
Subject:	THE OPEN GOLF CHAMPIONSHIP 2020
Meeting and Date:	Cabinet – 4 September 2017
Report of:	Nadeem Aziz, Chief Executive
Portfolio Holder:	Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Access and Licensing
Decision Type:	Key
Classification:	Unrestricted

Purpose of the report: To inform Cabinet of progress on the Corporate Plan objective of working with partners to achieve the return of The Open Golf Championship to be held at Royal St George's in 2020 and the need to allocate resources to enable and support the planning and delivery of the event.

Recommendation: Cabinet is asked to:

- a) Welcome the work being undertaken with partners to secure the return of the Open Golf Championship and agree the establishment of the governance arrangements; and
- b) Agree to delegate to the Head of Inward Investment, in consultation with the Leader of the Council and the Director of Finance, Housing and Community, the use of the funds in the Events Reserve, as required, to fund the District Council's contribution to achieve the return of the Open Golf Championship.

1. Summary

- 1.1 The Open Golf Championships (The Open) is one of the most prestigious annual sporting events to be held in the UK, attracting a global audience and bringing substantial economic benefits and profile to the locality in which it is held.
- 1.2 The Open was last held at Royal St George's Golf Club at Sandwich in 2011. Dover District Council (DDC) has a Corporate Plan objective to work with partners to secure the return The Open.
- 1.3 Following engagement with partners throughout 2015 and 2016, it has been confirmed that The Open is to be held at Royal St George's in 2020.
- 1.4 Significant improvements are required to the transportation sector, particularly the need to improve Sandwich Station, to enhance access and cater for the expected scale of the upcoming event.
- 1.5 Work is ongoing to define the scale and costs of improvements at Sandwich Station.

2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 The Open is the oldest of the four major international championships in professional golf and is the only event played outside of America. This event is administered by The Royal and Ancient Golf Club of St. Andrews (the R&A) and is played on an annual basis and is generally regarded in the golfing world as the most prestigious event of the four majors.
- 2.2 The Open is played on links courses on a rotational basis at ten locations around the UK, with St Andrews, the historic headquarters of golf, currently hosting the event on a five yearly cycle. Royal St George's Golf Club at Sandwich, which is on the R&A's rota, has hosted the Open on 14 previous occasions, the last of which was in 2011. Other courses across East Kent, including Princes and the Royal Cinque Ports Golf Club, have also been used on numerous occasions to host qualifying events for The Open.
- 2.3 Locations for The Open are usually notified several years in advance. Carnoustie is hosting The Open in 2018 and Royal Portrush will be hosting event in 2019. The 150th event is scheduled to be held at St. Andrews in 2021. This has resulted in the location for 2020 becoming available and which the R&A announced earlier in the year would take place at Royal St George's.
- 2.4 By way of background, it is widely recognised that The Open delivers very significant benefits to the localities in which it is held. The scale and impact of The Open, however, dictates that improvements to infrastructure and transportation are often required. In the case of Sandwich, the major transportation issue revolves around the need for improvements at Sandwich Station.
- 2.5 The report to Kent County Council's (KCC) Growth, Economic Development and Communities Cabinet Committee in March (attached at **Appendix 1**) details both the benefits, which transcend administrative boundaries, along with the issues in question which primarily relate to the interface between the road and rail access in the vicinity of Sandwich Station.
- 2.6 A number of actions have been undertaken since March relating to the funding and transportation issues associated with Sandwich Station. These include, among other matters, discussions at South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP), Kent and Medway Economic Partnership (KMEP) and East Kent Regeneration Board (EKRB) including their Senior Officer Group. In addition, a specific Sandwich Station Rail Project Group, which KCC is chairing and which DDC is represented on, has been established to consider the issues and solutions at Sandwich Station. This group, which also includes Network Rail, South Eastern and the Department for Transport (Dft), has already met on two occasions and is due to meet twice monthly going forward.
- 2.7 The report to KCC's Cabinet Committee in March detailed the expectations around the improvements at Sandwich Station along with the likely sources of funding for what was then considered to be the appropriate requirement of a semi-permanent option. More detailed discussions have since taken place over the nature of the improvements to Sandwich Station. In particular, this has revolved around the costings and benefits associated with either a semi-permanent improvement compared to the costs of a permanent solution and the assurance this would provide to securing The Open at Sandwich on a more regular basis
- 2.8 In order to progress The Open, and mindful of the need to provide assurance around the planning of the event, particularly with the transportation plan, the necessary governance arrangements for 2020 are already being in place. Following meetings

with KCC, Royal St George's and representatives from Sandwich Town Council a Project Board Executive Framework has been established and is due to meet on 23 August. As the host local authority for The Open, the DDC Portfolio Holder for Access and Licensing will Chair this Project Board and will be assisted by the Head of Inward Investment and Corporate Services Officer. A number of working groups are also proposed to be established (as defined in draft attached at **Appendix 2**) and report to the Project Board Executive as appropriate. These will need to correlate with the R&A's management and governance structures and cover, among other matters, the following areas of activity:

- transportation and accessibility,
- tourism, marketing and promotion,
- business and commerce;
- inward investment; and
- safety and resilience.

The Sandwich Station Rail Group will also report to the Project Executive Board. An update on the outcome of the meetings on 23 August will be provided at the Cabinet Meeting.

- 2.9 The report to KCC's Cabinet Committee indicates the estimated costs at that time of the semi-permanent solution. Following further work by Network Rail (NR), it is evident that the costs, including significant contingency, would be in the order of £1.5m rather than an original target figure of round £1m. In addition to this, it is understood that a semi-permanent solution would also require a reoccurring cost of circa £900k per future event.
- 2.10 In order to quantify the comparison costs, NR has also examined the costs of providing a permanent improvement to Sandwich Station. This was originally estimated to cost over £4m. Following work undertaken by the Rail Group, this has been reduced to circa £3.5m. With this background, a permanent option, which is supported by the Secretary of State among others, is considered to be the preferred cost effective option, particularly as it will provide assurance for the holding of future Open events at Sandwich.
- 2.11 The need to provide assurance over the funding framework for the improvements to Sandwich Station was instrumental in the R&A confirming the return of The Open to Sandwich. It should be noted that KCC has committed a contribution of £250k, with the acknowledgement that the four East Kent District Councils would also commit a combined contribution of £100k. On this latter point, discussions have taken place at Leader level, with contributions of £20k being sought from the adjacent Districts.
- 2.12 It should be noted that in relation to the possible increased costs associated with the semi-permanent improvement to Sandwich Station, consideration is being given to how this will be addressed. Helpfully, the Dft has also agreed to meet the contingency element of NR's cost estimate.
- 2.13 NR are committed to provide a firm cost estimate for the semi-permanent solution through their Governance for Railway Investment Projects procedures and it is anticipated that a briefing paper will be presented at The Open Project Board on 23 August. An update on this will also be reported at the Cabinet Meeting.

- 2.14 In parallel with the semi-permanent solution, NR will also provide more detailed costs in due course for the permanent solution. There is an expectation that all parties should increase their contributions accordingly if this is agreed as the most effective way forward. Again, a further update will be given at the Cabinet Meeting.
- 2.15 The issue of timetabling and train power draws are also under consideration. South Eastern are engaging on the timetabling issues which will need to roll across into the new franchise period and observed by whoever is appointed as the future train operation company. NR is also undertaking a review of the power capabilities on lines to Sandwich and is due to report further in the on this matter in the autumn.

3. Identification of Options

3.1 The options are:

- a) to support, plan, engage and work with partners to enable and deliver a successful Open in 2020 and encourage the return of further events on a more regular basis; or
- b) to limit DDC's engagement with the Open.

4. Evaluation of Options

4.1 The Council's Corporate Plan 2016 – 2020 under the section Thriving Economy, indicates that:

“We will, with our partners: Work with the R&A to bring the Open Golf Championship back to the district, to raise the international profile of the district and associated economic and tourism benefits it will bring”

4.2 Of the two options referred to at paragraph 3.1, it is recommended that option 3(a) is to be agreed.

5. Resource Implications

5.1 The key issue at this stage in the event planning is to understand how the transportation plans, particularly, the improvements required at Sandwich Station, can be fully defined, funded and delivered in agreed timescales. It is evident that, once the infrastructure needs are clarified, resources will be required from a range of partners.

6. Corporate Implications

6.1 Comment from the Section 151 Officer: The Council's earmarked reserves include an Events Reserve. As set out in the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan, a contribution of £20k per annum is made from the General Fund to this reserve in order to provide funding for major events such as the Open Golf Championship. The recommended delegation will enable the Head of Inward Investment to apply this reserve for expenditure required to support the return of the Open Golf Championship (MD).

6.2 Comment from the Solicitor to the Council: The Solicitor to the Council has been consulted in the preparation of this report and has no further comments to make.

6.3 Comment from the Equalities Officer: This report does not specifically highlight any equalities implications, however in discharging their responsibilities members are

required to comply with the public sector equality duty as set out in section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15>

6.4 Other Officers (as appropriate):

7. **Appendices**

Appendix 1 – Report to KCC’s Growth, Economic Development and Communities Cabinet Committee

Appendix 2 – Draft Working Group Structure

8. **Background Papers**

Open Golf Correspondence

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