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Relocation Strategy Widnes Waterfront

1. Introduction

- 1.1. The aim of Halton Borough Council (HBC) together with its development partners is the successful delivery of the project that leaves a legacy of sustainable regeneration in the Widnes Waterfront area.
- 1.2. The need to relocate certain activities and occupiers from the area to enable it to realise its full regeneration potential has been recognised as a fundamental component of the project. As a result this Relocation Strategy has been prepared to detail the approach to relocation that will be undertaken by HBC.
- 1.3. The primary objective of this strategy is to ensure that the benefits of the Widnes Waterfront can be delivered whilst minimising the extent of the impact upon those businesses that are subject to relocation. To achieve this existing businesses will need to be transferred to locations that are appropriate to the present and future needs of the businesses concerned.
- 1.4. This strategy details the approach required to understand and address the relocation needs of the businesses, it will demonstrate that;
 - HBC recognises the scale, character and diversity of the businesses and their associated need to relocate
 - There is adequate capacity to accommodate the needs of businesses from the Widnes Waterfront area to alternative locations that are appropriate to their requirements
 - A policy exists to support businesses throughout the relocation period, from pre-relocation support and identifying requirements through the actual process and appropriate aftercare to ensure that the effects of relocating are minimised
- 1.5. Business relocations: to address the needs of a range of existing commercial occupiers, an assessment will need to include:
 - Level of demand - The overall demand for alternative commercial premises and sites, this will be based upon an emerging understanding of the current business requirements
 - Level of supply – An overview of the current supply of premises within the borough and if appropriate the neighbouring authorities
 - Matching supply and demand – Initial assessment of supply against demand and identification of shortfalls

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2. Business Relocation

- 2.1. The most effective method for achieving a successful business relocation is through a detailed assessment of the needs of each individual business. This assessment is achieved through direct, proactive face-to-face meetings with the individual businesses. Before undertaking the assessment it is important to establish an initial baseline study.
- 2.2. Widnes Waterfront is today characterised as an area once dominated by the chemical industry, but more recent given over to a number of more varied commercial occupiers, together with areas of dereliction.
- 2.3. The master plan for the area shows a sustainable regeneration of the area that will deliver a mixed-use development that meets the needs of 21st century businesses and residents of the borough.

3. Initial Level of Demand

- 3.1. Although detailed discussions are required to understand the exact requirements of individual businesses and clarify needs. It is necessary at a early stage to establish an initial baseline of the potential scale of demand.
- 3.2. To undertake this initial study information has been drawn for the following sources.
 - HBC Economic Regeneration Service
 - HBC Major Projects Department
 - Valuation Office
- 3.3. This review of existing businesses likely to be effected by relocation reveals the following;
 - Existing physical size of occupied sites and premises
 - Market knowledge of current supply of sites and premises
- 3.4. At present six businesses require relocation, employing less than 100 staff with an existing land take of 5.4 acres
- 3.5. The table below gives a breakdown of the businesses existing property requirements

Size Range	Number of Businesses	% of Total requirement
0 – 5,000 ft ²	0	
5,000 – 20,000 ft ²	2	33.3%
20,000 ft ² +	1	16.7%
Site only	3	50.0%
Total	6	100.0%

- 3.6. The above table does not take into consideration any future expansion requirements of the businesses

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4. Current Supply of Sites and Premises

- 4.1. The Economic Regeneration Service maintains a comprehensive database of all commercial premises and sites in Halton, regardless of ownership.
- 4.2. The table below indicates the availability of commercial premises in Widnes and Runcorn as at 30 June 2006. It does not include premises which are proposed but not yet under construction

Size Range	Widnes	Runcorn
0 – 5,000 ft ²	20	22
5,000 – 10,000 ft ²	6	8
10,000 ft ² +	19	40
Site only	6	8

- 4.3. A proactive approach to ensuring an adequate supply of suitable relocation sites is being undertaken through the partnership between HBC and St Modwen Properties where funding is available to advance purchase sites that can be used for the relocation of businesses affected by the CPO process.

5. Ability to Meet Demand

- 5.1. Combining the findings on relocation demand and the potential premises supply indicates that a range of opportunities exist to meet the locational requirements of those businesses that require premises rather than sites. At present there is a shortage of sites that are suitable for use as open storage with a relatively small building.
- 5.2. The study does not take into consideration the cost between the business's existing premises and those currently on the market. This factor needs to be considered as part of the relocation procedure
- 5.3. Should a business affected by the CPO be unable to identify a suitable site within Halton, then HBC will work with adjacent Local Authorities to identify suitable sites provided that the local workforce is retained.

6. Business and Relocation Support Process

- 6.1. The key elements of the process are;
- 6.1.1. Setting up a team with clear lines of communication with the businesses
- 6.1.2. Delivering proactive one-to-one support to the businesses to;
- Establish a working relationship between the team and business
 - Understand the characteristics and requirements of the individual businesses
 - Identify through discussions with businesses support measures and property options available

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6.2. HBC is committed to minimising the impact on businesses adversely affected by the Widnes Waterfront project. A key element of this objective is to ensure that proactive assistance to businesses is available, helping them to find alternative premises that are suitable to their needs.

6.3. The Team will be headed by Sara Munikwa of HBC Major Projects (0151 471 7347) and draw upon the following expertise as required;

- HBC Property Services, Angela Gore 0151 471 7488
- HBC Economic Regeneration, David Lyon 01928 516125
- St Modwen Properties, Richard Bakes 01925 825950

6.4. It is recognised that the process of relocation must be managed both carefully and sensitively so that the disturbance to the businesses is kept to a minimum.

7. Understanding the needs of individual businesses

7.1. The initial task for the team will be to hold discussions with each business in the Widnes Waterfront area in order to understand the more detailed characteristics of each and their potential needs.

7.2. This process has already begun and will continue into the future. In order to balance the various demands of the businesses, the following factors are considered to be relevant in identifying a suitable site;

- Location of business customers
- Contribution to the local economy in terms of employment
- Transport requirements
- Intensity of land use on current site
- Scope for integration on a business park
- Individual business and investment plans

8. Identifying relocation options

8.1. The outcome of the business engagement process will be to identify suitable relocation sites for each of the businesses.

8.2. Following initial contact between the team and the business a support package will be developed from a number of different elements to aid the business concerned.

8.3. The elements will include

- Assistance in finding space / premises within the Halton area
- Assistance in finding space other locations, were this is the preferred choice of the business.
- Access to support through the Business Link were appropriate
- Access to training through the Learning and Skills Council.