

## Executive 2 December 2024 – Public Questions

Name of person submitting	Annexe A – Public Questions Question
Stuart Hearn	<p>The published vision for Somerset Council is to build "a fairer, greener, resilient, more flourishing Somerset that cares for the most vulnerable and listens to you".</p> <p>In 2022, Somerset Council decided it wished to sell Packsaddle Community Fields in Frome to raise capital receipts. The fields are 8 acres of green space and are a listed Asset of Community Value, the only green space Asset of Community Value of its kind in Somerset.</p> <p>Since 2022, I have written to the council on five occasions offering to buy the fields on behalf of the local community, many of whom are elderly and vulnerable, so that the fields can be enjoyed by our community in perpetuity. The first email was sent to Estates, the subsequent four were sent to senior executives including Duncan Sharkey and Bill Revans.</p> <p>I have not received a single response to any of these emails. This is not the action of a council that 'listens to you' and 'cares for the most vulnerable'.</p> <p>Whilst refusing to engage with me and the local community, Somerset Council has, however, been actively working with a developer on a scheme to build 74 houses on this green, community space. The proposed development scheme is not policy compliant as it does not offer the required 30% affordable housing. It is neither sustainable nor green as the vast majority of the houses will not have solar panels or heat pumps - they will instead have gas burning boilers. Yet the council's planning officer still recommended approval. This is not the action of a 'greener' council.</p> <p>Please can the Executive answer the following questions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Does it accept that these actions are contrary to Somerset Council's published vision, specifically of being a 'greener...Somerset that cares for the most vulnerable and listens to you'?</li><li>2. What will the Executive do to investigate and rectify this situation in order to comply with its published vision?</li></ol>

## Executive 2 December 2024 – Public Questions

<b>Written Response</b>	<b>Response from Lead Member for Economic Development, Planning, and Assets, Cllr Mike Rigby</b> <p>Thank you for your question. In framing a response, it is important to set out the history behind this land. This parcel of land, comprising about 8.3 acres, was originally purchased by the Council in 1973 with the intention that it be used as the site for a future new-build school to serve the area, as it was expected that there would be large amounts of new housing built that would outstrip the local supply of school places. Subsequent increases in school place demand have been met using other solutions such as increasing places at nearby schools.</p> <p>On this basis the Council had determined that the site is now surplus and will not be used.</p> <p>The Council entered into an Option Agreement with the purchaser to sell the site. The Option Agreement includes the caveat that the purchaser would not complete the transaction until they have obtained planning permission on the site. Selling the land in this way generates a higher return than selling the land without planning permission and reduces the risk to the Council.</p> <p>By entering into an Option Agreement, the Council is also not able to sell the site to any alternative third party.</p> <p>If planning permission were to be granted, the Council would complete the sale of the site to the developer. If planning permission were to be refused, the developer would not purchase the site, and the Council would then explore other options for the disposal.</p> <p>The exact price at which the site will be sold is currently uncertain. This is due to the developer not having yet gained planning permission for development. If permission is granted, then there will be a formal valuation process carried out to determine market value, with both the Council and the purchaser undertaking their own valuations of the site. The anticipated sale price will be commensurate with residential land sale prices for sites of a similar size and location.</p> <p>Therefore, the Council originally purchased the land for a reason that is no longer needed, is required to obtain best value when disposing of the site, is already contracted with a third party to sell the site and intends to use the capital receipts to invest into its ongoing work in supporting other services including providing care for its most vulnerable.</p> <p>I also note your concerns about the current planning application which remains under consideration; the application was withdrawn from the Planning East Committee meeting in November to allow officers time to review the concerns raised by the People for Packsaddle Group prior to consideration by the Committee. It is likely to be resubmitted for the planning committee early in the new year.</p>
-------------------------	--

## Executive 2 December 2024 – Public Questions

	<p>I do appreciate that this response may be disappointing, but I hope you understand the Council's position and contractual obligations.</p>
<b>Sarah Baker / Somerset Inclusive Nexus</b>	<p>Thank you for acknowledging, the 1100 children out of the approximate 2000 children who in 2020 were without any provisions. Each day we are coming across more and more children who are being pushed out of schools due poor curriculum delivery and reduced staffing in Academies.</p> <p>10 years ago, there was approximately 240 children, happily in elected home education. Last year this number has risen to over 2200 children, and rapidly growing! The trauma caused in Somerset schools is life changing, for the many who have deregistered from the school systems.</p> <p>We welcome the change of the Somerset SEND reform delivery, this was something that the previous DCS changed to prevent children to receive funding to stay in mainstream provisions.</p> <p>What will the council be doing to ensure that academies are held to account?</p>
<b>Written Response</b>	<p><b>Response from Lead Member for Children, Families, and Education, Cllr Heather Shearer</b></p> <p>Thank you Sarah and Daisy for coming in person to ask your question. We understand and share your concerns about the increasing number of children without school places and the rise in elective home education. Our proposed reforms for SEND and exclusions highlight several key strategies to make mainstream education an appealing and accessible choice for children and their families.</p> <p>The Local Authority (LA) has several measures in place to hold Multi Academy Trusts (MATs) accountable:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Team Around the School (TAS) and Team Around the Child (TAC) Meetings: These meetings are conducted across LA maintained schools and academies to ensure that children receive the right support at the right time. These forums are intended to create a level playing field for support and accountability for all establishments.</li><li>2. Graduated Response Tool: All schools are accountable for ensuring that a graduated response to children with additional needs is consistently applied and the use of the graduated Response Tool by all schools can evidence this.</li></ol>

## Executive 2 December 2024 – Public Questions

3. Data Sharing: SEND data and other relevant information are shared at MAT CEO meetings to maintain transparency and accountability.
4. Managing SEND Concerns: These are raised at the LA's School Improvement Panel, where Relationship Managers, linked to Academies, discuss any SEN issues during their meetings. This ensures joined-up work around academies and that we have a full picture of any concerns.
5. Locality Model: The move towards this model ensures that all LA schools and Academies are involved in phase transition meetings, facilitating appropriate placements and provision for SEND children.

Additionally we have developed our Education for Life strategy, which includes working with all schools, academies, early years providers and colleges to ensure we have a consistent approach to education provision, quality and attainment across the county.

These steps help ensure that MATs are providing the necessary support and resources to their students, particularly those with special educational needs (SEND).