

Questions and Answers from Councillors at the Council meeting held on 22 January 2025

Councillor Whitaker asked Councillor Maddocks:

The state of Properties on Yorkshire Street especially 52-58 has been a major concern for many years under successive administrations and there have been numerous complaints from residents and businesses, but nothing has been done to address this issue.

Question 1

I would like to ask The Cabinet member what action can the Council realistically take to bring the owners of these dangerous dilapidated properties to account for them to take responsibility and bring these properties up to a respectable standard?

Question 2

In accordance with public interest how many complaints have been forwarded about these properties?

Supplementary Question for Question 2

What dates have these complaints made?

Councillor Maddocks replied:

I would like to thank Councillor Whitaker for his questions.

With regard to the first question, there are various powers that local authorities have that can be used to prompt the owners of derelict buildings to take action.

Where a building is considered to be affect public amenity and is so untidy to warrant action, there are provisions under the Town and Country Planning Act.

Where a building is considered dangerous following a risk assessment carried out by qualified structural engineers, then action can be pursued under the Building Act.

Where buildings have lesser issues, such as broken doors and windows, but the structure might not be untidy or dangerous, there is potential recourse under the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act.

There are also provisions under the Environmental Protection Act if the property is deemed to be causing environmental problems to adjoining properties.

I am aware that in Autumn last year Councillor Whitaker attended a meeting of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee, where the general issue of dilapidated buildings was discussed. I understand that Members of the Committee discussed how the Council might tackle this issue using a combination of the powers that I have mentioned, in a collaborative manner. The Committee considered that this should be explored further. As Cabinet Member for Enforcement, I should be pleased to meet with Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to explore this further, if the issue is part of their Work Programme for the year ahead.

With regard to your second question, regarding how many complaints have been received, the Councillor has provided the address details of one property, namely 52-58 Yorkshire Street, and so I can provide details of the complaints received for that property.

As far back as 2009 the Council pursued action against the then owner following the receipt of a complaint, and that resulted an improvement to the condition of the property including external painting. The case was closed in June 2009. Planning permission was granted earlier that same year for the demolition of the shops and the construction of a 2-storey building to accommodate 3 shop units at the ground floor and 2 flats at the first floor. The applicant did not implement this permission.

A further planning application was submitted in 2017, but the applicant failed to pay the application fee, so the proposal was not determined and the application was returned to the applicant.

In 2019 the Building Control Team investigated complaints regarding dangerous roof tiles, which was subsequently remedied, and a similar issue in 2022 was also resolved. The Council's Environmental Protection Team were also involved.

A Community Protection Warning was served by Environmental Protection in 2021 following complaints about pigeon infestation and dereliction. The local planning authority received a similar complaint at the same time. The joint action appeared to have the effect of minor improvement being carried out to the property. However a further complaint was received in 2022 regarding the roof and the issue of pigeons. A Section 215 Untidy Land Notice was served and the Council's Unbugged Team also attended to address the issue of pigeon infestation.

Since then the property has changed hands and a new enforcement investigation was commenced in November 2024 following the receipt of two complaints towards the end of last year. The new owner appears to be responding to our officer's communications and is showing intent to resolve the issue, but I cannot divulge specific details of those conversations at this stage. However, if the new owner fails to improve the condition of the properties then the Council can serve a formal notice to require improvements to the building.

In conclusion I would advise Councillor Whitaker to continue liaising with the Planning Enforcement Team regarding the latest investigation; and I look forward to discussing the more general issue of enforcement regarding dilapidated buildings with the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, if the matter is within their forthcoming Work Programme.

Councillor Ainscough asked Councillor Peter Jackson:

Within the Corporate Fees & Charges 2025/26 report for Cabinet, section 3.3 , it discusses the specific challenges that Salt Ayre Leisure Centre, like many other public leisure facilities face and highlights the specific vulnerabilities that the Centre faces as energy costs continue to increase and the amount of disposable income residents have, which in turn directly affects membership levels.

However, over the last 12 months, SALC has gone through a complete management restructure and anecdotally, over those last 12 months, Labour Councillors have received an

increasing number of complaints about the cleanliness, customer service standard and heating.

Access to the centre is problematic, the entrance road is riddled with very large potholes which doesn't give the best impression of a centre that is well cared for and when the recycling centre is busy no one can get access because the road gets so backed up.

In addition, there are problems within the centre, such as a broken lap timer in the pool that has needed fixing for an exceptionally long time, that feeds into the narrative of lack of care.

Could Councillor Jackson please advise what work has been done with the County Council to improve access to the facilities, especially fixing the potholes and whether the new management team have been tasked with ensuring that all the little niggles on site are brought up to standard or budget proposals made to tackle them in a timely fashion.

Councillor Peter Jackson responded:

SALC management restructure was undertaken and implemented in January 2024. Since March 2024, the senior management of the centre has seen a significant amount of staff turnover. Active recruitment has resulted in us welcoming a new Membership Experience Manager since November 2024 and recruitment is ongoing for a Commercial Venues & Leisure Manager.

In regard to the operational matters raised, I can assure the Councillor that daily and overnight deep cleaning regimes are in place across the centre to ensure the facilities are at the desired standards for all users. In the last twelve months, the number of cleaning hours across the business has increased from 122 per week to 137 hours per week.

We are proud that SALC is one of the first fully decarbonised leisure centres in the Country following the investment in air source heat pumps and solar array. We are aware that there was a small period when heating systems had been broken, but these were swiftly dealt with and protocols are in place to deal with any future breakdowns.

The centre sees over 800,000 through its doors annually, and we are committed to ensuring they all receive the best level of customer experience. Whilst not aware of the specific concerns about customer experience, I can assure the Councillor that the facility continues to strive towards excellent customer service to all its visitors daily.

The centre has a customer feedback system where comments and queries are monitored daily. In the period from April 2023 to March 2024, 2209 visitors fed back on their experience at the centre. Each question is measured between 0 and 10, with 10 being excellent. When asked the question, how likely are you to recommend SALC to friends and family, 86.9% scored between 8 and 10, with 57% (1253) scoring the centre 10.

In October 2024, correspondence was shared with County Council Highways who confirmed that the road is adopted and the responsibility of Lancashire County Council as the highways authority. Officers at Highways confirmed that the stretch of road has been passed across to the asset management team for consideration as a resurfacing scheme, and we await to hear an outcome.

Should centre users contact any Councillor regarding this matter, I would urge them to report the matter to Council Highways directly. We will of course continue to work with County Highways to achieve the correct outcome.

Regarding the access issues compounded by the Household Waste and Recycling Centre, officers are in regular dialog with contacts from highways and the HWRC to look at suitable solutions. We fully appreciate this can be frustrating for users, but would highlight that these cases are mainly problematic around times such as Christmas, Easter and bank holidays.

The lap timer has been obsolete for several years but remains in situ due to the cost of removal. On quotation in the last year a replacement would cost in the region of £120,000.

Officers have discussed this matter with swimming clubs in the pasts, which has led to one swimming club purchasing their own timing system for training and galas. As part of this, SALC allocates storage space for the club.

Investment in the centre's facilities will continue and money is currently allocated across the capital programme for investment in the pools moveable floor. In relation to on going repairs and maintenance, officers will always look to react at the earliest opportunity to keep the centre a welcoming space in order to protect the member experience and financial income streams.