

From: Mike Hill OBE, Cabinet Member for Community Services
Barbara Cooper, Corporate Director, Growth, Environment and Transport

To: Growth, Economic Development and Communities Cabinet Committee – 22 March 2017

Subject: Transport Improvements to support The Open

Classification: Unrestricted

Electoral Division: Countywide, but with specific reference to Sandwich

Summary:

Hosting The Open at Royal St George's Golf Course at Sandwich will substantially raise Kent's profile as a tourism destination. It is likely to have a significant economic impact. Past performance suggests the economic benefit to Kent will be in excess of £77m.

The decision by The Royal & Ancient Golf Club in favour of Royal St George's in 2020 was influenced by the strong support from the Kent and Medway Economic Partnership, the County Council, the four East Kent districts, the South East Local Enterprise Partnership and Network Rail. This included an undertaking to make significant enhancements to Sandwich Station to improve spectators' access to the Royal St George's Golf Course.

Recommendation(s):

The Cabinet Committee is asked to welcome the announcement by The Royal and Ancient Golf Club to host The Open 2020 at Royal St George's, and to note the work underway to deliver the associated transport improvements at Sandwich Station.

1. Introduction

- 1.1. The Open Championship (The Open) is the oldest of the four major international championships in professional golf. This prestigious event is administered by The Royal and Ancient Golf Club (The R&A) and is the only 'major' outside the United States. It is a 72-hole tournament held annually at one of nine designated links golf courses across the UK. Following The R & A's recent decision, The Open will be returning to Royal St George's Golf Club Sandwich for the fifteenth time.
- 1.2. Transport improvements are required at Sandwich Station to enable the expected number of spectators to access the Royal St George's Golf Course when The Open is underway.
- 1.3. This report gives an overview of these transport improvements, the investment needed to fund these improvements, and the economic impact that The Open delivers to the local economy.

2. Economic benefits of hosting The Open

- 2.1. Hosting The Open delivers significant economic benefit and attracts hundreds of thousands of visitors to the local area. Research undertaken by the Sheffield Hallam University's Sport Industry Research Centre (See appendix 1) provides an economic impact assessment of the 2011 Open at Sandwich.

Year	Golf Course	Economic Benefit	Spectator numbers & television coverage
2011	Royal St George's, Sandwich, England	<p>The Open delivered a £77m benefit to the Kent economy.</p> <p>This headline figure includes £24.14m of direct spending in Kent attributable to event specific visitors and organisers, as well as a destination marketing benefit worth more than £50m derived from exposure on global television.</p>	<p>A total of 180,091 spectator admissions were recorded. Of these, 134,000 spectators came from outside of the county.</p> <p>Images of Kent were broadcast to a worldwide audience of nearly 500 million homes.</p>
2012	Royal Lytham & St Annes, England	<p>The Open delivered a £65m benefit to Lancashire.</p> <p>The headline figure includes £28m of direct spending in Lancashire attributable to event specific visitors and organisers, as well as a destination marketing benefit worth £37m derived from exposure on global television.</p>	<p>A total of 181,400 spectator admissions were recorded.</p> <p>Over 3,800 hours of televised coverage reached 500 million households worldwide.</p>
2013	Muirfield, Scotland	<p>The Open delivered a £88m benefit to Scotland.</p> <p>This headline figure includes £24.4m of direct spending in East Lothian and Edinburgh attributable to event specific visitors and organisers, as well as a destination marketing benefit worth £45m derived from exposure on global television.</p>	<p>A total of 142,036 spectator admissions were recorded.</p> <p>A record 4,500 hours of Open Championship television coverage was broadcast from Muirfield, across 104 television channels.</p>
2014	Royal Liverpool, England	<p>The Open delivered a £75m benefit to the regional economy of Wirral and Liverpool.</p> <p>This headline figure includes £30m of direct spending in the local economy attributable to event specific visitors and organisers, as well as a destination marketing benefit worth £45m derived from exposure on global television.</p>	<p>A total of 202,917 spectator admissions were recorded.</p> <p>The televised coverage reached 500 million households worldwide.</p>

2015	St Andrew's, Scotland	<p>The Open delivered a £140m benefit to Scotland.</p> <p>This headline figure includes £88m of direct spending in Scotland attributable to event specific visitors and organisers, plus destination marketing benefit worth £52m derived from exposure on global television.</p>	<p>A total of 237,024 spectator admissions were recorded.</p> <p>The televised coverage reached more than 500 million households worldwide.</p>
2016	Royal Troon, Scotland	<p>The Open delivered a £110m benefit to Scotland.</p> <p>This headline figure includes an economic impact of more than £64m, as well as a destination marketing benefit worth £46m derived from exposure on global television.</p>	<p>A total of 173,000 spectator admissions were recorded.</p>

2.2. Sheffield Hallam's research showed that the economic benefits are spread beyond the town of Sandwich in Dover District, especially to the neighbouring districts of Shepway, Canterbury and Thanet.

3. Transport Improvements at Sandwich Station

3.1. Royal St George's most recently hosted The Open in 2011. A total of 180,091 spectators attended the event. Of these, 37,000 passengers travelled on the special High Speed train service from London St Pancras, operated by Southeastern.

3.2. With such high passenger volumes, the capacity of the local station proved to be insufficient to cope.

3.3. Sandwich station is designed to accommodate 8-carriage trains. Given the high passenger numbers, Southeastern used 12-carriage trains in 2011. The longer trains meant that the level crossing (which regulates the road access to the golf course) had to be closed for long periods. During peak periods, the level crossing was closed for some 40 minutes per hour. This had a knock-on effect, significantly delaying spectators accessing the venue by car, bus and on foot, and resulted in considerable adverse publicity. In addition, the existing passenger bridge over the tracks was not fit to bear the large number of arriving passengers.

3.4. Three transport improvements are required to resolve these logistical challenges:

- Extension of the up and down platforms at Sandwich railway station to accommodate 12 carriage trains.
- Construction of an additional footbridge linking the up and down platform passengers at Sandwich railway station to a pathway leading to the Royal St George's Golf Club.
- Construction of this pathway from the extended up platform to the start of a footpath which links the station to Royal St George's Golf Club avoiding the town centre.

4. Cost estimate and financial contributions

- 4.1. A feasibility study, a visual site survey and topographic survey of Sandwich station have been undertaken by Network Rail. In late January 2017, their estimated cost of delivering the transport improvements on a semi-permanent basis was identified as approximately £1 million.
- 4.2. To help pay for this work, a financial contribution of £350k was committed by four East Kent District Councils and Kent County Council. The South East Local Enterprise Partnership's (SELEP) Accountability Board agreed, subject to the receipt of a robust business case being received (and the Government providing flexibility in the deployment of Local Growth Funding) to provide another £300k using underspends from other projects. Kent County Council has also undertaken to underwrite SELEP's element of funding in the event that SELEP underspends are not able to be used on this project. If the costs are likely to exceed £1 million there would need to be a further discussion.
- 4.3. In addition, the R&A has committed expenditure to purchase two parcels of land to enable the extended platform to join up with a pedestrian route from the station to Royal St George's, avoiding the town centre, and to enable the positioning of the second bridge to join up with this same pedestrian route. This will further support and enable more spectators to choose to travel to the event by train, minimising the impact on Sandwich's narrow roads.
- 4.4. On 20th February 2017, The R&A issued a press release announcing it had selected Royal St George's as the venue for The Open 2020.
- 4.5. Officers from the Growth, Environment and Transport Directorate are putting in place a project team to manage the County Council's involvement.

5. Conclusions

- 5.1. Hosting The Open significantly raises the county's profile as a key tourism destination and provides a substantial economic impact.
- 5.2. Increasing participation in golf particularly by under-represented groups, has also been one of the R & A's aims.
- 5.3. Royal St George's also has the capacity and layout to host considerably more spectators than in previous years. With transport improvements in place, there is an expectation that the direct economic impact on East Kent and the County as a whole can continue to grow.
- 5.4. The transport improvements at Sandwich Station has initiated conversations with The R&A to secure Royal St George's as the venue for The Open not only in 2020 but also on two more repeat returns. Based on past performance, the anticipated return for the KCC investment would be in excess of £230 million of benefit to the Kent economy by 2036.

6. Recommendation(s)

The Cabinet Committee is asked to support the announcement by the Royal and Ancient Golf Club to host The Open 2020 at Royal St George's, and to note the work underway to deliver the associated transport improvements at Sandwich Station.

7. Contact details

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