

REPORT TO: Executive Board

DATE: 7 June, 2007

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director, Environment Services

SUBJECT: Expanding the Programme of Regenerating Halton's Employment Sites

WARDS: Borough-wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 A Scrutiny Panel report, that explored the options for sustaining and expanding the current programme of regenerating Halton's employment sites, was considered by the Urban Renewal Policy and Performance Board on 21 March 2007. The Board resolved that the key recommendations of the Topic Team, be forwarded for consideration and decision by the Executive Board at the next available meeting.
- 1.2 To provide the necessary context, therefore, this report sets out the Scrutiny Panel report in full and seeks approval to implement the Key recommendations in the report.

2.0 RECOMMENDED: That

- (1) **The key recommendations of the Scrutiny Topic team, set out in paragraphs 7.4 to 7.7 and paragraph 8.4 of this report be approved.**

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 Context

The Business Parks Improvement Programme (BPIP) comprises a merger of the Business Improvement Area (BIA) Scheme and Greening Employment Areas (GEA) project, both of which have operated for the last three years.

- 3.2 The BIA Scheme provides grant assistance to all existing businesses located within the Widnes Waterfront and Gorse Lane, and to new businesses moving into the area. The BIA grant is part-ERDF funded and is an integral part of the Widnes Waterfront Programme. The purpose of the grant is to assist businesses in enhancing the external appearance of their sites in order to contribute to the overall regeneration of the Widnes Waterfront and the approaches to the area.
- 3.3 The BPIP works with businesses and property owners located on Astmoor, Halebank and Riverview Industrial Estates. The industrial

estates were selected to complement other regeneration projects that are taking place in the Borough:

- Astmoor due to its proximity to the Castlefields Project and the impact of the Mersey Gateway.
- Halebank due to proximity and impact generated from new housing developments and 3MG Mersey Multimodal Gateway.
- Riverview due to proximity to the Widnes Waterfront.

- 3.4 Business-led steering groups have been established in each of the target areas and are implementing jointly agreed action plans that are aimed at addressing the local needs and priorities of the resident businesses. The focus of attention covers a range of initiatives including: improvements to security and the physical environment; waste management and joint purchasing; inter-trading; local recruitment and training; improving access to jobs, improved environmental performance and links with community.
- 3.5 The Halton Economy sustains close to 53,000 jobs, with many of these jobs being located within Halton's 16 key employment sites. There is a danger that Halton's key employment sites could experience similar problems to those identified on Astmoor, Halebank and Riverview Industrial Estates, and which led to the establishment of the Greening Employment Areas project. It is considered prudent, therefore, to explore the options for extending the BPIP to other industrial estates in the Borough, as a preventative measure that will seek primarily to sustain businesses and jobs in these areas and counter economic and environmental decline, and secondly to attract new businesses and jobs into the Borough.
- 3.6 The BPIP is entirely funded by Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (NRF) and Halton Council's Capital Priorities Fund. The current funding for the BPIP expires on 31/03/07, although a provisional allocation of NRF has been indicated for 2007/08. If the benefits gained from regeneration work and business engagement, as part of the BPIP, are to continue beyond 31/03/08, it is clear that other funding sources / opportunities need to be identified.
- 3.7 The process of economic and environmental decline is not exclusive to Halton's employment sites, there are many examples of other industrial estates in the Region where similar regeneration programmes operate. This Scrutiny Topic was used as an opportunity to benchmark the BPIP against a number of best practice examples in the Region. Moreover, as other Local Authority areas are likely to be in a similar position in terms of the availability of external funding to deliver such programmes, funding has been included in the benchmarking exercise.

4.0 METHODOLOGY

4.1 The Scrutiny Topic Group utilised a range of techniques to undertake the research work, including:

- Desk research and analysis of relevant Web-based data
- Gathering of evidence to determine the level of need to provide support to other employment sites in the Borough
- Visits and/or research designed to see what can be learnt from other Local Authorities, and how they deliver their programmes of industrial estate regeneration.
- Working group discussions to determine the most effective and sustainable methods to regenerate industrial estates, based on the best practice identified from other Local Authorities.

5.0 ASSESSMENT OF THE BUSINESS PARKS IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME

5.1 The engagement with businesses located within the BPIP target areas has proven to be a success and popular with businesses, which is demonstrated by:

- Consistently well-attended Business Steering Group meetings.
- Businesses stating that the meetings are a high priority (Astmoor 77%, Halebank 71% and Riverview 85%).
- Businesses stating that they find the meeting useful (Astmoor 68%, Halebank 71% and Riverview 62.5%).

5.2 The Business Steering Groups are truly business-led; each having an elected Chairperson from the resident businesses, with businesses deciding on the nature of the estate priorities and agreeing their own action plans for improvement.

5.3 The BPIP has demonstrated to businesses the ability to deliver the estate-wide improvements detailed in the agreed action plans, with improvements including:

- Estate-wide CCTV system on Halebank
- Improved landscaping and maintenance
- Installation of company sign boards and colour-coded maps
- Installation of industrial estate welcome signs
- Upgrade in the provision of advance directional signage to estates
- Installation of bollards to prevent vehicular access to footpaths / verges
- Installation of speed activated signs and rumble strips on Astmoor Road

- Creation of Astmoor Website detailing company directory to promote inter-trading and latest news to keep businesses up to date on key developments and improvements
- Upgraded double yellow lines provision to improve traffic flow around the estate

5.4 Businesses covered by the BPIP have benefited from the Business Parks Officer as a resource for accessing business support and the resolution of problems and issues in their locality (e.g. environmental business support, training, recruitment of staff, fly-tipping, unauthorised encampments etc).

5.5 The area-based email alert system, operated by the Crime Reduction Advisor, from Cheshire Constabulary is an excellent low-cost resource available to inform businesses of crime trends in their immediate area so that they can remain vigilant and protect their business.

5.6 The BIA Scheme has generated significant improvements, both to the appearance and security of business sites and the general environs within the Widnes Waterfront.

6.0 IDENTIFICATION OF BEST PRACTICE FROM OTHER LOCAL AUTHORITY AREAS

6.1 Background Information

The topic group explored best practice examples from two other Local Authority areas to identify mechanisms that are being used in these areas to implement sustainable industrial estate regeneration, given the current uncertainty about external funding beyond March 2008.

6.2 Visits to Winsford Industrial Estate and Bolton Industrial Estate Partnership, were undertaken to evaluate the role that Business Improvement District (BIDs) can play in implementing and sustaining estate-wide improvements.

6.3 What is a BID?

A BID is a partnership between a local authority and the local business community that develops and takes forward projects and services that benefit the trading environment and the public realm. BIDs are an investment in the local trading environment through the provision of added value services.

6.4 On industrial estates, BIDs provide a vehicle for drawing together partnerships to improve the local environment and to tackle problems like inadequate security, poor transport links, maintenance etc, all of which affect trade, staff retention and economic activity.

6.5 BIDs can be used to address a single issue (e.g. crime and security) or multiple issues (e.g. crime and security, image, estate management function and inter-trading). It can also be used to focus improvements on one or more industrial estates.

6.6 Who pays for a BID?

Non-domestic rate payers within a BID area pay for the BID through a supplement on their rates bill.

6.7 How does an area become a BID?

- Businesses will identify the area and the issues, and put together a proposal which should include delivery guarantees, performance indicators and a management structure.
- BID proposals are voted on by the non-domestic rate payers who will be responsible for paying the BID levy. Businesses must vote in favour of a BID in order for it to be established.
- They vote in a postal ballot conducted by the local authority.
- A successful vote for a BID must meet two tests. More than 50% of votes cast must be in favour of the BID and the positive vote must represent more than 50% of the rateable value of the votes cast.
- A BID's mandate is for a maximum of 5 years. A BID wishing to continue beyond 5 years must reaffirm their mandate through another ballot, based on a further proposal.

6.8 Similarities between BPIP and the Winsford and Bolton examples

Industrial estates covered by the BPIP and the Winsford and Bolton examples operate business-led steering groups:

- As the driving force for industrial estate improvements.
- As the forum for agreeing action plans for improving the industrial estates.
- To communicate to businesses, property owners and partners.
- To provide periodic updates on project achievements and new developments.
- As a forum to highlight any pertinent issues and to agree and provide solutions.

6.9 Like the BPIP, the Winsford and Bolton examples received external funding to fund a small team to facilitate business-led steering groups and deliver industrial estate improvements. The Winsford and Bolton examples were also faced with the prospect of a loss of external funding.

6.10 At the time of considering BIDs as a way forward, Bolton were in a similar position as Halebank is today - the Council funded the purchase and installation of an estate-wide CCTV for the benefit of all businesses on the estate, with businesses voluntarily contributing to the on-going revenue costs.

6.11 Winsford and Bolton used the cessation of external funding as an opportunity to enhance the existing service provision and consolidate funding to deliver a 5-year programme. Halton presently has the same opportunity on Astmoor and Halebank, and could consider other industrial estates in the future.

6.12 Lessons learnt from the Winsford and Bolton BID Development Process

It is vital that there has been a programme of engagement with businesses in operation, with improvements implemented as this generates trust and demonstrates the ability to deliver.

6.13 Ensure that the ratepayers are identified and engaged early in the BID development.

6.14 A budget in the region of £15,000 is required to develop a BID implementation plan. A significant budget is also necessary to cover administration costs associated with implementing a BID(s).

6.15 It is crucial to record accurate baseline data to demonstrate to businesses the achievement and benefits associated with the BID.

6.16 The Local Authority may need to benchmark the current service provision if the BID will result in an additional frequency/quality of a particular service provided by the Council – e.g. litter picking, grass cutting, street cleansing etc.

6.17 To establish the views of resident businesses on Astmoor, Halebank and Riverview Industrial Estates, a survey was commissioned to ascertain to what extent businesses would be willing to support and contribute to the development of a BID within their respective areas.

7.0 BIDS SURVEY CONDUCTED ON ASTMOOR, HALEBANK AND RIVERVIEW

7.1 Key Findings

The study achieved an excellent response rate, with responses received from 44% of businesses and property owners (77 responses).

7.2 Businesses on all three estates identified security / crime, general estate improvements and Business Steering Groups as their top three priorities.

7.3 The survey established the willingness of businesses to consider paying a 'BID Levy' to sustain/or implement a range of estate improvements, which are detailed in Table A.

Table A

Industrial Estate	Response rate (%)	Number of responses	Business willing to consider BIDs (%)
Riverview	38	8	37.5
Halebank	37	17	65
Astmoor	47	52	61

7.4 Key Recommendations – Business Improvement Districts

Begin the process of formulating an outline business plan for a BID on Astmoor and Halebank Industrial Estate as a succession strategy beyond the lifetime of the BPIP project.

- 7.5 Review the mechanisms available for delivering BIDs in Halton, either through the formation of a BID company, management by HBC or a 3rd party body.
- 7.6 Consideration be given to the development of a single issue or multiple issue BID.
- 7.7 The cost of taking forward both BIDs proposals can be funded from this years allocation of Neighbourhood Renewal Funding and Capital Priorities Funding. A provisional budget of £35,000 has been included in the Business Parks Improvement Programme Service Level Agreement to cover the cost of implementing BIDs as well as an increase in the marketing budget to £20,000 which will, in part, be used to assist in promoting BID's. It is expected that the BIDs programme will be progressed to the vote stage within this financial year.

8.0 ASSESSMENT OF NEED IN OTHER INDUSTRIAL AREAS

8.1 There are 16 major employments areas within Halton, of which the BPIP only covers three. From the analysis of need on other industrial estates in the Borough, the findings display the employment areas demonstrating the greatest need for intervention through the BPIP are:

- Widnes Waterfront (see below)
- Waterloo Road (image and proximity to the Mersey Gateway)
- Speke Approach (security and crime prevention)
- Bold Industrial Estate (access control and fly-tipping)
- Manor Park (security, unauthorised encampments and crime prevention)
- Whitehouse Industrial Estate (fly-tipping and crime prevention)

8.2 The Widnes Waterfront displays the greatest need for intervention by the BPIP, in order to:

- Complement the regeneration activities already being implemented by Major Projects;
- Create a business-led steering group for the existing businesses, landowners and developers;
- Improve communication between businesses, landowners, developers and HBC;
- Devise an agreed action plan for enhancing this key employment site;
- Resolve pertinent issues identified within the project area (e.g. unauthorised encampments, access problems during construction phases etc);
- Assess the feasibility of establishing a BID; and
- Maintain the operation of the BIA Scheme to provide contributory funding towards site improvements.

8.3 It is crucial that the BIA Scheme remains in operation beyond the current end date of 31/03/07, should a business-led steering group be established. If the BIA Scheme was not available beyond this date, the steering group is likely to be considered a 'talking shop' by the local business community, rather than a functioning group that achieves tangible benefits for the area.

8.4 Key Recommendation – Expansion of the Business Parks Improvement Programme

The Business Park Improvement Programme be extended to include the Widnes Waterfront area and a business-led steering group be established to determine priority actions focused on addressing the needs of the resident businesses.

9.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

9.1 One of the key objectives of Urban Renewal Strategic Priority is “to create and sustain a twenty first century business environment with the required variety and quality of sites, premises and infrastructure that can support high levels of investment and economic growth and increase Halton’s competitiveness”. The implementation of BIDs on Halebank and Astmoor, coupled with the expansion of the BPIP to cover the Widnes waterfront, will contribute towards providing the required business environment that will sustain existing businesses, attract new businesses and the provision of jobs for local people.

9.2 The proposals will assist in addressing the economic prosperity and employment objectives set out in the Corporate Plan, Community Strategy and the Economic Development and Tourism Strategy.

9.3 A contribution will also be made to the Creating a Safer Halton Strategic Priority, most specifically “to investigate and tackle the underlying causes of crime and disorder and respond effectively to public concern

by reducing crime levels". This will be achieved by improving security and designing out crime on Astmoor, Halebank and Widnes Waterfront.

10.0 OTHER IMPLICATIONS

10.1 There are no other implications arising from this report.

11.0 RISK ANALYSIS

11.1 The risk of no action will result in a cessation of regeneration activities on estates covered by the BPIP, thus missing an opportunity to create a long-term delivery strategy for enhancing Astmoor and Halebank Industrial Estates and the Widnes Waterfront.

12.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

12.1 The BPIP is guided by Halton Borough Council's Equality of Opportunity in Employment Policy. This ensures compliance with the following Acts: The Equal Pay Act 1970 (updated 1983); The Sex Discrimination Act 1975 (updated 1986); The Sex Discrimination Act (Gender Reassignment) Regulations 1999; The Disability Discrimination Act 1995. The services employed through BPIP activities are available, and will be marketed, to any business or employee located on the target industrial estates.

12.2 It is anticipated that the project activities will contribute towards the creation of jobs that are accessible by deprived communities.

13.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

13.1 None