

## DEVELOPMENT PARTNER SELECTED FOR MAJOR LEISURE DEVELOPMENT AT THE WATERFRONT

**A major leisure development featuring a cinema and an ice rink is coming to Widnes, after Widnes Regeneration Ltd was selected as development partner for the £10m project.**

The company, a partnership between Halton Borough Council and St. Modwen Properties, has signed up the rapidly-expanding Loughborough-based cinema chain Reel Cinemas to operate a five-screen cinema, and Leisure Living Ltd to open an ice rink - 'Blue Ice' - on Venture Fields.

Reel's stand-alone cinema will bring the touch of classical elegance - its high quality trademark - to this exciting development in a town which used to be home to ten picture palaces in the heyday of cinema. Widnes has been without a cinema since the Empire closed its doors for the last time in the 1970s. Chairman of Reel Cinemas, Mr K C Suri, and Gordon Kirk, General Manager of Leisure Living, were on hand to mark the signing of the agreement with both Halton Borough Council and St Modwen Properties.

St Modwen has carefully put together a leisure package which will appeal to the whole

family and as well as securing the cinema and ice rink, is currently pursuing interest from a wide range of operators including those of bowling, family restaurants, pubs, children's play areas and climbing walls.

Cllr Tony McDermott, Leader of Halton Borough Council, is delighted with the announcement: "A wish come true. That is the only way I can describe this exciting leisure development."

Chairman of St. Modwen Properties, Anthony Glossop, commented, "Our team has done a great job in securing Reel Cinemas and is now focused on consolidating interest in the balance of the site. When Widnes Regeneration was formed in 1999 we went to the market for leisure activities and received poor response. The current, very different, reaction shows how far Widnes has come in the intervening time and how much Widnes Regeneration has helped in that transformation."



Left to right: Councillor Rob Polhill, Gordon Kirk, General Manager of Leisure Living, Council Leader Tony McDermott MBE and Richard Bakes Development Manager at St Modwen Properties



A word from  
**COUNCILLOR  
TONY  
MCDERMOTT**

**From its very inception the Widnes Waterfront Programme was a bold and ambitious vision to transform some, two hundred acres, of derelict and, in many cases, highly contaminated former industrial land into a business environment of regional significance.**

In the early days selling that vision was often difficult and required a considerable leap of faith on the part of the development community, local businesses and indeed residents of the Borough.

However, the recent spate of announcement and evidence of developers gearing up to begin on site, demonstrates that the vision is becoming a reality. In particular the announcement of a major leisure complex on a prominent, Council owned site, adjacent to Ashley Way demonstrates renewed developer confidence in, not only the Waterfront, but also the Borough as a whole.

It was always intended that Widnes Waterfront be more than a business park but rather provide a new focus for a whole range of activities for the people of the Borough. The recent opening of parts of Widnes Warth, a unique wildlife habitat on the Mersey Estuary complete with cycle ways and bird hides, goes a long way towards providing the range of amenities which will be a hallmark of the reborn waterfront.

# News

## Major investment in Widnes Waterfront

The transformation of Widnes Waterfront into a prime business location within a stunning waterfront setting has received a £5.6 million boost from the Northwest Regional Development Agency (NWDA).

The investment will assist Halton Borough Council to deliver the Widnes Waterfront Economic Development Zone Masterplan, which aims to bring over eighty hectares of derelict land back into productive use over the next six years.

The former industrial area will enjoy a new lease of life with the development of 104,000 sq metres of new commercial office and light industrial space in a dramatic waterfront setting. It will also benefit from a mix of public spaces and landscaped parkland with trees, seating areas, lighting and public art.

The economic impact of the Widnes Waterfront development will be considerable, with over 2,700 new jobs being created over the lifetime of the programme. The project is also expected to attract an additional £70 million investment, which will transform the area into a commercial and tourism development site of regional significance.

The Widnes Waterfront Economic Development Zone is also being supported by the European Objective Two Programme.

Steven Broomhead, NWDA Chief Executive, said: "Widnes Waterfront has enormous potential to become a prime business location, making a significant contribution to the regional economy. The NWDA is delighted to support this development, which will act as a catalyst for investment in Halton, creating a significant number of jobs in the process."

Tony McDermott, Leader of Halton Borough Council, said: "The confirmation of the NWDA funding is excellent news for the Waterfront and will help us deliver this important regeneration project. We are giving the local and regional economy a shot in the arm and will create infrastructure and jobs that will provide real change to Halton. The Waterfront project will become something of which all Haltonians can be rightly proud."



Cllr. Rob Polhill, Executive Board Member at Halton Borough Council with responsibility for planning and development with Steve Broomhead, Chief Executive NWDA

## NEW TAN HOUSE LANE SET TO EMERGE

A £400,000 scheme to transform Tan House Lane into a car, cycle and pedestrian friendly route is about to start.

The creation of a 10.5m corridor through the Waterfront complete with a 3m wide combined pavement and cycleway, will act as an attractive route into the area.

The landscaping will not only make the area more visually appealing to passers by and potential investors, it will also act as a safety measure separating pedestrians and cyclist from other road users.

It is hoped that this latest implementation of well-maintained foot and cycle ways will encourage more people to use sustainable transport methods when accessing the Waterfront.



Artists impression of the scheme created by 20/20 Knowsley

## DEVELOPERS LINE UP FOR WATERFRONT GROUND-BREAKING

Developers which are helping to transform Widnes Waterfront into a 21st century business park have celebrated the first physical steps to the realisation of the site's regeneration.

Bosses of Priority Sites were on hand to turn the first sod of earth which will in just 12 months time be home to 90,000 sq ft (8,360 sq m) of high quality commercial office space.

Construction work will start soon at their 60,000 sq ft (5,575 sq m) hi-tech hybrid accommodation which sits alongside Langtree Group's 30,000 sq ft (2,787 sq m) development of managed office space - both of which have received full planning permission.

On an adjacent site, Manchester based Property Alliance Group have officially marked their own start on site for their development of a brand new 45,000 sq ft B&Q store with garden centre and builders yard, which will replace the current store situated on Ashley Way.

In addition, some 50,000 sq ft of industrial accommodation will be constructed on a speculative basis. Russells Construction has been awarded the contracts and has started construction work on site which will be completed in Autumn 2007.

Under the watchful eyes of officials from Halton Borough Council, the developers will now press ahead with full-scale remediation and construction on their respective sites.

Councillor Rob Polhill said: "This is a great day in the future of the Waterfront and one that we have been working to for a long time. Over the coming months the people of the borough will see this site change dramatically."

"From a post-industrial wasteland into something which they can be proud. The Waterfront is a key gateway to Widnes and it will help provide a positive and forward looking feeling that will reverberate across the Waterfront and the borough generally."



David Carr, Chief Executive of Priority Sites celebrates with council officers the imminent start on site

Development Director at Priority Sites, John Boanas said: "We're delighted to be making such a positive contribution to the regeneration of the Waterfront by providing some top quality office premises. We are already receiving enquiries from prospective occupiers, and we're very confident that when completed this development will soon become a thriving hub of commercial activity that will have a significant impact on the local economy and generally boost the prosperity of the area."

Nick Pentith from Property Alliance Group said: "We are obviously delighted to have secured a pre-let to B&Q and we are confident our speculative industrial units will all be let prior to completion."

Full-scale construction work at the site is set to start imminently.



Nick Pentith, Director, Property Alliance Group, turns the first sod of earth ahead of building work on the new B&Q superstore



# DEVELOPMENTS MOVE FORWARD AT **WIDNES WATERFRONT SITE**

**The Forward Partnership is now expected to commence works at both of its developments at the Waterfront by the end of February.**

But before construction work can begin, a process of land reclamation has been undertaken. The first stage involved ridding one of its sites of the 'evil weed' known more commonly as Japanese Knotweed.

A former railway marshalling yard, the Forward Business Park site has been derelict for more than 25 years. In addition to Japanese Knotweed, quantities of concrete and chemical waste known as galligu have been dumped on the brownfield site leaving it vacant and undeveloped. This has made it difficult to attract developers and businesses into the area, which in turn has restricted the economical development of Halton.

The scheme, located off Brown Street, has been earmarked as a light industrial/warehouse park aimed at growth sector businesses. Consisting of two linear rows totalling 11 double-height, single-storey, hi-tech units with 3,060 sq metres of accommodation, it is here that the Japanese Knotweed is being eradicated.

The exotic sounding plant with its bamboo-like stems and clusters of creamy flowers is the UK's most invasive plant.

Invading development sites countrywide, it has even been unearthed at London's 2012

Olympic site and there are now more than 50 sites across Halton with the problem.

An infestation of Japanese Knotweed reduces land value and removing it is expensive and time consuming. The Government now estimates costs in excess of £1.56bn countrywide to eradicate the problem.

With roots that can spread seven metres wide and three metres deep, huge amounts of soil have to be dug up with strict legal restrictions regarding its disposal.

The Forward Partnership's Chris Wright says: "We need to act responsibly now before development is underway, as this is one of the major ways Japanese Knotweed can spread."

"Our main concern is to provide high quality space, attracting growth sector businesses to the business park which will in turn create job opportunities for the local community. Before we can even begin to do this we need to eradicate this problem."

The Forward Partnership has employed UK expert Environet Consulting Ltd and work started during the summer.

Nic Seal of Environet Consulting Ltd adds: "It is the building sector where its impact is most felt and developers could be looking at

costs of £50,000 and upwards, depending on the size of the site. A costly affair for a developer before a build has even started."

"The site will take around five months to clear but the product we use is proven to be the most effective technique available and prevents vast quantities of infested soil being dumped into precious landfill sites."

The Forward Partnership's second development, Forward Point will provide a dramatic gateway to Widnes Waterfront with its location close to the junction of Tan House Lane and Fiddlers Ferry Road.

The project will consist of three modern, flexible office buildings with glass façades, one of three storeys and two two-storey buildings providing a total of 1,535 sq metres of high quality office accommodation.

Forward Point will not only help to fill a gap within the existing portfolio of commercial office space, it will also mean the land will, once again, be brought into long term use following the disposal of any contamination.

The buildings on both sites will be released for sale or lease and are expected to be complete by late autumn 2007.

## **HERON BUSINESS PARK** Phase 1 - early sales in new Widnes industrial development



Two units in the first phase of the Heron Business Park development in the Widnes Waterfront Economic Development Zone (EDZ), have been sold by the park's developers, Widnes Regeneration Ltd, the joint venture between St Modwen Properties PLC and Halton Borough Council.

Maintenance Cleaning Services have bought a 5,253 sq ft unit and a local businessman has acquired a 5,339 sq ft building to create a plumbing-based trade counter.

Nine units totalling some 39,500 sq ft remain in the first phase and are ready for occupation.

Michelle Taylor, regional director of St Modwen, said: "This is the first speculative development in the Economic Development Zone and we have strong interest in six of the remaining nine units."

"The early sales and strong interest reflect the strength of the market and the quality of the buildings which have brought for the first time a major high quality standard of development to Widnes."

It was formerly a Lafarge Group site which Widnes Regeneration has reclaimed prior to redevelopment.

Dixon Webb is acting for Widnes Regeneration.



For further information contact Michelle Taylor of St Modwen (01925 825950).



Chris Wright - Forward Group



## HALTON JOBS PROGRAMME IS RIGHT ON THE MONEY

A job-matching scheme run by Halton Borough Council has placed over 1,000 people into new employment in the last 18 months.

The Halton People into Jobs programme, is a unique partnership between the council and local employers aimed at providing people outside of the jobs market with the confidence, skills and other tips on how to land a job with one of Halton's existing businesses.

The programme has the full support of 1,145 businesses in Halton which have all signed up to an Employment Charter recognising applicants that have completed an intensive two-week employment workshop designed to hone their application and workplace skills.

The Halton Employment Charter tackles real and perceived barriers to employment and worklessness such as low self-esteem, poor self-image or lack of self-awareness, communication skills, job aspirations, goal setting, decision making and dealing with difficult situations.

Once in employment, participants will also benefit from an on-going 26-week employment aftercare programme to help coach new employees through the first weeks of their new career.

For further information on the project please contact: Emma Marsh on 01928 759 090.



## Widnes Warth Official Opening

The Mayor and Mayoress of Halton, Councillor John and Mrs Margaret Swain, recently officially opened one hundred metres of new steel walkway providing panoramic views across the Mersey Estuary.



The construction of the walkway is one small part of a major project to improve access to the Mersey Estuary for walkers, cyclist and nature lovers.

The Widnes Warth Nature Reserve is a significant part of the overall regeneration of the north bank of the River Mersey and is a key element of the Widnes Waterfront programme.

The Nature Reserve will eventually cover over one hundred and twenty acres of mudflats, reed beds and salt marsh. Home to a rich and diverse range of animal and plant species.

The walkway will allow visitors to view areas of the salt marsh which, at high tide, are tantalisingly out of reach for bird watchers and those interested in this unique eco-system.

As part of the work, new information boards have been designed to provide visitors with a quick reference guide to the flora and fauna that occupy Widnes' most notable natural asset: The Mersey Estuary.

The walkway, and further environmental improvements along the banks of the Mersey, have been made possible with

a grant of £385,000 for The Mersey Waterfront project together with an additional £85,000 from Halton Borough Council.

To date over £200,000, of mostly external grant funding, has been spent developing access to Widnes Warth.

The Mersey Waterfront Project is tasked with revitalising the whole of the Mersey Estuary. Sara Wilde, Chair of Mersey Waterfront commented, "Widnes Warth is a key site, although not many people realise it is designated a Special Protection Area for birds and a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC)."

Councillor Rob Polhill, Executive Board Member with responsibility for Transportation and Development and Halton's Mersey Waterfront Board Member commented, "Opening up the Warth for the enjoyment of residents and visitors alike is a key element of the Council's drive to improve the natural environment of the Borough. The project is also a vital element of the wider Widnes Waterfront programme and goes a long way towards realising the vision of the Waterfront as a work and leisure environment of the highest quality."

### WHAT TO SEE AT THE WATERFRONT IN WINTER

Estuaries are marvellous places to visit in winter. The mixture of dramatic skies, varying colours of light and ever changing weather mean that anything can happen!

A visit to Wigg Island or to the new walkway on Widnes Warth at low tide will reveal different types of birds who are using the estuary for both feeding and for roosting. Herring and Black-headed gulls are quite common at most times of the day, with the darker winged Lesser Black-backed gull standing out at a distance.

Cormorants can be seen, statuesque, on the mudflats in the middle of the estuary, or feeding in the faster channels looking for fish and eels. They may be competing with the occasional grey seal that also fishes in the estuary in winter. One was seen off Pickerings Pasture on the 20th November, and there is no reason why they cannot be seen from Spike Island or Wigg Island.

Smaller wading birds such as the Redshank can be seen running rapidly along the sides of the mudflats, but are perhaps more noticeable once they fly off with a strident piping sound.

The estuary between Runcorn and Widnes is also a winter home to over 300 Canada Geese. This bird regularly flies between the two sides, looking for seeds in the saltmarsh grasses.

If you prefer to find out more about the wildlife at Widnes Warth, please contact the Borough Council's Wildspace Officer. For further details, please phone 01928 583905.

## KEEPING THE WATERFRONT ON THE MOVE

The Waterfront is about to appoint its own Mobility Co-ordinator whose role will be to advise pedestrians, cyclists and bus users, current businesses and possible relocating businesses on how to best take advantage of the Waterfront's travel infrastructure.

The co-ordinator will have seven key areas of activity which will focus on ensuring easy access to and from The Waterfront for all of its users. They are:

- To assist companies and employers within The Waterfront to develop and implement staff travel plans
- To provide a personalised journey planning service for people either employed on The Waterfront or in other businesses immediately adjacent
- To develop the Waterfront's own cycle hire scheme
- To help identify and implement innovative transport solutions to tackle the needs of all Waterfront users
- To regularly assess travel needs and patterns
- To act as key transport advisor to Halton College during its reorganisation.

As part of the Council's Mobility Management Unit they will be in place for a period of two years and as well as providing the hands on advice and reporting role described above they will have a marketing role designed to engage local people with the wide ranging programme.

For further information please contact Martin Mookerji on 0151 424 2061 ext. 3129.



## LET THERE BE LIGHT

A new scheme to replace the existing sub-standard street lighting along Dennis Road will be implemented in the New Year. The project will be equally funded by the B&Q development, which has started on site on Dennis Road, and Halton Borough Council.

Existing 5m and 6m columns will be replaced by 16 new 10m aluminium columns with high-pressure sodium lighting. The columns and lanterns have been selected due to their longevity and energy efficiency.

Current lighting levels are below standard for this size of road. With the envisaged increased usage of Dennis Road by employees and visitors to the B&Q development and future office complexes at the Waterfront, it is necessary for safety measures to be significantly improved.

The landscaping improvements carried out earlier this year have already drastically uplifted the aesthetic value of Dennis Road and new lighting will continue to make the area more attractive and safer for users.

## ENGINEERS DIG DEEP FOR MERSEY GATEWAY

Mersey Gateway specialist engineers took to the water on jet-skis, hovercrafts and quad bikes as investigations continue to learn more about how the channels of the Upper Mersey Estuary move.

Curious motorists and those walking by the river will also have noticed a new temporary addition to the Mersey - a 30 sq m marine drilling rig.

The rig, which will be in place for around three weeks, will drill 40 - 50m beneath the riverbed to generate a detailed profile of the characteristics of the soil and rock below.

At the same time, aircraft will be overhead mapping the heights and levels of buildings and land around the proposed route and approach to the Mersey Gateway. This will assist with the meticulous planning needed to ensure the design of the new crossing fits with existing infrastructure.

Cllr Tony McDermott, Chair of the Mersey Crossing Group and Leader of Halton Borough Council, said: "It is exciting to see this rig in place on the river as it's a visible sign that we are making progress to building the Mersey Gateway. The River Mersey is a great asset and this work is being carried out so we can be confident that the new crossing will have minimal impact on the river and its wildlife."



# Development News

## ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE TRACKS

One of the Waterfront's closest neighbours is The Mersey Multimodal Gateway - or 3MG for short

**This is no ordinary freight terminal. A fully integrated hub in the global logistics chain, 3MG is at the beating heart of Halton's distribution industry.**

5000 new jobs will be generated in the borough as 3MG draws in over £86m of capital investment into the region.

But this is only the beginning. Already with plans for 60,000 sq ft of office buildings and 750,000 sq ft of distribution sheds, outline planning permission is in place for a further 1.8m sq ft of new buildings rising eventually rising to a colossal 3.5m sq ft.

Already handling 60,000 containers per year, it is anticipated that this figure will boom once redevelopment work is complete.

All of this goes to make 3MG one of Britain's largest dedicated logistics parks, but it is designed for multiple occupancy allowing numerous companies access to the benefits of its unrivalled infrastructure and accessibility.

Whether goods are handled by air, rail, road or by sea, 3MG is perfectly positioned at the fulcrum of the regional transport infrastructure to help deliver logistics solutions on an international scale.

For logistics businesses the benefits of 3MG are clear. Its central location along with high specification buildings and business environment make it almost the natural choice to distribute within the North West, North Wales and the North Midlands.

For rail and shipping operators too, the connectivity of the Gateway is second to none in the region.

With many of the world's leading shipping companies, such as Maersk, Mediterranean Shipping Company, NYK Logistics, already using 3MG and benefiting from its daily rail freight services to the UK's deep sea ports such as Southampton, Felixstowe and Purfleet, the gateway is set to grow and grow.

With easy access to the UK's motorway network and the region's two main

international airports, onward shipment is easy and efficient.

The future promises to be bright for 3MG and have massive regeneration benefits for Halton's, and the North West region's economic future.

For further information please visit [www.3-mg.co.uk](http://www.3-mg.co.uk)



### Further information

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