

Meeting: Policy Development and Decision Group (Joint Operations Team)

Date: 23 November 2016

Wards Affected: All

Report Title: Potential Helipad and Light Rail system for Torbay

Is the decision a key decision? No

When does the decision need to be implemented?

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1. Proposal and Introduction

- 1.1 This reports seeks to summarise the current position of two Mayoral pledges, namely a Helipad for Torbay and a Light Rail System to Brixham.
- 1.2 Discussions about the potential for a **Helipad** in Torbay started in March 2014. These initial discussions involved the Mayor, officers, and Captain Ian Payne, Flight Operations Director, Devon Air Ambulance. There was a clear desire, by Devon Air Ambulance, for a night time landing facility.
- 1.3 In August 2015, the Mayor's Executive Group asked officers to assess operations for a more formal landing site and potentially a scheduled service. A decision taken by the Mayor on 14 December 2015 to allocate £10,000 towards a feasibility study. This decision was called in and a report was prepared for the Overview and Scrutiny Board on 6 January 2016. At that meeting the Board welcomed the Mayor's decision to rescind his previous decision in relation to funding a feasibility study for a helipad in Torbay. However, the Board could not find any evidence that the allocation of £10,000 to fund such a feasibility study would have been in accordance with the Budget and Policy Framework.
- 1.4 Initial scoping work, on a commercial helipad, was undertaken in November 2014. Whilst this work was in no way exhaustive, it did identify Gallows Gate as a potential location.

- 1.5 Previously the cost of constructing a helipad has been estimated at £100,000 but that is prior to any level of feasibility study being carried out.
- 1.6 It was later suggested that a commercial helicopter service could operate between Torbay, Exeter, Plymouth and London. Whilst this may have gained support from the local businesses and the Local Enterprise Partnership, it was difficult to understand where funding could come from.
- 1.7 The work initiated by spatial planning officers and the Torbay Development Agency (TDA) was not sufficiently detailed in order to make a decision or judgement as to the need or appropriate location for such development.
- 1.8 Currently informal landing sites exist on Walls Hill and Daddyhole Plain. The emergency services also have a landing site at Torbay Hospital as well using a nearby playing pitch for larger aircraft.
- 1.9 No work has been carried out on a business case or to better understand the need, and neither is there a detailed understanding of the suitability of any location.
- 1.10 Neither the provision of a site, or the service, is included within the Devon and Torbay Local Transport Plan Strategy (2011-2026). However, the opportunity was consulted on (at Gallows Gate) as part of the Local Transport Implementation Plan (2016-2021) process. It received very little public support. The adopted version of the Plan does however illustrate some schemes which could be delivered, and this includes "Projects which support Mayoral manifesto commitments".
- 1.11 The Economic Strategy and Local Plan do not specifically set out the need or requirements for a Helipad in Torbay; however it could be determined against existing policies in the Local Plan.
- 1.12 Officers do not have the expertise, resource or capacity to undertake a feasibility study for a Helipad. An estimated cost to complete this is £10,000. This could look at possible locations and construction costs.
- 1.13 The other proposal is for a **Light Rail System** to Brixham.
- 1.14 It is understood that some initial discussions have taken place with the Dartmouth Steam Railway Company but that there was no officer involvement in those discussions.
- 1.15 The proposal is not included in the Local Plan, but any such proposal could be supported by certain existing policies. It was not explicitly included because there are doubts over deliverability within the plan period and that the levels of growth in Brixham would not have supported the need. There are also constraints in the area, particularly landscape designations of national importance.
- 1.16 There is also not reference made in either the Local Transport Plan Strategy or Economic Strategy. However, as with the Helipad, there is the potential to consider the opportunity through the Local Transport Implementation Plan.

- 1.17 Officers do not have the expertise, resource or capacity to undertake a feasibility study for a Light Rail system. An estimated cost to complete this is £30,000. This could look at possible routes and construction costs. This is based on similar work that has been carried out elsewhere.
- 1.18 Major transport funding for Transport is either directed through the Local Enterprise Partnership or direct from a Government competition. The LEP funding is in high demand locally and it is unlikely, depending on the scale, that such a level of resource would be available for this work. Any Government allocation would face competition from very significant, and often nationally important, proposals.
- 1.19 The issues to be considered are the start and end points, the route, the standard of the track facility, other opportunities, and the need would have to be demonstrated.
- 1.20 Alternative options may be more appropriate and cost effective. This could see National Rail services extended beyond Paignton with connections at Churston, or a bus-way scheme which greatly reduced the time to travel by bus. Either alternative solution would also need further work and assessment.
- 1.21 Whilst a capital cost of works at the stage is unknown, it is likely to be very significant. Similar schemes have only been successful where there is a very high demand and often the service would still require an ongoing subsidy.

2. Reason for Proposal

- 2.1 A decision needs to be taken on whether to continue feasibility work on both or either of the schemes and to agree how any such work will be funded.

3. Recommendation(s) / Proposed Decision

- 3.1 It is recommended that, given the level of financial cost necessary and the unlikely prospects of finding suitable capital funding for delivery, no further work is undertaken on a feasibility studies.
- 3.2 This should not rule out the opportunity for the private sector to undertake feasibility work and to put forward a proposal themselves.
- 3.3 Resources may allow for further discussions between the Spatial Planning and Devon Air Ambulance in respect of their needs for adequate facilities.
- 3.4 A reduced level of financial resource may be appropriate when considering alternative options instead of light rail.

Background Documents

<http://www.torbay.gov.uk/DemocraticServices/ieListDocuments.aspx?CIId=218&MIId=6754&Ver=4>

Overview and Scrutiny Board Minutes

Record of Mayoral Decision

Overview and Scrutiny Board Briefing Note