

Report to the LDF Cabinet Committee

Report reference: LDF-004-2011/12
Date of meeting: 3 October 2011



**Epping Forest
District Council**

Portfolio: Leisure & Wellbeing
Subject: White Water Centre Economic Development Study- update
Responsible Officer: Kassandra Polyzoides (01992 564119)
Max Houseago
Democratic Services Officer: Gary Woodhall (01992 564470)

Recommendations/Decisions Required:

- (1) To note the projects being delivered by EFDC and partners related to the 2012 Olympics;
- (2) To note the progress, key findings and action outputs of the Lee Valley White Water Centre Economic Study; and
- (3) To approve the Olympic Regeneration Officer's proposed work programme for the next 6 months.

Executive Summary:

The Economic Development and Regeneration work stream has worked effectively to finalise the work of consultants Nathaniel Lichfield in the delivery of the Lee Valley White Water Centre Economic Development Study. The report was finalised in July 2011 and since then work has continued to progress key actions and other work. The work stream has officers from EFDC, Lea Valley Park, ECC, Broxbourne and Herts. The Olympic Regeneration Officer sits on all work streams.

As the Economic Development Study progressed, and projects emerged, members of the work streams identified the need for the former to be restructured to ensure they functioned effectively; and were better able to manage the emerging programme of projects. This was suggested to the Legacy Board and a new structure was agreed in July 2011. The Olympic Regeneration Officer has been working with direction from the Legacy Board to finalise terms of reference and key actions for the groups, with input from all the work streams.

Following the completion of the Economic Development Study the Olympic Regeneration Officer was asked to do some soft market testing of proposed development ideas, with leisure operators and developers.

Reasons for Proposed Decision:

To update Members on the progress of projects identified by EFDC officers, the Olympic Regeneration Officer, and other partner agencies. To approve proposed work programme for the next 6 month period and propose other actions and activities to be undertaken by the Olympic Regeneration Officer.

Other Options for Action:

To not approve the Olympic Regeneration Officer's proposed work programme for the next 6 months.

Report:

Key Tasks Relating To EFDC Completed To Date

1. The Lee Valley White Water Centre Economic Development has now been completed, reviewed, and action plans for work streams distilled from it.
2. A £2.7million pound Heritage Lottery bid for the buildings of Waltham Abbey Town Centre has been developed, agreed by staff of EFDC and local community groups, and submitted to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) for approval. The HLF has approved the submission and a next round submission bid is being progressed for submission in November.
3. The Olympic Regeneration Officer has assisted the British Canoe Union with the creation of presentations, sponsorship lists, and publicity for their bid to host the 2015 Canoe Slalom World Championships, which was successful.
4. An all day business event at the Marriot Hotel Waltham Abbey was held on 16 March 2011, for local businesses, with workshops, and presentations regarding the impacts of the Games on local businesses, business opportunities for London 2012 Contracts, and the 2012 Legacy for the area.
5. A restructure of Olympic Legacy Board work streams has been completed. The Olympic Officer has been working on creating action plans and terms of reference for each group; and co-ordinating meetings for the new groups.
6. An information pack created for TV Tokyo identifying locations for TV lead up reports prior to the Games. This has been a main task for the Olympic Officer and further PR opportunities are being explored.

Legacy Board-Work Streams

7. Originally 6 work streams stemmed from the Olympic Legacy Board. However experience identified that the work streams overlapped, information often needed to be shared more readily across them, and that apart from Board meetings, no other mechanism existed to ensure that communication and information sharing took place effectively between the groups.
8. Following approval from the Olympic Legacy Board the work streams were restructured from 6 to 3. Appendix 1 shows the new work stream structure. The former work streams of, Regeneration and Environmental Improvement, and Economy and Business, now form Regeneration and Economic Development. Tourism and visitors, and the Communications work stream now form the Tourism, Marketing, and Communications work stream. Community and Engagement, and the Sports Development work streams, now form the Community and Sports Development work stream.

Summary Of The Economic Development Study Findings:

- Key Findings

9. Close to London with 8 million residents, many young, with higher than average disposal income, & with an interest in outdoor activities.

10. Lee Valley Regional Park attracts 1.5 million, the wider park 4.5 million.

11. Very limited opportunities for visitors to spend money in Lea Valley Park & narrow range of activities. There is a market for more sports, leisure & catering. To significantly increase visitor numbers to the area will require a bigger attraction or combination of other attractions.

12. Nearby visitor attractions with great potential for improvement, The Royal Gunpowder Mills, and Waltham Abbey.

13. The White Water Centre is a destination in itself for elite athletes, events, and members of the public, raising the profile, and creating awareness of the area leading up to the 2012 Games. The centre currently has strong interest and Market demand.

14. No real focus of adrenaline-type centres in London, individual facilities are scattered around London & Hertfordshire. The WWC and surrounding project area could be marketed and branded as an Adrenaline Sports Activity Zone. There is also opportunity to look at other activity zones as attractors in the area such as Sport/Event Space Activity Zones etc.

15. The White Water Centre (WWC) can be linked into existing attractions, stimulating operator interests, and act as a catalyst to develop an outdoor activities centre.

16. Hazelmere Marina and hotel development proposed near to the WWC.

17. The proposed way forward is to have a programme providing initial smaller developments i.e. high wires, archery over the short term (5 years), to build on the initial visitor numbers coming to the area. Once a critical mass is achieved a medium term phase is implemented (the preceding 5 years) focusing on more substantial development, i.e. indoor surfing. Again once critical mass is achieved the focus can move to longer term larger scale development i.e. large indoor facilities, restaurants, bars, sports retail.

18. Despite a decline in market areas such as luxury holidays, fine dining, and gym membership current markets trends favour the White Water Centre, the increase in demand for coffee shops, gastro pubs, healthier life styles and a strong health conscious attitude prevails, the attraction of women and over 50's to the adrenaline sports market, the rise in staycation due to recession.

19. Any vision and future development needs to look at current and future leisure trends & demands. Additional development will be needed in future years to refresh the appeal of the site.

20. The larger than expected number of casual visitors to the White Water Centre shortly after the centre opened, in excess of 100,000, might suggest scope for another café or restaurant at an earlier stage.

21. The facilities suggested by the consultant have been based on the existing Lee Valley Park brand, that won't harm the existing Lee Valley offer, and takes account of sensitivity issues i.e. ecological sites.

- Job Opportunities

22. The report focuses only on the direct employment the area can generate as a leisure destination. The report doesn't include the indirect employment generated by such a leisure destination such as ancillary retail and food. The White Water Centre on it's own is likely not enough of a catalyst to create a regeneration effect from Waltham Abbey to Waltham Cross. However, a larger scale leisure destination would be able to generate this effect. The consultants estimate a larger scale leisure development could create employment for just under 400 people.

- Events

23. Importantly for EFDC the report has indicated that events can play an important role in creating demand for certain developments i.e. accommodation for audiences and participants. Officers are proposing doing further work to test the market for interest in sites such as the Gunpowder Park etc.

- Development

24. Seven potential development sites have been identified and proposed uses put forward by the consultants:

(i) Cheshunt Station Site – Next to YHA and Young Mariners Centre. Possible uses proposed are camping and launch point for river canoe trips along the River Lee with stop offs at key attractions. Action to establish concept for the site, advertising it on the site during the Games to maximize exposure. Improve the gateway into the park here.

(ii) Showground site (EFDC) – With the constraint of over head cables, possibly uses as a flexible venue for various activities throughout the year. Scheduling a rolling programme of significant adrenaline sports related events, which can be advertised well in advance to publicise the site, and benefit from any cross over in interest from one event to the next.

(iii) Botanic Nursery – Possible health & fitness club providing training, physiotherapy, and complementary facilities to WWC athletes. It could also include an indoor children's adventure play area providing an alternative to the outdoor natural play area currently proposed in Lee Valley Park.

(iv) Hazelmere Marina (Broxbourne) – The site would need to be wholly redeveloped to create a new marina and accommodate restaurants, shops and bars. Increased visitor numbers and improved pedestrian links between Waltham Cross and Waltham Abbey will make restaurant and bars located here more viable. Indoor surfing, sky diving, climbing or go karting could be generated.

(v) Townmead (EFDC) - Possible uses as a sports/event space to improve the facilities and activities offered on the Waltham Abbey side of the River Lee. Facilities could include a specialised 5-a-side football facility with club house and bar. Create better visual links between Townmead and Hazelmere, and in the long term possibly a bridge.

(vi) Rammey Marshes – South of Innova Park it is zoned by the consultants to be a motor sports adrenaline area. Possible uses such as off road karting, or more formal outdoor go-karting, with ancillary club house and bar facilities.

(vii) Gunpowder Park – A large area of open fields, currently not used for recreational activity. Possible uses as a flexible club space for sports such as kite flying, model plans and clay pigeon shooting/also use as outdoor theatre/music event venue.

- Marketing and Branding

25. Separate marketing and branding strategies will be required to develop the LVWWC and it's immediate surroundings into an attractive location for investment initially, and ultimately a major visitor destination for adrenaline type activities.

- Soft Market Testing

26. On the request of the Olympic Legacy Board the Olympic Regeneration Officer researched the market to identify the activities and operations developers would be interested in developing, and hence an indication of what would be considered financially viable.

27. Following research discussions with two key operators has begun as an initial starting point. Both operators, Water Chariots river taxi service and Venture Extreme sports developers, are interested in the potential opportunities associated with the White Water Centre.

28. Venture Extreme are developers who are looking to creating a number of multi sports, leisure, and shopping complexes around the UK. Creating cultural and lifestyle destination venues based around adventure sports.

29. From their experience building a white water course and making it financially viable is the hardest part of making an adrenaline sports hub work. This has already been achieved at the Lee Valley White Water Centre.

30. Venture Extreme have said additional development around the White Water Centre could include: High ropes, climbing walls, ice climbing, artificial caving, artificial surf wave, scuba diving. Venture Extreme have also indicated that 'place making', in this case giving the area an identity as an adventure sports centre, is a proven method of regeneration.

31. Water Chariots is a river boat operator with boats specifically designed to travel along the River Lee. They will be operating a boat taxi service around the Olympic Park during the Games, and are interested in developing a number of boat services around London up to the White Water Centre in legacy should the critical mass exist to make this viable.

- Case Studies/Applicable Lessons

32. If a Thorpe Park scale development is desired, a review of how this destination developed over time is given in "Implementation Case Studies" of the Economic Study. This serves as an example of what would be required to replicate such a development around the White Water Centre. The key to this type of leisure destination is that it requires high levels of regular and continual development and change, ensuring that critical mass is ensured at each stage.

33. Cardiff International Sports Village has stalled as developers and local council tried to implement a number of large long term schemes, in one phase, before any critical mass had been achieved, it was then also a project vulnerable to the recession.

34. Other developments have been approached in a similar way building a White Water

Centre or a multi-activity centre with a White Water Centre, and then not developed the offer further over time, i.e. Cergy White Water and Leisure Centre in France.

Proposed Tasks For The Olympic Regeneration Officer For The Following 6 Months

35. Co-ordinate area wide master plan for the area which will inform an area wide branding and marketing strategy.

36. Co-ordinate a strategy, with funding secured, to implement a wayfinding, pathway, and gateway improvement scheme for walking and cycling routes across the project area.

37. Creation of a business prospectus for potential leisure developers and operators.

38. Establish a business breakfast for developers and operators promoting the potential of the area, area wide strategies, opportunities for developers.

39. Co-ordinate the next round submission bid for Heritage Lottery bid for the Town Heritage Initiative for Waltham Abbey and submission of report to EFDC LDF Cabinet.

Resource Implications:

Not applicable at the moment.

Legal and Governance Implications:

Not Applicable.

Safer, Cleaner and Greener Implications:

Regeneration/employment/skills opportunities etc.

Consultation Undertaken:

Economic development, commercial property agents, tourism, sports and business organisations (i.e. Gunpowder Mills). Sports operators of similar sports/leisure venues/developments. Updates provided to client member Councillors, town councils and Town Centre Partnerships.

Background Papers:

Previous report to the Cabinet Committee on 28 March 2011.
Economic Study.

Impact Assessments:

Risk Management

No identifiable risks at the current time.

Equality and Diversity:

Did the initial assessment of the proposals contained in this report for relevance to the Council's general equality duties, reveal any potentially adverse equality implications? No

Where equality implications were identified through the initial assessment process, has a formal Equality Impact Assessment been undertaken? No

What equality implications were identified through the Equality Impact Assessment process?
None.

How have the equality implications identified through the Equality Impact Assessment been addressed in this report in order to avoid discrimination against any particular group?
Not Applicable.