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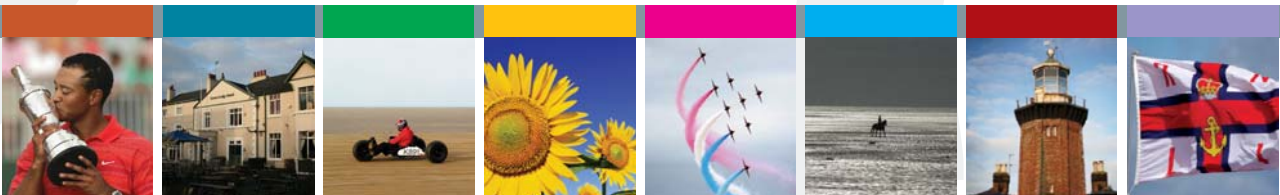
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UNDERGROUND OR BELOW GROUND RAILWAY FOR HOYLAKE: AN OUTLINE ANALYSIS OF THE BENEFITS

HOYLAKE VILLAGE LIFE

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“AN OUTSTANDING PLACE TO LIVE AND VISIT”

An underground or below ground railway for Hoylake: an outline analysis of the benefits

INTRODUCTION

This paper has been prepared by members of Hoylake Village Life (HVL), to explore a potential solution to one of the key factors we believe is affecting the regeneration of Hoylake. The paper is not a comprehensive exploration of all the issues, but a preliminary summary which is intended to stimulate a debate, in the hope that a viable way forward can be found.

In the first instance, this paper is for the consideration of Wirral MBC.

BACKGROUND

The development of the railway line has been integral historically to the development of Hoylake. Prior to the construction of the line, Hoylake was a small fishing village with a population of just 924 in 1861. The extension of the Wirral Line and creation of Hoylake Station in 1866 (and West Kirby station in 1876), transformed the fortunes of West Wirral and created a population boom. Since then, Hoylake has developed into an attractive residential town, with a population of almost 6000, reliant on the railway line to transport passengers to Liverpool and beyond.

The Wirral Line from West Kirby through Hoylake is now a vital artery into the economic heart of the Liverpool City Region. The line transports passengers between West Wirral and Liverpool, and to connecting railway lines across the region and across the country. In particular the rail network transports residents in Hoylake and West Kirby to work in the offices, hospitals, shops and universities of Liverpool, and for residents of surrounding areas to work in Hoylake.

The railway line is also integral to the future regeneration of Hoylake. West Wirral is being promoted by the key regeneration agencies, including the Northwest Development Agency, The Mersey Partnership and Wirral Council, as a major tourism destination. Hoylake is considered a major asset to the promotion of 'England's Golf Coast' and the Mersey Waterfront. The Edwardian charm of this coastal resort, together with the long beach and stunning coastal views and the attraction of major international sporting events, particularly The Open golf championships, are essential to the appeal of Wirral as a visitor destination. The railway line is vital to this appeal, transporting visitors from around the City Region to Hoylake.

There are so many more benefits that the railway line could bring to Hoylake. This paper sets out further issues related to the line which, if addressed, could ensure the long-term sustainability of Hoylake as an outstanding place to visit, live and work for many more generations to come.

ISSUES

The urban form of Hoylake is restricted by two key features, one natural, the other man-made. The coastline forms the north-western boundary of Hoylake, with the railway line to the south-east. The built development of Hoylake is mostly restricted between these two boundaries. The town boundary of Hoylake does cross the railway to the south-east, with a small area around Carr Lane of predominantly employment land, with some residential, but the restricted vehicular and pedestrian access across the railway line, together with the Green Belt designation, means that this area is very limited in size.

The economic and social benefits of the railway line are clearly considerable and fundamental to the future of Hoylake, as set out earlier in this paper. HVL recognises these benefits, but considers that in its present form, the railway line also represents a physical and social barrier that:

- Limits the potential opportunities to develop Hoylake;
- Restricts access from the town centre and most of the residential areas to the rural hinterland around Hoylake;
- Prevents the integration of Hoylake town centre with its employment centre off Carr Lane and the adjoining residential properties;
- Is a significant visual intrusion on the rural landscape, and detracts from the tranquillity of the rear of the town and its adjacent countryside;
- Creates a significant disturbance to residential amenity; and
- Creates a disturbance to wildlife.

In addition to this, HVL are concerned that the railway line would limit pedestrian and vehicular access between the proposed Golf Resort and the town centre, such that this major development project would not provide the necessary catalyst for Hoylake's regeneration. The proposed Golf Resort would have a far more beneficial impact on Hoylake town centre if the Golf Resort was well integrated with the town, and delivered as part of a transformational and holistic regeneration project.

THE PROPOSAL

HVL proposes that a solution to these issues be explored further. This proposal involves taking the railway below ground for all or part of its length between Meols Station and the West Kirby boundary of Hoylake Municipal Golf Course. Such a proposal would allow unrestricted vehicular and pedestrian access over the railway line, without the need for a railway crossing or footbridge. HVL considers that this proposal could offer considerable opportunities to transform Hoylake so that in all its parts it is an outstanding place in which to live, visit and do business.

OBJECTIVES

HVL sees this proposal as an upgrade of existing infrastructure necessary to support six key objectives:

- Development of an international-standard golf championship complex, fully integrated with the facilities and services on offer in the town centre;
- Regeneration of the town centre through enhanced vehicular and pedestrian linkages to new development opportunities and the attractions of the Golf Resort;
- The creation of opportunities to significantly increase and enhance the provision of employment land, vital for the regeneration of Hoylake and its surrounding areas;
- The provision of more high quality homes and facilities in Hoylake, including the creation of new development opportunities for high value family housing on the periphery of Hoylake, to complement concentrated economic activity in Wirral Waters and Liverpool;
- Upgrading of the environmental quality of the urban-rural interface to re-connect the town to its rural hinterland and provide new and enhanced recreational amenities; and
- Create new opportunities for co-ordinated Green Infrastructure, linking the existing rural and coastal landscape, and providing opportunities for landscape adaptation.

To explore these objectives further, the proposal is set out below in two sections of railway line.

Section One: Railway line along the boundary of Hoylake Golf Course

This section of the railway line raises the following issues:

- the space constraints at the Royal Liverpool Golf Club mean that the Hoylake Golf Course is used as a practice ground during major championships with access via Drummond Road/ Morpeth Road necessitating temporary closure of the rail line to the inconvenience of passengers;
- the line and trains detract from residential amenity;
- the noise and vibration from the trains detract from the tranquillity and quality of the golf experience on the municipal and proposed golf resort courses; and
- the line is a physical barrier between the town and its rural hinterland.

Part, or all, of the line alongside the municipal course could be lowered into a 'cut-and-fill' style shallow tunnel built through the golf course alongside the existing line, therefore reducing passenger disruption to a minimum during construction.

This could have the following benefits:

- provide a short permanent foot and/ or vehicle access route from both the municipal and new resort courses to RLGC via Morpeth Rd, Meols Drive and existing public access route by Barn Hey so providing enhanced connectivity for a championship-standard international complex of courses and facilities;
- remove the railway from Hoylake Station to Morpeth Road so delivering a massive environmental improvement for Drummond Road residents, who would now enjoy an open rural frontage, and change the feel of the area by re-connecting the town to its rural hinterland – it would boost this residential road in which some properties have been sub-divided and are in relatively poor condition;
- remove the rail line along the full length of the golf course beyond Morpeth Road to the West Kirby boundary so removing much of the urban fringe feel of Hoylake Golf Course, visual and noise intrusion and greatly enhance residential amenity for property owners backing onto the line;
- make the current track bed available for:
 - a Wirral Way style and quality of access provision – as an extension of the Wirral Country Park or the start of a new Hoylake Way linking through to the village centre, promenade and North Wirral Coastal Park
 - some very limited, but high value, residential development.

Section Two: Railway line behind Hoylake town centre from Hoylake Station to Meols Station

This section of the railway line raises the following issues:

- the development options for the town centre are constrained by lack of access across the physical barrier of the rail line;
- industrial developments across the line are of a generally low, or very low, quality;
- the rail line detracts from residential amenity of line-side properties and is a physical and social barrier with residents from residential roads across the lines being cut off from their town;
- the rail line detracts from the quality of the rural and urban environment alongside it making it a classic piece of neglected and run-down urban fringe;
- the rail line is a physical barrier between the town and its rural hinterland; and
- current crossing points which are used by farm labour, school children and elderly people to access market gardens, playing fields and allotments are a considerable and continuous community safety concern, having been the scene of several recent fatalities.

Ideally, the line would be taken underground from Meols Station to Hoylake Station but this is probably too ambitious. For town centre regeneration and safe access purposes the key stretch of line to study is the Carlton Lane-Manor Road-Hoylake Station section. An aerial view shows that a cut-and-fill line could be built parallel to the existing line with little impact on built properties, so it could be built keeping passenger disruption to a minimum.

This could have the following benefits:

- provide safe pedestrian crossing and market garden/ farm access routes;
- provide options for removing the urban fringe feel of the area, provide a massive environmental improvement for line-side and across-the-line residents, change the feel of the area by opening up the town to its rural hinterland and boost residential property values, desirability, etc;
- make the current track bed and adjoining land available for a green buffer area between the town and golf resort comprising:
 - a Wirral Way style and quality of access provision, wetland and parkland – as an extension of the Wirral Country Park or a new Hoylake Way linking through to the village centre, promenade and North Wirral Coastal Park;
 - a 'sports fields complex' of upgraded public playing fields and sports clubs with associated pitches, bowling greens and tennis courts;
 - an enhanced allotment area.
- provide development opportunities for:
 - some very limited, but high value, residential development fronting onto a transformed rural/ sporting landscape comprising, open parkland, golf courses and farmland so that the town no longer has its back turned to its hinterland;
 - town centre extension and golf resort hotel in Hoylake Village ('Heart of Hoose') and adjacent hinterland including:
 - a high quality supermarket (e.g. Waitrose or Sainsbury's on The Row);
 - a new 'Hoylake Village' Station (replacing Manor Road or even additional to it);
 - a primary access point to Golf Resort hotel/ conference venue sited just beyond the edge of the town centre with an open rural outlook but easy pedestrian access to Hoylake Village Station and Hoylake's shopping and entertainment area.
 - an upgraded Carr Lane Industrial Estate ('Hoylake Business Park') should be integral to the project.

STRATEGIC JUSTIFICATION

Regional Economic Strategy

The proposal would support the following Actions of the Regional Economic Strategy:

RES 119: Improve the physical environment

A high quality of environment is essential to attract private sector investment. The proposed railway works would improve the image and perception of West Wirral to businesses and potential investors by creating an enhanced town centre environment, with enhanced employment land, and easier access to the rural environment. Additionally the existing businesses would benefit from a step change in the quality of environment, and a more open accessible Hoylake.

Furthermore, an enhanced physical environment and regenerated town centre, would provide a more attractive environment for investment by developers of the proposed Golf Resort.

RES 95: Promote the image of the region

Hoylake is a key tourist destination for the north west, as a charming Edwardian seaside resort with stunning coastal views, and host venue for The Open golf championships. In addition, the West Wirral coastline attracts many visitors from its other sporting activities, including sailing, sand yachting and parakiting, and recreational activities including birdwatching, walking, riding and cycling. With greater promotion of Hoylake's key assets, and the forthcoming European Sand yacht Championships in 2011 and major international golf tournaments in 2012, 2013 and 2014, Hoylake will attract considerable interest from tourists and visitors to the region. A regenerated town centre, with a more open accessible rural environment, and stronger links to the proposed Golf Resort will make a major contribution towards the attraction of new businesses, investment, and continued economic growth of Wirral.

RES 101: Develop the quality of the visitor experience

Hoylake is identified as part of the Mersey Waterfront, a Signature Project identified by NWDA, as one of the region's key projects to transform the region to attract visitors. This project will greatly enhance the Mersey Waterfront visitor experience by helping to regenerate Hoylake, and making West Wirral more attractive to tourists, which in turn will help grow the overall visitor economy.

RES 82: Develop a portfolio of sub-regionally important employment sites.

Hoylake includes a key employment site for Wirral, located along Carr Lane. This proposal would improve access to this employment site by removing the constraint of the railway line, and by creating a more attractive environment, integrated with the town centre, this employment site will considerably enhance the sub-regional portfolio.

ERDF Action Areas

By regenerating Hoylake and creating greater accessibility to the employment site, the proposal would make a significant contribution to ERDF Action Area (AA4.2) Supporting linkages to key employment areas, and 4.3 Supporting employment creation for areas of regeneration need. In addition the proposal would help to enhance Hoylake as a key regional visitor attraction, therefore contributing towards Action Area 3.3, Supporting the improvement of the region's visitor offer and image.

Tourism Strategies

The **Regional Tourism Strategy** identifies Mersey Waterfront as a 'Signature Project', along with the Lake District, Chester Super Zoo, Blackpool and Hadrian's Wall. In addition the strategy identifies 'England's Golf Coast' as a key marketing theme, recognising the importance of the Royal Liverpool Golf Club.

The **Wirral Tourism Strategy** identifies the revitalisation of Hoylake as a key project of the Mersey Waterfront Signature Project.

In addition, the Department of Communities and Local Government's '**Strategy for Seaside Success: Securing the future of seaside economies**' highlights the importance of regenerating the seaside towns of Great Britain. The Strategy states that poor transport links are often cited as a reason for economic decline in some seaside towns, and supports proposals that enable residents to connect with employment opportunities, key local services, social networks and goods. Hoylake is specifically referred to in the Strategy as a seaside resort in need of support.

The **Multi Area Agreement** identifies an issue of worklessness around Hoylake, and its correlation with transport deprivation (maps 4.1, 4.2)

The promotion and regeneration of the Mersey Waterfront is a key part of the **Action Plan for the Liverpool City Region**.

The Scott Wilson **Open Space Audit** commissioned by Wirral MBC shows that the Hoylake & Meols Ward is poorly provided for in terms of public open space and very poorly compared to the neighbouring West Kirby & Thurstaston Ward. The development of new parkland behind Hoylake as part of HVL's transformation strategy would address this weakness and provide a major visitor attraction and enhanced connectivity between the existing Wirral Country Park and North Wirral Coastal Park with public footpaths linking inland to Royden Park and Thurstaston Common.

The improvement of accessibility to the key assets of the region are essential parts of the **Merseyside Local Transport Plan**.

RESOURCES

Dropping the railway line and filling over the cutting would of course be very expensive. But HVL consider that the expense would be in proportion to the enormous benefits that such a proposal would bring. The ground around the railway line is likely to be relatively soft, perhaps with none of the abnormalities typically associated with major excavation work.

In addition, the costs of the work must be considered in relation to the costs of providing new road infrastructure leading from Saughall Massie Road to the proposed Golf Resort which would also intrude into the Greenbelt and disturb its tranquility. The proposal to improve vehicular access across the railway line would mean that direct vehicular access to the Golf Resort could be achieved via the existing road infrastructure, i.e. from Market Street, which would again help to integrate the Golf Resort to Hoylake town centre, rather than directing traffic away from Hoylake. Upgrading Heron Road to provide an attractive rural gateway route to Hoylake from the M53 via the A5027/ B5192 would further enhance the visitor experience and reduce journey times whilst also greatly improving Hoylake's connectivity to local inland settlements.

The proposal would help to increase land values in the area considerably, including:

- the land for development of the Golf Resort complex;
- Retail/ commercial redevelopment of central Hoylake (Melrose Ave-The Row area and its hinterland);
- The potential upgrading/extension of the industrial estate off Carr Lane to a new Business Park, with a mix of workshop style accommodation, services, light manufacturing/ fabrication as existing, together with scope for some upmarket office developments with open views, and creative industries;
- Some limited housing development:
 - in a thin strip behind the main town looking out over the countryside, so that Hoylake does not have its back turned to its hinterland and to establish a new and better defined urban/ rural interface and so a strengthened Green Belt boundary;
 - The existing Drummond Road frontage should remain open but this road could potentially be extended towards West Kirby behind the Meols Drive houses to allow a strip of expensive new houses on the existing track bed and fronting onto the golf courses.

For such significant economic benefits, HVL considers potential funding sources to be from NWDA, ERDF and the Local Transport Plan, as well as through a contribution from the developer of the Golf Resort, through the Development Agreement, or s.106 contribution.

OUTPUTS AND OUTCOMES

To justify such a radical proposal and considerable cost of delivering such a project, it is clearly essential that significant outputs and outcomes are achieved. HVL consider that the outputs would be wide-ranging and the outcomes far-reaching.

In terms of outputs, the proposal would create a significant amount of jobs through the development and enhancement of the employment land around Carr Lane. The enhanced accessibility would raise the profile of the employment land, raising values and encouraging greater investment in industrial land. This would increase employment opportunities and help to reduce worklessness in West Wirral.

In addition, the proposal would increase house values and create new opportunities for high value family housing. This would be of direct benefit to commercial centres such as Liverpool, Birkenhead and the emerging Wirral Waters development, by creating a more diverse offer of accommodation, more suited to the high value professional jobs being created in those locations.

Other outputs include the development of poor quality Green Belt land, and the facilitation of improved, more accessible Green Belt; increased job opportunities through the creation of new retail and leisure development; and increased spend through the development of the visitor economy.

In terms of outcomes, the proposal would create a stronger and more diverse local economy by creating greater accessibility to more employment opportunities and creating new development opportunities. The proposal would also create a more accessible, and therefore more sustainable, rural environment; and help to raise the profile of Wirral as an outstanding place to live, work and visit.

CONCLUSION

This paper sets out HVL's early thoughts about the potential issues around the constraints that the railway line creates for Hoylake, and suggests a potential solution. There may be other potential solutions to consider. The suggestions made in this paper are made without expert advice on the practical issues around delivery of a project of this nature, and HVL are aware that this proposal is undoubtedly highly ambitious and expensive. The paper is intended only to stimulate a debate in the hope that it could be given further consideration in the first instance by Wirral MBC, and then potentially Merseytravel and funders. However HVL consider that the proposal could tackle Hoylake's primary structural weakness and the benefits could be huge. It could address concerns of HVL that the Golf Resort may not provide the catalyst for Hoylake's regeneration unless it is fully integrated with the town centre.

The proposal to 'drop' the railway line would open up Hoylake to the adjacent countryside, addressing the constraints associated with the restrictive ribbon development; open up new development opportunities behind a new slightly extended but high quality town boundary; and create new opportunities for associated Green Infrastructure.

The proposal would integrate the Golf Resort, the Hoylake Village ('Heart of Hoose') retail & rail station development, the rest of Market Street, and coastal paths. The proposal would also facilitate an upgrade of the Carr Lane Industrial Estate, thereby transforming the attractiveness of Hoylake's most disadvantaged residential and business areas. It would also provide easily accessible high quality countryside and a tranquil parkland environment for residents and visitors alike.

The major benefit though would be through the creation of employment opportunities in the town centre, on the industrial estate and in tourist related businesses throughout the town. The Carr Lane industrial area is clearly disadvantaged by the location of the railway line, and increased accessibility and upgrading of the estate would make a huge impact on improving accessibility to employment, and increasing employment opportunities.