



Meeting: Council

Date: 26 September 2013

Wards Affected: All

Report Title: Geopark Global Conference 2016

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1. Purpose and Introduction

- 1.1 The administrative area of Torbay was designated a Global Geopark in 2007, part of the Geopark Global Network endorsed by UNESCO.
- 1.2 Global Geopark status is awarded to areas with internationally important geology and outstanding heritage, archaeological, ecological and cultural value, where heritage is used for the benefit of the local community and sustainable economic regeneration.
- 1.3 The Global Geopark model is a driver for education, community benefits, expansion of the tourism offer and sympathetic regeneration.
- 1.4 Every 2 years a member of the Geopark Global Network hosts a Geopark Global Conference. A host is chosen through a bid process and there is an opportunity for Torbay to submit a bid for the 2016 conference which will increase international visitor numbers and raise Torbay's profile internationally.

2. Proposed Decision

- 2.1 It is recommended that Council give its approval for Torbay Council, in partnership with the English Riviera Geopark Organisation (ERGO) and the TDA, to bid to host the Geopark Global Conference in 2016.
- 2.2 It is recommended that the Council commits to underwriting any shortfall in costs of hosting. It is expected that the costs will be covered by fees from delegates and with private sector sponsors.

3. Reason for Decision

- 3.1 The decision needs to be made as the Global network will call for bids in Autumn 2013, with bids to be prepared and submitted in Spring 2014.

- 3.2 Geopark linked projects have made significant contributions towards improving facilities for the local community and visitors. The conference presents a valuable opportunity for Torbay to capture a range of benefits from:
- Attracting new international visitors.
 - Supporting the expansion of the conference market.
 - Improving the local economy where the forecast gain to the local economy is £602,800.
 - Creating future opportunities to be exploited by the tourism and hospitality sector.
- 3.3 The Geopark and the conference entirely support the Council's desire to attract prestigious events to Torbay to support the tourism sector.
- 3.4 The Geopark Global conference will help position the English Riviera on the 'world stage' creating opportunities to develop international partnerships such as has already developed with the Hong Kong Global Geopark. It will also lead to a greater awareness of the Geopark on a local, national and international level, which will ultimately generate benefits to the local community, through access to funding, improving local facilities, raised heritage profile, a successful tourism industry and improved civic pride.
- 3.5 The Geopark Global conference will increase temporary employment opportunities, along with the possibility of generating potential long term employment for volunteers by providing training leading up to hosting the conference (Appendix 4: OECD Report)

Supporting Information

4. Position

- 4.1 Torbay has been part of the Global Geopark Network since 2007, in that time we have built up significant influence on the European Geopark Network, with Melanie Border who is current Chair of the UK Geopark Forum, now sitting on the European Geopark Network Advisory Board, and both Melanie and Nick Powe (Chair of ERGO) are qualified evaluators for the GGN, carrying out Geopark evaluations and revalidation missions around the world (fully funded by the host Geopark).
- 4.2 Since designation the Geopark has helped to attract over £6million (Appendix 3) in funding into the bay. It has developed relationships with local, national and international partners, including our 'sister' Geopark in Hong Kong.
- 4.3 The 2014 Geopark Global Conference will be held in Stonehammer, Canada, the previous conference was held in Japan; therefore it is considered highly likely that they will look for a European country to host 2016. This will strengthen our bid, along with our current Geopark status, the expertise we bring to the network, the natural habitat, heritage and tourism offering, our close links with UNESCO and our good reputation with the European and Global Geopark networks.

4.4 The forecast costs, set out below, are based on 600 delegates attending the conference and 120 partners/spouses coming accompanying delegates, but not attending the conference. The 600 reflects the attendees at Japan's conference. However, with the growth of the Geopark network, the delegate number is expected to be much higher for the 2016 conference. The approximate costs and income are as follows:

- Hosting the Conference for 600 delegates +120 Partners - £336,820
- Delegate +Partners fees for the conference - £237,000
- Shortfall - £99,820
- Corporate sponsorship to be sought to cover the shortfall
- Estimated value of conference to local economy at 600 delegates + 120 partners - £602,800

A detailed breakdown of the costs is found in appendix 2.

4.5 Due to the scale of the Conference, the need for the initial costs to be underwritten by the Council and the resource implications for taking forward Council support to proceed with the bid is now sought.

5. Possibilities and Options

5.1 Council could decide not to bid to host the conference and the project would finish. This would mean that only staff costs have been incurred to get the project to this stage and there is no risk of having to underwrite the project or find any short fall. However, in not bidding for the conference, any opportunity of positively impacting our local economy that would have come from the delegates or any future tourism opportunities that could be realised off the back of the conference, are removed. It could also impact our standing with UNESCO and the Geopark Networks.

5.2 Council could approve the bid to host the conference, but decide to only give support in principle. This would mean an increase in project costs to get us to bid stage, but could also be seen as a negative aspect to the bid, especially if we win, then have to pull out because we haven't committed funds to the project. This would have a detrimental effect on our standing and integrity with UNESCO and the Geopark Networks, along with current and potential partners, that have been lined up to aid in hosting the conference as part of the bid. It would also mean losing the potential income that would be coming into the local economy from the conference and future tourism opportunities that can grow off the back of the conference.

5.3 Council could choose not to bid for the conference and decide instead to send larger delegations from Torbay to future Geopark Conferences and use our standing and status with UNESCO and the Geopark Networks as a spring board to connecting with other countries and organisations with a view to encourage investment in Torbay, along with setting up smaller tourism opportunities to encourage visitors from across the globe and link in with Geoparks across the UK.

5.4 While all the above options could be considered in the current financial climate, they are sub optimal in view of the longer term rewards for bidding for the conference and potentially winning the bid, if there is sufficient backing and funding. The benefits to the local economy, businesses, tourism and community cannot be undervalued, not just leading up to and during the conference, but also the legacy that is established internationally.

6. Fair Decision Making

6.1 We have current brought together key stakeholders to discuss the possibility of bidding for the conference:

- The Mayor
- Torbay Councillors
- Torbay Council Officers
- Torbay Development Agency
- English Riviera Geopark Organisation
- English Riviera Tourism Company
- Torbay Coast and Countryside Trust
- Riviera International Conference Centre

Following an approval to bid for the Conference, we will continue to meet with stakeholders and also engage with community groups, education organisations and businesses.

7. Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012

7.1 The requirements of the bid wouldn't necessarily require procurement services, however, should the bid be successful. Their services will be required, but have yet to be scoped.

8. Consultation

8.1 As detailed in 6.1, we have at this stage engaged with stakeholders to look at the possibility of bidding for the conference. Once a decision has been made we can then look to consult with community and voluntary groups, education organisations and businesses, along with UNESCO, UK Geoparks, South West UNESCO sites, Natural England, British Geological Society, National History Museum, Geoparks Scientific Panel, Visit England and the Geological Society. We have also been offered support from the Stonehammer host team and our 'sister' Geopark in Hong Kong.

9. Risks

9.1 There are a number of risks that we would face if the decision were not implemented. Most will revolve around missed opportunities for the bay in terms of potential tourism

benefits, inward investment, regeneration, loss to local economy and jobs. It could also significantly affect our standing with the Geopark Network and UNESCO, if they feel that we should have at least put a bid in to host the conference.

- 9.2 There are some associated risks if we go ahead with the project to bid and hopefully host the Conference in 2016.
- The funds are not realised from delegates, then the cost of the project impact the council. To mitigate this we will look to keep control of costs, look for value for money in all areas of the bid and hosting and negotiate the fixed costs down based on volume of business.
 - We do not win the bid for the conference. To reduce this risk, we will ensure that we cover everything we need to in the bid, along with seeking support from other Geopark, UNESCO and the Networks. We will also ensure we have the best and most prominent speakers and look for a Royal endorsement, with potential of a Royal visit to open the conference.
 - The number of delegates is significantly lower than expected. We will monitor numbers for Stonehammer and adjust accordingly the resources as required.
 - Number of delegates is significantly higher than expected. We will monitor and keep track of bookings, adjusting resources as required.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Stonehammer Bid

Appendix 2: Costs

Appendix 3: Capital Projects linked to English Riviera Geopark

Appendix 4: Local Development Benefits from Staging Global Events: Achieving the Local Development Legacy from 2012. OECD LEED Report, Secondary benefits (iii), page 13.