



Meeting: Overview and Scrutiny Board

Date: 6 January 2016

Report Title: Potential Helicopter Landing Facility for Torbay

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1. Discussions about the potential for a helipad in Torbay started in March 2014. They involved the Mayor, officers and Captain Ian Payne, Flight Operations Director, Devon Air Ambulance. There was a clear desire, by Devon Air Ambulance, for night time landing facilities.
2. Initial scoping work, on a commercial helipad, was undertaken in November 2014. This work indicated that Gallows Gate would be the most likely and appropriate location, that the cost of constructing a helipad would be £100,000 and that changes could be made at Walls Hill, to improve the facility.
3. An assessment, at the end of 2014, suggested an opportunity, with a formal landing site, to provide a helicopter service to/from Torbay that links with Exeter, Plymouth and London. It was thought there could be support from the Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), but would not be revenue funded by the LEP. Given the squeeze on HoSW LEP funding, capital funding from the LEP is now considered unlikely.
4. Currently there is an informal helicopter landing site on Walls Hill in Torquay. Devon Air Ambulance use Daddyhole Plain. Anecdotally, the number of commercial helicopter flights into Torbay seems to be increasing (e.g. the Palace Hotel reports an increased number of landings, mostly business related trips)
5. In August 2015, the Mayor's Executive Group asked officers to look at options for a more formal landing site and potentially a scheduled service. MEG also recommended funding (£10,000) be allocated for the preparation of a business case and timeline for delivery of a helipad.
6. The scope of the business case work is included as Appendix 1. Officers (from Spatial Planning and TDA) were in the very early stages of preparing a business case for consideration by Members, but little work has been done on the business case over the last few months (given other pressures / workloads). Work is not now progressing on the business case.
7. The working assumptions to date, prior to detailed work on a business case, are:
 - There is an opportunity to provide connectivity to regional airports and possibly further afield. Currently there is a good local transport network but onward connectivity requires improvement.
 - Investors are often put off Torbay by road and rail travel times to London and beyond.
 - There are possible benefits to regeneration from providing faster journey times to businesses.
 - Discussion with Cornwall Council indicates that scheduled services are very expensive to maintain and this was the reason for the failure of the Isle of Scilly Service.

- No funding has been identified to support the facility. It is unlikely to attract funding from the LEP and the Local Transport Board.
 - Any proposal would need to ensure noise, residential amenity and ecology issues could be overcome
8. Members will be asked, if the business case is completed, whether the project should proceed or not.
 9. In November 2015, the Council consulted on a very wide range (over 70 projects) of transport projects. That consultation has now closed. This was a 'toe dipping' exercise to understand what support there is from the community for those projects. This exercise, coupled with more detailed assessment of the projects against fit with the Corporate Plan, economy and health objectives etc, will provide the basis for the Local Transport Implementation Plan. This implementation plan covers the 2016 – 2021 period, as part of the delivery of the Local Transport Plan (2011 – 2026). The Implementation Plan will set out the priority transport projects for the Bay in that 5 year period.
 10. A helipad featured in the consultation document (project number 20), as “the creation of a permanent helipad in Torbay at Gallows Gate, primarily to serve business users and emergency services.” The project received very little support as a result of consultation. As such, and given its performance against economic and health objectives, it is not intended to include this project in the Council’s priorities for delivery over the next 5 years.
 11. A helipad is not included in the new Local Plan, the Economic Strategy or the Local Transport Plan. Consequently the identification of a helipad location, in the Local Transport Plan, is likely to constitute new policy and could not, as such, be included in the Implementation Plan.

Appendix 1: Scope of Business Case work

- Evidence of existing business / investor demand within South Devon, including the number of existing flights and the prices paid for those flights;
- Evidence of future demand (next 5 – 10 years) from businesses / investors;
- Potential economic impact on the Bay, based on examples from elsewhere in the UK;
- Potential for capital funding support from other partners (e.g. LEP, other councils, other services – e.g. Devon Air Ambulance)

- The cost of constructing a landing pad, including fencing and any building work
- The cost of managing and maintaining a landing pad;
- Evidence of viable landing charges that could be applied to helicopters using the new facility;
- A brief assessment of various council owned locations across the Bay for a helipad, noting that the conclusion to date is that the Gallows Gate site is best;
- An assessment of the ability to connect with regional airports, international airports and regional providers (i.e. how could demand be satisfied), independent businesses and the potential for a scheduled service;
- Evidence of demand from other services – Devon Air Ambulance, police and other such services;
- Comparative costs of other transport options – between Torbay and London.
- An assessment of the cost of submitting a planning application, including the cost of producing necessary survey work to support the application;
- A view on the likely support for the project from the Civil Aviation Authority.