



PROPOSALS FOR A HOYLAKE ECO-GOLF RESORT, WILDFOWL AND WETLAND CENTRE

DRAFT ONLY: FOR COMMENT



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NOTE: This document is prepared as an aide to the current Golf Resort plans by Hoylake Village Life CIC, a community group of residents and businesses in Hoylake. We hope this will add a fresh insight into the possible outcomes of the project.

Cover image: The Scarlet Eco Hotel, Cornwall, designed by Harrison Sutton Partnership. Used with permission.

IMPORTANT: At the time of writing, the 'strategic justification' notes at the back of this book were drawn from the North West Development Agency's (NWDA) Regional Economic Strategy, whose implementation was overseen by The Mersey Partnership (TMP). With the closure of NWDA, current structures, policies and strategies are being reconsidered. In the meantime, the justification notes drawn from the existing RES will necessarily form the basis of current justification for this project within this document.

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Eco-hotel in Cornwall designed by Harrison Sutton Partnership

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INTRODUCTION

Hoylake Village Life formed in 2009 out of a concern for the economic future of Hoylake. Among our aims is a desire to 'iron out' evident peaks and troughs in the local economy which appear to be influenced by many factors, including the impact of occasional international and Golf Open tournaments being hosted at the Royal Liverpool Golf Club.

Our ambition is to help create a more sustainable local economy, planning for the future, attracting inward investment, building on strengths and tackling existing weaknesses.

In 2004 a new Golf Resort was proposed as part of the BDP masterplan for Hoylake and West Kirby. Since then, the global financial climate has changed beyond recognition, which has had an inevitable impact on the ambitions of local communities, including Hoylake.

In addition, concerns about climate change have continued to grow and the way we tackle these challenges impacts upon every aspect of development and our society, notably including leisure and tourism.

Government targets for carbon reduction demand that we continually reassess plans for future development with a view to incorporating greater degrees of environmental consideration.

This document is prepared in that context; whilst being hopeful for the future we believe it would be wise to review and, if appropriate, adapt the existing plans in the light of these changes. Our proposals aim to do just that.

It is essential that any new development in Hoylake should have a low or neutral carbon footprint, be highly energy efficient, constructed using, as much as possible, locally sourced and environmentally friendly products, and be designed and built to the highest standards.

Our outstanding natural environment, home to some rare species, demands such high standards. Whilst this means a more expensive build and design; a well designed eco-building will have significantly lower running costs. Reed-bed sewage treatment, wind turbines and solar panels, geothermal heating, rainwater storage systems all reduce carbon footprint as well as running costs. The design and build quality should stand the test of time, just as many of Hoylake's existing original buildings have done.

Whilst we broadly support the principle of a new Golf Resort near Hoylake there are concerns, including some raised among the local community, that we hope the recommendations in this document will help to address:

- That the project should have a positive impact on environment, wildlife and biodiversity
- That the local community and economy should benefit directly and significantly
- That visitors should find an attractive route into Hoylake town centre, unhindered by the railway crossing, and without creating excessive traffic problems in Hoylake
- That both viability and sustainability of the proposed project is questionable.
- That the current proposals to facilitate the scheme through exclusive and high value residential development on greenbelt raise a wide range of significant concerns.



Attenborough Nature Reserve, Attenborough, Nottingham; a beautiful wetland nature reserve on the outskirts of Nottingham

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT AND SUSTAINABILITY

Much of the site is recognised as being of poor environmental quality and any project should serve to improve, rather than degrade this. Due to the high water table in the area, significant landscaping would be necessary to allow for existing plans, but our proposals to include a Wildfowl and Wetland Centre could potentially reduce this requirement.

With regard to land within the proposed site boundaries, the current landscape is not particularly 'attractive'. Agricultural land quality is a combination of grade 2 (very good quality), grade 4 (poor quality with severe limitations) and merges into grade 3 (good to moderate). The highest quality existing agricultural use could be retained and enhanced. Whilst there are some limited areas that would need to be retained or enhanced, we are not aware of any notable historic monuments or features.

It is proposed that the course should be built on Green Belt Land, which raises significant challenges in regard to obtaining planning permission, particularly in regard to the current proposals to build an exclusive development of "luxury" housing.

The rationale for retaining Green Belt Land around towns and cities is:

- To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built up areas;
- To prevent neighbouring towns from merging into one another;
- To assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment;
- To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns;
- To assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other urban land.

It is therefore highly likely that any planning application would be referred to the Secretary of State. However, there are a few ways in which the use of Green Belt land might be deemed acceptable:

- If it provides opportunities for access to the open countryside for the urban population;
- If it provides opportunities for outdoor sport and outdoor recreation near urban areas;
- If it retains attractive landscapes and enhances landscapes near to where people live;
- If it improves damaged and derelict land around towns;
- If it secures nature conservation interest;
- If it retains land in agricultural, forestry and related uses.

By including a Wildfowl and Wetland Centre, many of the above criteria are satisfied. We believe this would also provide a significantly lower risk and more sustainable business model for the project that that currently proposed (ie relying entirely on the provision of housing to cover up front development costs and subsequently on the unproven popularity of the resort).

Wildfowl and Wetland Centres attract many visitors and are increasing in popularity whereas the popularity of UK Golf has been in decline, although recent evidence shows a fragile recovery, with England remaining the largest golf market in Europe. Nevertheless, diversification can surely only benefit the industry, and the golf resort sector offers ample opportunity for creative thinking in this regard.

The emerging Hoylake NDP would also support a Wildfowl and Wetland Centre development in the context of landscape renewal, which is additionally supported through UDP Policy LA4.



Knot (*Calidris canuta*); a wading bird seen between August and May

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WILDLIFE AND BIODIVERSITY IMPACT

The Capita Symonds Wildlife and Biodiversity Report (2007) is a thorough and credible document which affirms that, at least theoretically, the overall impact of the proposed Golf Resort is positive.

But we feel there could be greater ambition in this regard. Our belief is that a more positive impact can be created through design. To this end we have consulted with RSPB and the Wildfowl and Wetland Trust (WWT). We subscribe to the view, endorsed by the RSPB, that well designed Golf Resorts enhance both environment and wildlife habitat, especially when built on previously poor quality land. Examples such as Machrihanish Dunes demonstrate that it is possible to operate a chemical-free course in an area of wetland and dune system.

However we would like to take the existing proposals a significant step further by including a wildlife and wetland centre. WWT have significant experience in building 'new' wetland areas. The Hoylake site would be unique as a 'new build' Wildfowl and Wetland Centre, in that it already enjoys within a 2km radius the following statutory designated sites:

- Dee Estuary RAMSAR site
- Dee Estuary Special Protection Area (SPA)
- Mersey Narrows and North Wirral Foreshore pSPA
- Dee Estuary possible Special Area of Conservation (SAC)
- North Wirral Foreshore Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)
- Meols Meadows SSSI
- Red Rocks SSSI
- Dee Estuary SSSI
- Hilbre Island Local Nature Reserve (LNR)

Existing habitats occurring within the site, much of which will need to be incorporated into the new centre, include lowland grazing marsh, boundary features (such as ditches, hedgerows, tree lines), lowland meadows and semi-improved neutral grassland. There are also small areas of woodland located within the nearby Municipal golf course and in the nearby Gilroy Nature Park there are ponds, reed beds, cropland and scrub. The majority of these are either UK and/or Local Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) habitats.

The areas of lowland grazing marsh located within the area provide important areas for breeding and over wintering wildfowl and waders, and for other species including Schedule I birds (Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 as amended) and birds listed in the EC Birds Directive. Wirral Wildlife have identified the area as being of potential importance in this regard and have proposed designation as a Site of Biological Importance.

The site is not currently designated as a Local Nature Reserve (LNR) or Site of Biological Importance within the Unitary Development Plan (UDP) – however, this proposal could warrant a broader designated site status of national importance that would provide new opportunities for existing and new species to develop and thrive.

Wildlife includes bats, voles, hares and invertebrates as well as many birds of local, national and international importance.

The site also contains a wide variety of fauna including nationally and internationally protected species, UK and local Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) species.



Cycling routes: promoting healthy living

© deanm1974/istock

SOCIO-ECONOMIC BENEFITS

Hoylake is a relatively affluent town in West Wirral, itself an affluent area of the North West of England. There are, however, pockets of social deprivation within the town that need addressing in a sustainable way. This project will have a significant impact on the whole community. The Centre will deliver the following socio-economic benefits by:

improved recreation opportunities

- Including walking and cycling routes through the course – not currently possible in the vicinity;
- Sailing on specially built lakes; supplementing the existing sailing offer in the area and providing local training schools with further facilities;
- Providing other high quality recreational facilities, for example indoor sports and gym facilities at the hotel;

an enhanced tourist economy

- Providing local employment;
- Increasing longer stay visits – supporting other local accommodation providers;
- Attracting more day tourists from around the region;
- Further developing eco-tourism on Wirral; one of the UK's fastest growing tourism sectors;

town centre businesses

- Improving access to and from Hoylake's retail area, thereby increasing trade in Market Street;
- Attracting new high quality niche retail to the town centre;
- Providing high quality and attractive conferencing and meeting facilities for local groups and organisations.

transport

- A road connecting Carr Lane to the Saughall Massie Road would make access to the M53 and Liverpool easier, quicker and safer from Hoylake and West Kirby;

- A rail freight 'spur' could serve the Carr Lane Industrial Centre, linking Hoylake businesses with the new Wirral Waters development and the proposed International Trade Centre;
- Improving road access to the Industrial estate and Resort;
- Provision of services to Carr Lane businesses and the new centre possibly via a bridge would bring an income to Hoylake from utilities providers;

housing renewal

- Improving and increasing housing stock in the Carr Lane area by transposing industrial buildings currently adjacent to the railway with the existing Ellerman Lines site and exploring options for improving or upgrading housing stock and associated green recreation space situated at the periphery of the estate;

educational and research opportunities

- World class wildlife and wetland educational and research facilities for regional schools and colleges;

environmental enhancements

- Public access to a rich wildlife environment, largely currently inaccessible as the land is privately or council owned;
- Reed beds could provide sewage treatment facilities for the industrial area and Resort;
- Enhancements to the current Station Gateway improvement project.

Raising the profile of Hoylake within the region will support and benefit tourism and investment in the region as a whole. This will be a world class facility and as such become another 'pearl' in England's North West, helping to promote the region nationally and internationally, benefitting every few years from a significant global publicity boost when the Golf Open is hosted in the town.



World class educational facilities

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EDUCATIONAL AND RESEARCH BENEFITS

As well as using the consultancy services of organisations such as RSPB and WWT, local schools, colleges and universities could benefit from involvement in the research and planning of this project.

To this end we believe that local schools, colleges and universities would welcome involvement in project delivery as well as ongoing maintenance and development. In that context, the proposal would deliver an outstanding research and educational facility over the long term, augmenting some of Wirral's already highly respected facilities such as Ness Gardens.

There are many local groups who have a keen interest in local wildlife and biodiversity. These groups could use the centre, bringing community activity into the facility and perhaps providing some degree of volunteer support.

Local nurseries too could enjoy opportunities for pre-school children to learn about wildlife; enjoying activities such as bug trails and otter feeding.

The facility could provide a further opportunity for the Wirral Ranger service to increase its outreach work.

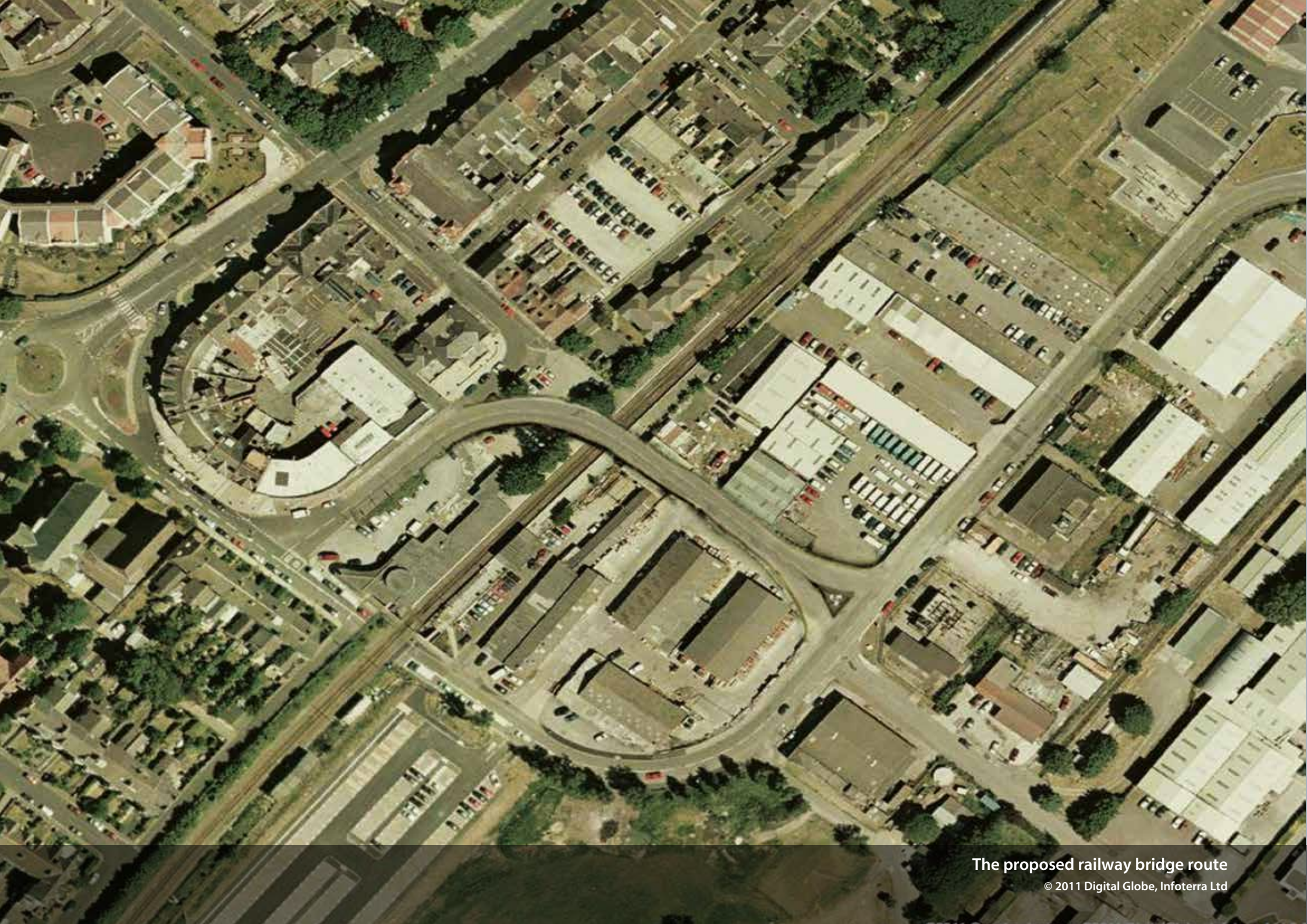
It is significant that Hoylake already provides a rich environment for wildlife; the impact on existing wildlife during the project development process would inevitably provide valuable new data. As a result its value as a research project is significantly enhanced.

Capita Symonds have identified the following research needs in the context of the proposed golf resort:

- breeding and over wintering bird survey to determine potential impacts and the requirement of an Appropriate Assessment under the Habitat Regulations, if development occurs on the western part of the survey site
- bat survey to farm buildings, linear features and areas of open water if to be impacted by the scheme
- survey for great crested newts to all ponds occurring within 500m of the proposed development site boundary where suitable habitat occurs
- detailed botanical assessment of study area to include NVC (National Vegetation Classification) mapping of habitat communities
- due to the highly transient nature of water voles, it is advised that any ditches or water courses to be impacted by the scheme and are suitable for water voles should be re-surveyed prior to development
- invertebrate study of any areas immediately adjacent to any adopted development site.

This research would clearly be extended in the context of a Wildfowl and Wetland Centre to provide a valuable study.

This added value could be an attractor for national or even international research, attracting further visitors and investment. WWT Consulting Ltd. have expressed a particular interest and have offered their consultancy services to take the project forward.



The proposed railway bridge route

© 2011 Digital Globe, Infoterra Ltd

ACCESS ISSUES

The site is currently accessible from Hoylake only by a level crossing, which is closed for approximately five minutes, four times an hour, for much of the day. Overcoming this barrier is a major priority if Hoylake is to benefit from any development of the site. If not addressed, those visiting the Centre would be less likely to come into Hoylake, staying on the site and thereby limiting the potential economic benefits for the town.

Network Rail are keen to close level crossings as part of a nationwide programme. With this in mind, in 2011/12 Hoylake Village Life engaged with Stobart Rail Infrastructure and Network Rail. A site visit in 2012 was encouraging and both recommended further research into feasibility and viability of outline proposals for either foot or road traffic bridges over the railway whilst encouraging exploration of other options.

The cost of such a bridge was estimated by Stobart Rail Infrastructure to be in the region of £5-10 million. If viable, both financially and structurally, a bridge could run North East from the South facing aspect of the Royal Mail Sorting office, turning through 90 degrees across the railway into Carr Lane. It would then split, for traffic heading to and from the Resort site and remaining traffic to and from the Industrial Park.

Whilst the bridge will rise within a conservation area a competition among specialist bridge designers could be held to deliver a concept which meets the exceptionally high quality of design and materials demanded in such a context.

Utilities provision would run via conduits in the bridge, with WMBC receiving income from the the utilities providers. Energy and utility provision for the planned resort does not appear to have been properly considered; current provision is insufficient for existing businesses, let alone a new Golf Resort. We believe this is a creative solution to the problem with a solid business-led rationale, providing funding for further public realm improvements.

Research by Liverpool University students in 2010 revealed the possibility of Scottish Power relocating away from Hoylake within the next few years, potentially releasing land for new, high quality affordable residential development adjacent to the railway line.

It was also noted that the brownfield “Ellerman Lines” area of Carr Lane could be redeveloped with new industrial space which would enable the relocation of existing industrial units currently adjacent to the railway line, releasing further land for new residential development.

As well as improving the visual quality of the entrance to the Centre, this will deliver improved housing and industrial facilities for Carr Lane, including the creation of new, affordable units for innovative startup businesses.

It is important that the local economy benefits from the project: this solution would deliver major benefits to businesses in Carr Lane, as well as residents in the area and businesses in Market Street by improving both access and environment.



RES 101: Developing the quality of the visitor experience: a hotel restaurant serving high quality local produce

© Harrison Sutton Partnership

STRATEGIC BENEFITS

In December 2016 a referendum on the Hoylake Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP) resulted in 86% of those voting in favour of adopting the NDP. This initiative, started by HVL in 2011, and designated to new, dedicated planning forum Hoylake Vision in 2012, aims to support sustainable development within the Hoylake NDP area including employment creation and improvements to the Carr Lane area (Policies CL1 and CL2). The NDP area also includes about 50% of the proposed Golf Resort area and any development is therefore subject to NDP policies.

The proposal would additionally have the following strategic benefits:

- **Improve the physical environment**

A high quality of environment is essential to attract private sector investment. The proposed bridge and freight spur would improve the image and perception of West Wirral to businesses and potential investors by creating an enhanced town centre environment, with enhanced employment land, and easier access to the rural environment. Additionally the existing businesses would benefit from a step change in the quality of environment, and a more open accessible Hoylake. Furthermore, an enhanced physical environment and regenerated town centre, would provide a more attractive environment for investment by developers of the proposed Resort.

- **Promote the image of the region**

Hoylake is a key tourist destination for the north west, as a charming Edwardian seaside resort with stunning coastal views, and host venue for The Open golf championships. In

addition, the West Wirral coastline attracts many visitors from its other sporting activities, including sailing, sandyachting and parakarting, and recreational activities including birdwatching, walking, riding and cycling. With greater promotion of Hoylake's key assets, and the success of major international golf tournaments in 2012, 2013 and 2014, Hoylake will increasingly attract considerable interest from tourists and visitors to the region. A regenerated town centre, with a more open accessible rural environment, and stronger links to the proposed Resort will make a major contribution towards the attraction of new businesses, investment, and continued economic growth of Wirral.

- **Develop the quality of the visitor experience**

Hoylake is identified as part of the Mersey Waterfront, a Signature Project identified by NWDA, as part of England's Golf Coast: one of the region's key projects to transform the region to attract visitors. This project will greatly enhance the Mersey Waterfront visitor experience by helping to regenerate Hoylake, and making West Wirral more attractive to tourists, which in turn will help grow the overall visitor economy.

- **Develop a portfolio of sub-regionally important employment sites.**

Hoylake includes a key employment site for Wirral, located along Carr Lane. This proposal would improve access to this employment site by removing the constraint of the railway line, and by creating a more attractive environment, integrated with the town centre, this employment site will considerably enhance the sub-regional portfolio.



Hoylake's potential for attracting tourism investment is huge: this project will reinforce the value of the offer

© Holy Trinity School Hoylake

- **Contributing to ERDF Action Areas**

By regenerating Hoylake and creating greater accessibility to the employment site, the proposal would make a significant contribution to ERDF Action Area (AA4.2) Supporting linkages to key employment areas, and 4.3 Supporting employment creation for areas of regeneration need.

In addition the proposal would help to enhance Hoylake as a key regional visitor attraction, therefore contributing towards Action Area 3.3, Supporting the improvement of the region's visitor offer and image.

TOURISM STRATEGIES

The Regional Tourism Strategy identifies Mersey Waterfront as a 'Signature Project', along with the Lake District, Chester Super Zoo, Blackpool and Hadrian's Wall. In addition the strategy identifies 'England's Golf Coast' as a key marketing theme, recognising the importance of the Royal Liverpool Golf Club.

The Wirral Tourism Strategy identifies the revitalisation of Hoylake as a key project of the Mersey Waterfront Signature Project.

In addition, the Department of Communities and Local Government's 'Strategy for Seaside Success: Securing the future of seaside economies' highlights the importance of regenerating the seaside towns of Great Britain. The Strategy states that poor transport links are often cited as a reason for economic decline in some seaside towns, and supports proposals that enable residents to connect with employment opportunities, key local services, social networks and goods. Hoylake is specifically referred to in the Strategy as a seaside resort in need of support.

The Multi Area Agreement identifies an issue of worklessness around Hoylake, and its correlation with transport deprivation (maps 4.1, 4.2)

The promotion and regeneration of the Mersey Waterfront is a key part of the Action Plan for the Liverpool City Region.

The Scott Wilson Open Space Audit commissioned by Wirral MBC shows that the Hoylake & Meols Ward is poorly provided for in terms of public open space and very poorly compared to the neighbouring West Kirby & Thurstaston Ward.

The development of new parkland behind Hoylake as part of HVL's transformation strategy would address this weakness and provide a major visitor attraction and enhanced connectivity between the existing Wirral Country Park and North Wirral Coastal Park with links inland to Royden Park and Thurstaston Common.

The improvement of accessibility to the key assets of the region are essential parts of the Merseyside Local Transport Plan.

Other reference of interest:

- www.hoylakevision.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Hoylake-B-report.pdf
- <https://prezi.com/-w9rflozoe1/transforming-hoylake/>
- <https://shop.randa.org/birds-and-golf-courses-a-guide-to-habitat-management>
- <http://machrihanishdunes.com/golf/the-course/stewardship/>



An eco-golf resort. Popular with locals, visitors and wildlife. Good for the regional economy. Good for Hoylake.

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