

Report Title Here: Sefton Council and Sovini Group – Local Strategic Partnership

Date of meeting:	23 rd July 2026		
Report to:	Cabinet		
Report of:	Executive Director (Regeneration, Economy and Assets)		
Portfolio:	Housing and Highways		
Wards affected:	Ainsdale, Bootle East, Formby East		
Is this a key decision:	Yes	Included in Forward Plan:	Yes
Exempt/confidential report:	No		

Summary:

In November 2025, Cabinet agreed a Local Strategic Partnership with Sovini to bring forward new social and affordable housing across Sefton. This initiative aims to address the significant challenges residents face in securing suitable, quality homes and to better meet local housing demand.

An initial phase of potential residential development sites was identified to provide Sovini exclusivity to develop housing proposals to be brought back for consideration. This report provides an update on progress since the Sefton 2030 Partnership was approved at Cabinet as well as bringing forward recommendations for a second phase of sites to be included in the partnership.

Recommendation(s):

Cabinet is asked to:

- (1) Note that each site will be reported back for further approval on a case-by-case basis in line with the Asset Disposal Policy and Council Constitution and once terms have been negotiated with Sovini;
- (2) Declare Ainsdale Hope and the Formby Professional Development sites (as shown edged red on the plans at Appendix 1) surplus to operational requirements;
- (3) Authorise the Chief Legal and Democratic Officer to issue a licence to Sovini to allow feasibility work to be progressed for the Ainsdale Hope site;
- (4) Authorise the Chief Legal and Democratic Officer to issue a licence to Sovini to allow feasibility work to be progressed for the former TT Cables/Peoples site;
- (5) Authorise the Chief Legal and Democratic Officer to issue a licence to Sovini to allow feasibility work to be progressed for the Formby PDC site; and

- (6) Note the commitment to working with community partners to ensure new and enhanced provision to replace the affected Ravenmeols Community Centre.

1. The Rationale and Evidence for the Recommendations

Introduction and Background

1.1 In November 2025, Cabinet approved a Local Strategic Partnership with Sovini. The partnership will see Council owned land pooled with The Sovini Group land brought forward to deliver new housing across Sefton between now and 2030. As well as new homes, the partnership will bring wider training, employment and economic benefits which as set out in the Partnership Agreement, including but not limited to:

- Meeting housing need and prioritising new homes for social rent.
- Development of new homes across the borough to meet Nationally Described Space Standards.
- Deliver a place-making approach to housing development.
- Listening to communities and collaborative working to improve neighbourhoods and shared spaces, enhance community safety, reduce anti-social behaviour and improve health and wellbeing.
- Provision of training places, apprenticeships and employment opportunities, working collaboratively with Sefton@Work.
- Commitment to opportunities for care leavers and care experienced young people.
- Economic benefits to the local economy of Sefton including local spend and use of Sefton-based suppliers where at all possible as well as supporting SMEs.
- Explore working with other Sefton partners to achieve strategic priorities.

1.2 Delivery of new social and affordable homes is a key priority for the Council and is identified in the Council's Transformation Programme Plan focused on increasing supply and ensuring a sustainable pipeline to address both current housing needs and demand but also building long-term resilience. The Council recognises that housing is fundamental to the health and well-being of residents and is bringing forward new housing opportunities on vacant and underused sites across Sefton which in some cases are having a detrimental impact on communities in which they are located.

1.3 The Sefton 2030 Partnership directly responds to this and contributes to the wider delivery of new homes across the borough including through wider Registered Provider land led affordable housing schemes, Section 106 affordable housing delivered on-site by housebuilders building open market sale schemes, off-site Section 106 financial contribution to invest in affordable housing elsewhere in Sefton and the Council's own Council Housing Programme which delivered its first 18 new social rent homes in March 2026.

1.4 Bringing Council owned land forward for new housing development through the Sefton 2030 Partnership will help to meet strategic priorities and local housing need whilst ensuring that the Council receives the agreed value for the sale of these sites for their proposed use along with wider community and social benefits highlighted above.

Sefton 2030 Update and Progress

- 1.5 Through the agreed Sefton 2030 Partnership in November 2025, Cabinet confirmed a first phase of activity in agreeing an initial 10 sites that have been identified as having residential development potential (Development Package 1). It was agreed for these sites to be brought forward into the partnership and to be ringfenced in order to give Sovini exclusivity to enable housing proposals to be developed. Any site proposals will be brought back to Cabinet for a formal disposal decision based on agreed terms and in accordance with the Council's Asset Disposal Policy.
- 1.6 Sovini have entered into Licence Agreement with the Council for these initial 10 sites and are currently undertaking feasibility works in order to identify any site constraints and develop suitable proposals. These sites will be brought back for consideration in due course. The initial 10 sites approved provide an indicative capacity of 392 new homes across Sefton by 2030.
- 1.7 Since agreeing the Sefton 2030 Partnership at Cabinet, progress has included:
- Signing of the Partnership Agreement between the Council and Sovini.
 - Commencement of a valuation exercise for all sites agreed as part of the first phase of activity.
 - Licence Agreement agreed for all 10 sites agreed as part of the first phase of activity.
 - Planning application submitted and approved to amend the description of the development for Bootle High Phase 1 site.
 - Bootle High site hoarded ready commence site feasibility works on Phase 2 and readiness for development activity on Phase 1.
 - Planned programme of hoarding for all sites as part of the first phase of activity.
 - Drafting of Planning Performance Agreement for specific sites agreed as part of the first phase of activity.
 - Ongoing work within the Property and Strategic Asset Management Team as part of the Asset Rationalisation Programme to identify future sites for potential for the Sefton 2030 Partnership.
 - Development of a dedicated website 'Sefton 2030' where residents, communities and interested parties can go for more information as sites develop and sign up for newsletters.
 - Commencement of work programme with wider partners to progress construction skills and training opportunities in Sefton.

Next Sefton 2030 Partnership Sites

- 1.8 The report in November 2025 also identified that additional sites were being considered and assessed for inclusion in the Partnership and would be brought back to Cabinet at a later date as part of a progress update. Through this work, a further three sites have been identified (Development Package 2) as having residential potential and are recommended through this report to include in the Sefton 2030 partnership with Sovini. The delivery potential based on estimates in the adopted Local Plan is set out in Table 1 below and each site detailed separately within this report.

Table 1: Development Package 2 Sefton 2030 Sites

Site	Estimated number of new homes
TT Cables/Peoples	110
Former Ainsdale Hope School	120
Formby Professional Development Centre	15
Total	245

Former TT Cables/Peoples Site

- 1.9 The former TT Cables/Peoples site is a 2.93-hectare parcel of previously developed (“brownfield”) land owned by the Council and located on the corner of Hawthorne Road and Linacre Lane in Bootle. It is also known as ‘Land at Linacre Lane and Hawthorne Road’ and is a formal allocation in the Sefton Local Plan (MN2.44) with an indicative capacity of 110 homes. The site is allocated in the recently approved Bootle Area Action Plan as a housing site (BH1) within the Hawthorne Road/Canal Corridor Regeneration Opportunity Area (BAAP20).
- 1.10 The site was acquired in 2004, as part of the Housing Market Renewal Initiative (HMRI), with the former TT Cables portion of the site being acquired using a grant of £1,650,000 from English Partnerships (now known as Homes England). The grant is secured via a restriction on the title and governed by a Grant Funding Agreement (GFA). Along with various other provisions, the GFA requires the Council to dispose of the site for development and repay a proportion of the receipt. The Council are required to obtain Homes England’s consent to dispose of the site to allow removal of the restriction upon completion.
- 1.11 In 2010 the Coalition Government announced the premature end of the HMRI programme, 7 years into what was intended to be a 15-year programme. Although several attempts were made to bring forward housing on the site the loss of significant government grant funding when the HMRI scheme was ended meant that the site remained undeveloped.
- 1.12 In 2021, Homes England raised concerns about the fact that the site had not been brought forward for new housing and suggested that the grant may be clawed back. Following negotiations, a Standstill Agreement was entered into, which allows the Council more time to dispose of the site for development. Due to the ongoing progress being made, the Council secured a 2-year extension of the Standstill Agreement at the end of 2024, resulting in the Council having until 30th December 2026 to dispose of the site. Due to progress made with the proposed development of the site the process to extend the standstill agreement by a further 2 years, until 30th December 2028, is underway to allow sufficient time for the disposal process to complete.
- 1.13 In July 2025, Cabinet approved the disposal of the site to a preferred purchaser on the basis of an agreed purchase price. This disposal decision followed marketing of the site with an appointed commercial agent. Bids were shortlisted, interviews conducted and best and final bids were received in order to select a preferred purchaser. The agreed land transaction required the preferred purchaser was to complete the land purchase subject to planning determination only, with all allowable deductions agreed prior to exchange of contracts.
- 1.14 Negotiations had continued with the preferred developer and, due to various factors on their part, the terms of the disposal had materially changed. As the terms were now in departure from the July 2025 Cabinet approval, the decision was taken to cease negotiations with the preferred developer.

- 1.15 Alternative options have been considered to dispose of the site and meet the obligations of the GFA and Standstill Agreement with Homes England. These include commencing negotiations with the underbidder from the marketing exercise and including the site within the Sefton 2030 partnership with Sovini.
- 1.16 From both a speed and certainty of delivery perspective, the preferred option is to include the site in the Sefton 2030 Partnership with Sovini which will see the site come forward for housing development with proposals targeted to meet housing need and demand in the local area.
- 1.17 In line with the adopted Planning Policy the site can deliver a sustainable mix of new homes to comprise a mixed tenure scheme with homes for sale, social or affordable rent and low-cost home ownership.
- 1.18 The GFA requires a proportion (83.33%) of any disposal receipt generated to be repaid to Homes England. As the marketed 'housing site' also comprises of part of the Peoples site i.e. a site that has not benefited from grant, the above % only applies to a portion of the receipt based on a calculation of the areas of the two sites. This calculation means that Homes England will be entitled to 52% of any receipt generated from the disposal.

Former Ainsdale Hope School

- 1.19 The Former Ainsdale Hope School is a formal allocation in the Sefton Local Plan (MN2.08). The site is 9.17 ha in size and includes an existing former school building along with associated land and former playing fields. The site is identified in the adopted Local Plan for housing development with an estimated capacity of 120 new homes.
- 1.20 The site is currently used by the Council as a Corporate Learning Centre (CLC) with staff based there to deliver training and development. Feasibility works will include a number of ecology surveys due to the close proximity to the sand dunes beyond the site boundary, as well potential on-site ecology implications.
- 1.21 Alternative buildings within the Council's property portfolio are currently being considered to relocate the CLC service to along with its staff. This process will be undertaken in a collaborative and consultative manner to ensure service continuity and the provision of quality accommodation for the workforce in, and users of, this service area. Because of the size of the site and the estimated capacity in order to ensure a balanced community, the working assumption is for a mixed tenure development of outright sale, social rent and low-cost home ownership tenures.

Formby Professional Development Centre (PDC)

- 1.22 The Former PDC site is a formal allocation in the Sefton Local Plan (MN2.16) and is approximately 1.57ha. It is a former school and currently utilised as a professional development centre and community centre with associated car parking provision.
- 1.23 Options to relocate staff from the site are already being explored and will be progressed in consultation with those who are affected. This will be undertaken collaboratively to ensure continuity of service provision for all affected parties.

- 1.24 The current community centre on the site will either be replaced on the current site or relocated close to the current location in a suitable alternative venue. A full review of the options to replace the community centre will be brought back to Cabinet for future consideration, and this review process will be undertaken in close consultation with ward councillors and with community partners and current users of the Ravenmeols Community Centre.

Approach

- 1.25 For all sites identified, officers will work with Planning and Sovini to develop an agreed Planning Performance Agreement which will ensure all statutory consultees are engaged on proposals and proposals can be shaped to respond to the needs of each local area including across transport and local infrastructure.
- 1.26 As the partnership intends to do, any site proposals will be driven by meeting the housing needs and demands across Sefton and in local areas ensuring new homes come forward to meet the needs of a range of different household. This may include homes for younger people, homes for older people, homes for growing families, homes for those that need/want to downsize, specialist and supported homes including accessible and adapted homes, permanent homes for households in temporary accommodation.
- 1.27 The impact of these developments on the local social, community and transport infrastructure will be considered in detail as part of the planning process to ensure that the developments themselves, and the wider communities that surround are not detrimentally impacted.
- 1.28 Any recommendation for disposal will be brought back to Cabinet as identified earlier in the report.

2. Financial Implications

- 2.1 It is expected that there will be revenue savings as a result of the disposal of the three sites including but not exclusively maintenance and insurance costs. Further savings and/or cost avoidance are also anticipated once new social and affordable homes are built enabling more move-on accommodation to become available supporting households in temporary accommodation to move to more permanent, safe and secure homes.
- 2.2 The Sefton 2030 Partnership aims to deliver new homes to meet housing needs across Sefton and this includes specialist and supported homes which will be considered on a site-by-site basis. Where these homes are developed, additional savings and/or cost avoidance are anticipated for adult social care.

3. Legal Implications

- 3.1 Any decision to dispose of the site will be made in accordance with the Council's Constitution and the Council's Asset Disposal Policy. The Council has an obligation to obtain best consideration for its assets under Section 123 of the Local Government Act 1972. Once negotiated terms have been agreed, sites will be brought back to Cabinet for a formal decision to any disposal recommendations.

3.2 UK Subsidy Control will need to be considered and support from the Legal Team will be required to ensure that any land disposals are compliant with UK Subsidy Control and all other legal requirements and statutory duties.

4. Risk Implications

- 4.1 The risk of the decisions outlined in this paper, the inclusion of these sites in the Sefton 2030 Partnership so that a full scheme proposal and financial offer can be considered by Cabinet, is low. The partnership is agreed by Memorandum of Understanding and therefore not legally binding. The partnership is focused on delivering benefits to residents and local communities of Sefton across a range of areas including providing new homes. Structuring in this way enables the Council to bring forward land for disposal, including as part of the Asset Rationalisation Programme to secure a capital receipt.
- 4.2 In addition, the key priority is to support the delivery of new homes, including social and affordable homes, increasing the number of homes available whilst also providing the potential to target specific needs reducing demand on the Council's revenue costs such as for temporary accommodation and adult social care, and to provide wider benefits for residents including construction training opportunities.
- 4.3 Sovini will develop their scheme proposals at risk. Any future development risk will also lie with Sovini who will be providing the development capacity, resource, and investment.
- 4.4 The report seeks approval from Cabinet to include the sites within the Sefton 2030 Partnership allowing Sovini exclusivity to develop site proposals at this stage. Once terms are negotiated for any sites, these will be brought back to Cabinet for a decision on any disposal and setting out any bespoke risks on a site-by-site basis.

5. Staffing HR Implications

- 5.1 Work on the Sefton 2030 Partnership is led by the Strategic Housing and Investment Team and being staffed internally with existing resources across this and the Property and Strategic Asset Management Team. Support for any disposals will be required by the Chief Legal and Democratic Officer and Legal Team.
- 5.2 Resource will be required across the Planning Team as well as any statutory consultees involved in the planning process, including Environmental Health, Land Contamination, Highways and Drainage. As sites develop and move forward, resource requirements and capacity will be considered through a Planning Performance Agreement as is currently under way for the sites part of the first phase of activity.
- 5.3 As outlined in section 1, the relocation of staff and services affected will be undertaken in a consultative and collaborative manner to ensure service continuity for users.

6. Conclusion

- 6.1 All three Development Package 2 sites identified are sites allocated for housing development in the Sefton Local Plan and have the potential to come forward for housing development. Social and affordable housing delivery is a priority for the Council and bringing forward through the Sefton 2030 Partnership with Sovini will help to maximise that offer and provide a tenure and house type mix that responds to the local areas supporting the Transformation Programme.

6.2 Through the Sefton 2030 Partnership, benefits of training and employment opportunities as well as local supply chain benefits will be realised.

6.3 The sites subject to valuation will deliver a capital receipt for the Council supporting the approach agreed as part of the Capitalisation Direction approved in-principle with MHCLG.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

Option 1 – Not bring the sites forward for development and leave them as they are currently used.

Risk: The Council is progressing an Asset Rationalisation Programme considering all assets across the Council's portfolio. The purpose of the programme is to make better use of existing assets as well as bringing forward disposal of assets that have significant revenue implications for the Council and are no longer fit for purpose.

As part of the programme the Former TT Cables/Peoples site was already on the disposal pathway but unfortunately the sale had fallen through and in any case is required to be disposed under the terms of the GFA with Homes England.

The Former Ainsdale Hope School and Formby PDC though currently in use have been identified as being surplus to operational requirements and identified for disposal. Both sites are allocated housing sites in the Sefton Local Plan, therefore exploring the residential development potential of the sites is considered the most appropriate course of action. If the sites were retained the Council would need to continue to fund the revenue costs associated with the management, maintenance and insurance of the buildings as well as foregoing any incoming capital receipt.

Option 2 – Bring the sites forward for disposal on the open market. An open market disposal would enable the Council to test the market and generate offer from a range of organisations which might include Registered Providers and housebuilders.

Risk: The risk with this option is a significant amount of work required to bring all three sites to the market. Two months would be needed to appoint a commercial agent via a framework to lead the marketing process. The capital receipt would also be delayed as an extended period of time would be required for formal marketing and selection of preferred purchaser. Whilst higher offers may be forthcoming through this option, all offers would be a gross price which would still be subject to deductions determined through feasibility and as the scheme progresses through the planning process.

Equality Implications:

There are no equality implications. If the sites proceed for housing through the Sefton 2030 Partnership, a range of new, quality affordable homes will be provided which may include general needs, specialist and supported housing to support families and households with specialist needs as well as homes for older and younger people.

Impact on Children and Young People:

Through the Sefton 2030 Partnership and through strong working relations prior to the existence of the partnership, Sovini/OVH are committed to the Caring Business Charter and Care Leaver Career Commitment. OVH have supported Sefton care leavers and

care experienced young people through the 'Roots' project, the service provides people who are preparing to leave care with guidance and support, transition advice and essential household items to create a home and support in tenancy sustainment. The sites proposed in this report have the potential to bring forward around 245 new homes which will help support families and young people to move on from temporary accommodation and into permanent homes offering tenure security.

Formby PDC provides a training centre and community space which may include for children and young people. Options for alternative provision for this service and space will be considered and brought back to Cabinet as part of any future report.

Climate Emergency Implications:

The development of new homes on the sites proposed has both positive and negative implications for the Climate Emergency. Any development brought forward will introduce direct emissions resulting of the redevelopment for housing as well as longer-term emissions from the occupation of new homes.

Each site will need to demonstrate how it meets Planning Policy requirements and Building Regulation requirements and particularly relevant is Policy EQ7 Energy Efficient and Low Carbon Design. Each site will be considered on its own merits as it is brought forward through planning considering carbon impact and environmental standards. New developments are required to achieve 10% biodiversity net gain (BNG) which will provide a positive impact to the natural environment.

What consultations have taken place on the proposals and when?

(A) Internal Consultations

The Executive Director of Corporate Resources and Customer Services (FD9886/26) and the Chief Legal and Democratic Officer (LD6586/26) have been consulted and any comments have been incorporated into the report.

(B) External Consultations

Consultation for any development proposals will take place on a site-by-site basis following feasibility and during the planning process.

Consultation has commenced with staff at Ainsdale Hope, as well as staff and Community Centre tenants at Formby PDC. Further consultation will take place as any development plans are progressed and once Community Centre options are established.

Implementation Date for the Decision :

Following the expiry of the "call-in" period for the Cabinet decision.

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Appendices:

Appendix 1 – Site Plans:

Former TT Cables/Peoples Site

Former Ainsdale Hope School

Site Plan Formby Professional Development Centre

Background Papers:

[Sefton Council and Sovini Group – Local Strategic Partnership](#)