

REPORT TO: Executive Board

DATE: 14 June 2018

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director Enterprise, Community and Resources

PORTFOLIO: Economic Development

SUBJECT: Promoting Halton's Visitor Economy

WARD(S) Borough-wide

1.0 **PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

1.1 The purpose of this report is to present proposals aimed at further promoting and supporting Halton's Visitor Economy.

2.0 **RECOMMENDATION: That Members note progress to date to raise the profile of Halton's Visitor Economy, and approve the proposals in section 4 and 5 of this report.**

3.0 **SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

3.1 Whilst the term 'Visitor Economy' is often used by those involved in the tourism industry, it actually reflects the concept that the word 'visitor' reaches a more inclusive customer base and goes beyond tourism and tourists. The reference to 'economy' focuses attention on the contribution that cultural, heritage and tourism assets can play in supporting economic growth.

3.2 Although Halton's Visitor Economy may not have the same prominence as some of our other economic sectors such as science and innovation, logistics and distribution and advanced manufacturing, if we are to create a successful economy in Halton, there is also a need to make Halton a successful visitor destination.

To achieve this there is a requirement to capture all the ingredients that attract visitors to Halton. These ingredients might cover the following areas:

- The Natural Environment;
- Iconic Buildings;
- Retail Offer;
- Heritage, Leisure and Cultural Facilities.

3.3 In essence, these are the things that can make Halton distinctive, special, a place that engenders pride, and a place that visitors feel is worth experiencing.

3.4 However, the Visitor Economy goes beyond a focus on the ingredients described above; it is also concerned with embracing the wider elements that would attract visitors to Halton. This could include transport infrastructure i.e. to make the Borough an easier place to get to; signage and orientation; parking, as well as interpretation; public space and amenities. These aspects all contribute to creating an attractive visitor offer. The proposals in section 4 of this report seek to reaffirm this.

4.0 **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 The Employment, Learning and Skills and Community PPB recently undertook a scrutiny topic review of Halton's Cultural Offer within a City Region context. It concluded that there needs to be a strong interaction between Halton's Cultural Offer and the Visitor Economy.

4.2 The Topic Group also recognised that with reducing resources, the Borough needed to focus on a discrete set of priorities which would enable the Borough to brand and package its cultural assets and visitor attractions in a clear and consistent way.

4.3 The work of the Topic Group coincided with the production of a report that had been led by the Liverpool City Region (LCR) Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) to undertake a brief review of the Halton's Visitor Economy. Similar reviews were undertaken in some of the other LCR Local Authorities.

4.4 The report assessed how, through additional investment, the sector could be developed to support Halton's wider economic strategy and help shape its sense of place.

4.5 The project undertook a brief review of Halton's current and potential visitor markets, assessed the existing destination offer, sought views of the Borough's visitor economy businesses and organisations and made recommendations in respect of the key areas that the Borough should focus on if it is to increase the prominence and impact of its Visitor Economy.

4.6 The approach is now being used to determine the key aspects of Halton's core visitor proposition, as well as establishing a broad range of opportunities for product development and destination marketing.

4.7 **Proposals**

Acknowledging the earlier point about resources, in order to deliver

these outcomes described above in the most cost effective way, it is proposed that, where appropriate, Visitor Economy opportunities are aligned with the Key Impact Areas associated with the delivery of the Mersey Gateway Regeneration Plan (Plus) document.

4.8 This approach recognises that in other areas, visitor attractions have been used as a catalyst for stimulating broader regeneration. It is also argued that placing these assets within a wider context and linked to other themes, could improve the chances of seeking external funding in the future.

4.9 Suggested links and opportunities to the Council’s regeneration priorities are set out in the table below.

Key Impact Area	Potential Visitor Economy Assets
Runcorn Town Centre	The Brindley; Bridgewater Canal; Silver Jubilee Bridge and Mid Mersey Estuary Park;
Astmoor Business Park & Manor Park	Wigg Island & Norton Priory; Daresbury Village and Lewis Carroll Centre
West Runcorn	Bridgewater, Manchester Ship Canal and Weaver Navigation Canals
West Bank	Catalyst Science Discovery Centre and Spike Island;
Widnes Waterfront	The Hive; Sankey Canal
Southern Widnes	Leisure Centre, Widnes Market and Town Centre; The Studio
Ditton Corridor	Pickerings Pasture; Hale Village and Lovels Hall
Halton Lea	Halton Castle, Shopping City

4.10 It is proposed that by making the connections described above, Lead Officers for each area would then ensure that the benefits of a vibrant Visitor Economy are embedded within Masterplans and or Delivery Plans for the respective Key Impact Areas.

5.0 **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 The approach outlined in sections 4.2-4.10 provides a proportion of the key ingredients needed to deliver a successful Visitor Economy for Halton. However, there are other actions that are needed to support this agenda. These are:

1. Bringing a group of stakeholders together to review and refine Halton’s visitor proposition & consider the options for developing a coherent brand for Halton.

2. Reform the Halton Visitor Economy Network, as the basis to establish a new operating model.
3. Undertake a full review of current partner marketing and develop a Halton-wide destination marketing strategy. Using the proposition, products and markets that have been identified, establish a range of itineraries that have the ability to create full/half day experiences.
4. Develop an investment plan to upgrade paths and cycle ways that link experiences. Interventions should include developing interpretation, way marking, all abilities access and enhanced interpretation at key visitor locations

5.2 Actions 1 and 2 could be co-ordinated through the Council's existing Regeneration, Business Improvement and Growth and Culture Teams.

5.3 However, funding does not currently exist to develop and implement actions 3 and 4. The Mersey Gateway Key Impact Areas will be identifying funding which could be extended to include activities that support the Visitor Economy.

6.0 **IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES**

6.1 The Visitor Economy plays an important role in attracting and retaining visitors in the Borough. However, whilst this report focuses on the role the Visitor Economy plays in promoting inward investment, and job creation activities, it transcends all of the Council's priorities because the attractiveness of a place will also be measured by other indicators such as the quality of schools, housing, social care provision that the Borough can provide.

7.0 **RISK ANALYSIS**

7.1 The following options have been considered.

1. Do Nothing – In this scenario the Council chooses to continue to focus resources on its 'primary' employment growth sectors, acknowledging that Halton's Visitor Economy is not as prominent when compared with visitor assets in other neighbouring areas. The advantage of this approach is that it does not require any further funding or human resource.

The disadvantage of this option is that Halton could miss out on future City Region funding if it has not developed a coherent set of priorities that are supported by long-term revenue streams. There are a number of significant scale funding streams that are applied to through the LEP VE Group, which Halton officers are a member of, and which would bring benefit, both in terms of capital and revenue funding, to Halton's VE. Resource is

required, however, in order to play a more meaningful role in these developments.

2. The Preferred Option – this option is outlined in section 4 and 5 of this report where the Council seeks to work within the Mersey Gateway Key Impact Areas, identifying funding which could be extended to include activities that support the Visitor Economy.
3. Establish a fully-funded Visitor Economy Programme. This option would result in the Council allocating a pot of funding to deliver a long-term rather than piece-meal programme. This would be evaluated using KPIs such as increased visitor numbers; increased spend in the Borough etc.

The disadvantage of this option is that it would require revenue funding that the Council does not have, and as mentioned above, the Borough has other strengths and advantages that are driving its economic growth.

8.0 **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

- 8.1 The proposals and actions outlined in section 4 and 5 of this report would reflect the need to ensure that all our cultural, heritage and retail and leisure facilities are accessible for all.

9.0 **LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

- 9.1 None under the meaning of the Act.