

HONORARY FREEDOM OF THE CITY

**Joint report of the Chief Executive and Executive Director of
Commercial and Corporate Services**

1.0 Purpose of Report

To consider recommending Council formally to confer the Honorary Freedom of the City upon Mr John Mawston, Sir Bob Murray CBE and Sir Peter Vardy.

2.0 Description of Decision

To recommend to Council that:-

- (i) it agrees to the conferring, in accordance with the provisions of Section 249 of the Local Government Act 1972, of the Honorary Freedom of the City upon Mr John Mawston, Sir Bob Murray CBE and Sir Peter Vardy, and
- (ii) authority be given for the Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader of the Council, to agree all appropriate arrangements for the formal ceremony at an extraordinary meeting of the Council to be held on 14th October 2011.

3.0 Background

The Council has traditionally honoured notable citizens of Sunderland who have made significant contributions to the well being and community spirit of the City by conferring on them the Honorary Freedom of the City.

Members of the Council have now nominated three candidates for consideration:-

3.1 Mr John Mawston

John Mawston has been nominated in recognition of his outstanding contributions to culture and leisure in his local community and within the City.

He was first elected as a Councillor on Houghton Urban District Council in 1954 and served as its Chairman in 1967/68. In 1973 he was elected to represent "Area three" of Houghton on the newly constituted Sunderland Borough Council. He represented Shiney Row Ward since its inception until his retirement from the City Council in May 2002. Therefore he served as a local Councillor for a total of 48 years; a truly remarkable achievement.

During his years on the Council John took a particular interest in developing Culture and Leisure within the City. He was Vice-chairman of the Leisure Committee from 1976 until he became its Chairman in 1998. In 1999 he became the first Cabinet Member to hold the Leisure Portfolio.

In 1987 he had the honour of serving as Mayor of Sunderland.

During his long career John served as a Justice of the Peace for over 30 years. He has been chairman of the Houghton Feast Steering Committee for well over a quarter of a century and his great love of band music was evidenced by his Chairmanship of the North Regional Brass Band Trust and his Presidency of the Houghton Pipe Band. He was also enthusiastic in his support for the Sunderland Empire Theatre Trust, the Tyne and Wear Museums Service and the Beamish North of England Open Air Museum.

3.2 Sir Bob Murray CBE

Sir Bob has been nominated in recognition of his outstanding contributions to football, education and charitable causes within the city.

Sir Bob, the son of a steelworker from Consett, Co Durham, left school at 15, and went on to build several successful multi million pound businesses, creating and retaining thousands of skilled manufacturing jobs in the UK.

He joined Sunderland AFC as a director and shareholder in 1984, becoming chairman in 1986 and going on to become Sunderland's longest-serving chairman. During his Chairmanship, the club relocated from Roker Park to the 49,000 seat Stadium of Light.

In 2006 he relinquished his control of the club and was made honorary Life President.

In 2010 he was knighted in the Queens Birthday Honours List for services to football and education.

He was founder and is chairman of trustees of the Sunderland AFC Foundation, one of the most influential football charities in the UK, with its own purpose built facility; the “Centre of Light”. The Sunderland Foundation works closely with very many young people in various programmes.

Sir Bob was appointed a board member of Wembley between 2001 and 2002 and he helped to inspire the regeneration of the City of Sunderland through the development of the Stadium of Light, The Academy of Light, The Sunderland Aquatic Centre and The Centre of Light.

Away from Sunderland AFC Sir Bob was heavily involved in the affairs of schools in the City, taking a significant role in the setting up of the Academy schools.

3.3 Sir Peter Vardy

Sir Peter has been nominated in recognition of his outstanding contributions to business and education.

Born in 1947, Sir Peter, from Houghton-le-Spring, took control of the car dealership Reg Vardy plc. In the 1970s he was successful in acquiring franchises to sell various brands in the UK and from 1982 he expanded into the volume car market, first with British manufacturers and subsequently with European and Japanese marques. The business grew from the one dealership in Houghton le Spring to 100 nationwide; employing up to 6000 people and with a £2 billion turnover.

He was awarded the inaugural Industry Personality of the Year Award in a round of Automotive Management Awards and received a knighthood for services to education in the Queen’s Birthday Honours List of 2001.

In May 2006, The Vardy Group of Companies was launched in Durham.

He has had a long commitment to philanthropy, through the Vardy Foundation, supporting a very wide range of community causes. He has been at the forefront of business involvement in education and has funded the building of a City Technology College in Gateshead and three Academies in Middlesbrough, Thorne and Blyth. These four schools form the Emmanuel Schools Foundation; a coalition of schools with a Christian ethos based in the north of England.

4.0 Current Position

Given Sunderland's long tradition of conferring the Freedom of the City on its notable citizens who through their various achievements have contributed to the well being and community spirit of the City, it is considered appropriate to recommend the Council to confer the Freedom of the City upon the three nominees.

5.0 Reasons for Decision

The proposal will formally seal the relationships between the nominees and the City of Sunderland and will recognize their contributions to the well being and community spirit of the City.

6.0 Alternative Options

There are no alternative options submitted for consideration, as the conferring of honorary freedoms is considered to be appropriate in order to recognise the outstanding contributions made by the nominated individuals.

7.0 Background Papers

None.