

REPORT TO: Employment learning and Skills and
Community Policy Performance Board

DATE: 26th January 2012

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director, Children and Enterprise

PORTFOLIO: Economic Development

SUBJECT: Mersey Gateway and Tourism potential

WARDS: Castle and Riverside.

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To consider the potential for tourism relating the construction of the Mersey Gateway.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That

(1) The Policy & Performance Board considers the potential for tourism activity related to the construction of the Mersey Gateway.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 With the progress now being made on the construction of the Mersey Gateway, a scoping paper (appendix 1) has been developed to consider the potential impact it could have on tourism in the Borough. If benefits are to be maximised, it is important to plan proactively rather than be reactive to opportunities as they arise. By bringing the paper to the Board early, this will enable a considered approach to be developed in the future in partnership with local tourism operators and importantly the future concessionaire.

3.2 The paper considers the potential tourism benefits and possible activities through a number of case studies of construction related projects. Key elements of a response as detailed in the paper could include -

- Viewing Points
- Virtual Viewing Platform
- Marketing and Promotion
- Contractor Involvement
- Employment and Skills
- Local Heritage Context

3.3 Working in Partnership will be very important. There are a number of hotels and tourist operators already interested in working together and a number have volunteered to be part of a delivery group. The future concessionaire will have a critical role to play and will no doubt have its own ideas to contribute.

- 3.4 One issue that does need early clarity is the selection of viewing points in that some of them may need additional investment and management arrangements putting in place.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The Community Strategy identifies the need to develop a diverse economy. Presently tourism is under represented with only 3.1% (3,700) employee jobs in comparison to 8.2% North West and Great Britain. Developing tourism related to the bridge provides an opportunity to close this gap.

5.0 OTHER IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Financially, the cost of activities should be shared across the partners. At this time the paper does provide some indicative costs for activities and these will need to be worked up in more detail for consideration at a later date.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES.

- 6.1 Children and Young People in Halton.
The bridge construction/maintenance and its related tourism will offer considerable employment opportunities for young people in the future, particularly through apprenticeships.
- 6.2 Employment Learning and Skills in Halton
There is considerable opportunity to promote tourism and engineering jobs as future career opportunities to the people of Halton. The Halton Employment Partnership is well placed to link the opportunities arising to local unemployed.
- 6.3 A Healthy Halton.
No implications identified at this time.
- 6.4 A Safer Halton
No implications identified at this time.
- 6.5 Halton's Urban Renewal
Tourism is only one aspect of opportunity that the bridge presents for this priority. The Mersey Gateway Regeneration Strategy identifies a range of opportunities associated with its construction.

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

- 7.1 At this early stage in development it is not possible to identify specific risks, this will need to be done as specific projects are identified and developed. However, there is a general risk associated with not being proactive in that opportunities may be missed to generate jobs and secure investment in the Borough.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

8.1 Again, it is hard at this early stage to identify specific issues. However, it is important to note that the selection and development of viewing points will need to take into account particular issues of accessibility and information provision.

9.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT

9.1 None under the meaning of the Act.

Maximising the Impact of the Mersey Gateway on the Visitor Economy

1. Context

This scoping paper considers the potential that exists to develop a series of proposals to maximise the economic impact of the construction of the Mersey Gateway upon the visitor economy in Halton.

2. Examples of Construction Related Tourism.

The London Olympics is the most notable example of construction tourism presently on site. There are daily public walking tours running alongside the 2012 site led by qualified [Blue Badge tourist guides](#). The walks are attended by over 1000 people each month. They are run by guides who are specifically trained to talk about the 2012 Games and the history and traditions of the local area. In 2010, Blue Badge Guides led 220 visits from colleges and schools to the 2012 Games site and nearby Olympic venues. During summer they guided over 1000 new visitors and tourists a day around East London's 2012 sites.

In 2011, a new initiative to bring tourists and visitors into the area will involve a public waterbus 'hop-on hop-off' route, from Limehouse Basin to waterways near the Olympic Park.

The Eden Project Cornwall had half a million people visiting the site during construction between May 2000 and its official opening in spring 2001.

The Millau Viaduct is a [cable-stayed road-bridge](#) that spans the valley of the [river Tarn](#) near [Millau](#) in southern [France](#) that was constructed between 2001 and 2004. During the period of construction work alone, the site attracted some 700,000 visitors.

Post construction, by 2005 the viaduct was, after Lourdes, the most visited area in the Midi Pyrenees region. By the end of July 2011 more than 30 million vehicles had passed over the viaduct, many stopping at local tourist destinations and viewing points that have been developed. Millau Viaduct has its own Information Centre in the small village of Cazalous at the base of the bridge. It opens daily at 10am, and closes at 7pm in summer and 5pm in winter.

The Severn Bridges Visitors' Centre houses an exhibition that provides visitors with an insight into the history of crossing the estuary, a look at the work that went into building the new bridge, the first bridge and the tunnel, and an understanding of the environmental care taken during construction. It has welcomed more than 15 000 people through its doors since it opened in December 1998 and is popular with school children, university students and tourists. The centre was set up for two reasons: to give people with an interest in the two bridges an opportunity to find out more about them, and to give schools and colleges the chance to help attract more young people into the

profession. Some £90,000 was secured from engineering firms, the ICE (Institution of Civil Engineers) and government and the centre costs about £20,000 p.a.

The **Sundial Bridge** is a [cantilever spar cable-stayed bridge](#) for bicycles and pedestrians that spans the [Sacramento River](#) in [Redding, California](#). In the fiscal year following its grand opening, Turtle Bay Exploration Park, adjacent to the bridge, saw a 42% increase in its visitation. As of 2011, Redding's city manager stated that the bridge "continues to generate millions of dollars worth of commerce and tourism each year".

3. Activities to consider

Considering the examples and other researched projects, there are a number of activities that can be considered.

3.1 Viewing Points

Sometimes these are purpose built but many based on existing and/or upgraded locations and facilities. In Halton there are a number of possible locations with the two key assets being the Catalyst Discovery Centre and Wigg Island Visitor Centre. (Other locations would include West Bank promenade and also Halton Castle).

Both Catalyst Discovery Centre and Wigg Island Visitor Centre are managed by individual trusts. Each will also require an element of investment to enhance the visitor experience through, for example the provisions of interpretive displays and improvements to the fabric of the buildings. Agreement needs also to be secured with respect to any potential charging issues within the wider context of the development of specific visitor packages. Viewing could also conceivably take place from a dedicated vessel operating on the river or helicopter operating from Liverpool John Lennon Airport. There will also need to be enhanced provision for brown directional signing to the designated viewing platforms.

3.2 Virtual Viewing Platform

The Borough Council already possesses a number of cameras and associated infrastructure, located for example at Churchill Mansions, The Catalyst Discovery Centre and the Silver Jubilee Bridge, which could be utilised and enhanced to provide an on-line virtual viewing experience.

3.3 Marketing and Promotion

The marketing and promotion of the visitor opportunities afforded by the project will be critical to the projects success to not only maximise the number of visitors but also to manage visitors once they are within the Borough.

Marketing will include

- Traditional print (for example a map of key assets, trails etc)
- E.marketing and viral marketing
- The utilisation of existing web resources (for example www.visithalton.com) whereby the bridge is used as an opportunity for wider promotion of the borough.

- Direct promotion of specific visitor packages (in partnership with local hotels) to promote overnight stays
- Utilisation of existing tourism networks, for example the TIC network
- Utilisation of tourism professionals
- Collaborative marketing activities with destination marketing agencies The Mersey Partnership and Visit Chester and Cheshire
- A targeted campaign aimed at tour group operators either existing operators active in the North West or specialist, niche, tour organisers

3.4 Contractor Involvement

This is highly desirable and could involve construction briefings from the construction company – these can be written (put on www) or presented (on www or on site/viewing point/hotel). Another possibility is virtual tours of the construction site to give access to parts of the site not normally available.

3.5 Employment and Skills

Construction Halton will work closely with the prime and sub contractors to secure local employment and training places. The Employment Learning & Skills SSP and Children and Young People SSPs have a considerable opportunity to work together to promote engineering and all related jobs as future career opportunities to the young people of Halton.

3.6 Local Heritage Context

The construction phase of the Mersey Gateway represents an opportunity to maximise the historical assets of the Borough, particularly at West Bank, with reference to the areas significance as a crossing point of the River. Partnerships could be established with local historical societies, community groups and other interest group to incorporate a scheduled, guided interpretive trail within the proposed visitor packages. A similar resource could be rolled out to local schools and community groups. Further, the bridge as an iconic project could be used to instil a sense of achievement and aspiration that would link well with past achievements in terms of economic prosperity.

4. The Constitution of a Project Delivery Group

In developing this paper, a discussion was held at the Halton Tourism Business Network. A number of hotels and local attractions showed great interest and support for this initiative. As such, the establishment of a viable partnership to put in place and manage a coherent visitor experience for individuals with an interest in major construction projects is key to the successful delivery of the project. The group of already interested parties includes :-

- Halton Borough Council : Major Development Projects, Business Development, External Funding and Open Spaces
- The Catalyst Discovery Centre
- De Vere Daresbury Park
- Everglades Park
- Holiday Inn
- The Mersey Partnership
- Visit Chester and Cheshire
- Cheshire Wildlife Trust

On a day to day basis the project would be progressed by an in-house Virtual Project Team based on the teams identified above.

5. Project Objectives

Objectives associated with this project would need to be clarified early on. Suggested objectives for consideration include

- Raise the profile of Halton
- Promote the visitor economy, and the businesses contained therein
- Support existing visitor destinations
- Promotion of Halton and broader investment opportunities
- Capitalise on the broader historical and heritage assets associated with the crossing of the Mersey
- Create safe, accessible and managed viewing areas for visitors and the local community.

6. Project Costs

At such an early stage it is very difficult to identify cost with any accuracy and it should be noted would be spread out over a number of years. The reality is the more spent, the bigger the impact is likely to be. However, typical costs associated with the types of activity considered above would be

Viewing Points – too little detail to estimate

Signage - £4,000

Virtual Platform - £6,000 (assuming no additional hardware required)

Marketing - £18,000

Heritage/other initiatives - £10,000

At this juncture it is difficult to estimate the make up of potential project funding. However, it is anticipated that the project will be funded from a combination of external grant for specific elements of the project, contributions from partners (especially the 'concessionaire') income generated for charging for certain elements of the programme and revenues generated by collaborative activities, for example the development of visitor packages with local hotels and attractions.

7. Conclusion

A carefully planned and executed programme to maximise and exploit visitors attracted to Halton as a consequence of the construction phase of the Mersey Gateway will bring tangible financial benefits to the Borough. It can also be employed to raise the profile of the Borough, develop community cohesion in adjacent communities and provide employment for local people.