

REPORT TO: WEST OF ENGLAND JOINT COMMITTEE

DATE: 17 DECEMBER 2021

REPORT TITLE: WESTERN GATEWAY UPDATE

DIRECTOR: DR JO DALLY, DIRECTOR, WESTERN GATEWAY

AUTHOR: JAMES COOKE, EXECUTIVE OFFICER, WESTERN GATEWAY

Purpose of Report

1 To consider a progress update on the Western Gateway (a cross-border economic partnership of Local Authorities, City Regions, Local Enterprise Partnerships and Governments (in Wales and Westminster)).

Impact of Covid-19 pandemic

2 As the vaccination programme has been rolled out and restrictions have lifted, the Western Gateway is capitalising on the opportunity to develop a robust identity and brand that will support our communities, to deliver a greener, fairer future, levelling-up the economy and connecting the Union.

3 The Western Gateway was in its infancy when the Covid-19 pandemic struck. A formal Secretariat function was established in Spring 2020. The pandemic has significantly constrained the emergence of this powerhouse partnership, not least the capacity for partners and new staff to convene, host events and develop opportunities.

4 Partner organisations have had to prioritise their resources on responding to the pandemic and the powerhouse partnership has taken this opportunity to set the economic evidence base and subsequent identification of workstream priorities within the context of recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic.

Recommendation

- Joint Committee is asked to note the update.

Background / Issues for Consideration

5 The Western Gateway powerhouse partnership is the UK's first pan-regional powerhouse that spans two countries. Stretching across South Wales and Western England, the Western Gateway connects the Union and has the core cities of Bristol and Cardiff at its heart. The partnership pulls together City Regions, the Combined Authority, multiple Local Authorities, three LEPs plus representatives from business and academia.

The partnership is chaired by an independent business representative in the form of Katherine Bennett, CBE who is Chief Executive of the High-Value Manufacturing Catapult.

6 The West of England Joint Committee Members are all partner Members of the Western Gateway. The Secretariat and Accountable Body status is hosted by South Gloucestershire Council on behalf of the partnership. West of England Member Authorities have played a leading role in establishing, shaping and contributing to the Western Gateway since its inception. Councillor Toby Savage, Leader of South Gloucestershire Council is one of two Deputy Chairs of the Partnership Board.

7 The Secretariat is a small team such that realising the full potential of the partnership will rely on partners playing an active role. The partnership is focused on realising economic growth for the people we serve both now and in the future. By working together, around a shared goal of achieving carbon net zero, we can create the sustainable, levelled-up economy that all our communities can benefit from.

Economic Positioning and Priorities

8 The Western Gateway commissioned a detailed dual-phased Independent Economic Review which reported in the Autumn. In summarising the findings of the report Sir Howard Bernstein noted:

'The Western Gateway offers a unique proposition which combines strategic location, an innovative economy, and significant natural and economic assets. Home to market leading multinationals, creative enterprises, and academic expertise, the region is an innovation powerhouse and can play a crucial part in engineering and designing the industry and economy of tomorrow.'

9 The Western Gateway Partnership Board has collectively identified a series of priority workstreams. These opportunities align around a very straightforward unified objective to deliver a net zero carbon economy.

- **Tidal Energy:** Board Members agreed to explore unlocking the Tidal Energy potential of the Severn Estuary.
- **Hydrogen Ecosystem:** There are Hydrogen strengths, capabilities, and activities across the Western Gateway in both the public and private sector. A programme to map this activity and to inform future opportunities is underway.
- **STEP Fusion:** The Western Gateway 'Severn Edge' nomination was successful in being selected into the last five contenders for a UK first prototype fusion power plant
- **Rail Connectivity:** The Board asked that work to map the 2050 'ideal' national and regional rail network in the Western Gateway area be commissioned. This will be done in close collaboration with leading authorities on either side of the Severn, notably for the purposes of this report – The Western Gateway Sub-National Transport Body.
- **Innovation and Investment:** Working with the Combined Authority, City Regions & LEPs to advocate for inward investment

10 These priorities will be framed in a robust workstream governance with regular reporting to the Board. As new and complementary opportunities emerge there will be additional and potentially significant roles for partners and stakeholders to play in delivery.

Severn Edge STEP Fusion

11 In Autumn 2020 the UK Atomic Energy Authority (UKAEA) released a call for site nominations for the UK's first prototype STEP fusion power plant, seeking just one single site to be announced by December 2022.

12 A consortium of partners was convened by the Western Gateway and Nuclear South West to explore the viability of land at the decommissioned nuclear power station sites of Oldbury (South Gloucestershire) and Berkeley (Gloucestershire). Landowners, industry and academic leads, Local Authorities, WECA and the LEPs have come together under the Western Gateway umbrella to form a powerful nomination consortium that delivered a compelling and unique dual-site nomination to the UKAEA in March 2021.

13 The nomination identifies the 'new nuclear site' at Oldbury as the proposed host site for the plant, whilst Berkeley offers a ready-made and operational Science and Technology Park and University Technical College, with room for expansion and with skills, learning and education at its heart.

14 The nomination was followed by a further desktop submission in July 2021 and on 14 October 2021, the Severn Edge nomination was announced as one of just 5 sites proceeding to the final assessment phase.

15 As a home for a STEP Fusion prototype power plant, Severn Edge at Oldbury & Berkeley would offer;

- Access to the largest nuclear industry cluster in the UK
- 46% of the UK Steel industry in South Wales
- Proximity to world-leading expertise in; high-temperature engineering; construction & welding; and fusion research itself in Oxfordshire
- Proximity to an enormous active and talented supply chain (Hinkley Point C)
- Proximity to the UK's primary source of lithium in Cornwall which is essential to the fusion process.
- A great environment to live and learn and a place known for retaining talent
- A knowledgeable local community with a rich nuclear and engineering heritage
- The opportunity to promote skills and employment investment in nearby 'Priority 1' communities identified in the Government's Levelling-Up Fund (notably Forest of Dean and South Wales)

16 Berkeley was home to the first UK commercial fission power station. The Severn Edge nomination presents a timely and compelling legacy for Western Gateway to be the pioneer of STEP fusion, sustaining the wealth of talent and expertise which will otherwise become at-risk. The project will reach disadvantaged, but resource-rich communities, upskilling and inspiring young people of today to become the researchers, operators and supply-chain needed to for the power plant of tomorrow.

17 UKAEA's objective of developing fusion technology to deliver limitless low carbon electricity is well aligned with the West of England's Climate Change commitments, and

presents a major opportunity for our area to be at the forefront of this emerging and very green technology.

18 The project enjoys very widespread and publicly stated support at all levels, from MPs, Local Authority Leaders and Councillors, Business West, Nuclear South West and the host Parishes, Town Councils and Site Stakeholder Groups for both Oldbury and Berkeley.

19 The nomination is now going through further technical reviews and commercial discussions with landowners, which are expected to complete in Spring 2022 and we expect further stakeholder and public engagement in February 2022.

Western Gateway Conference

20 The Western Gateway's Inaugural Conference is to be held on 20 January 2022 at the International Convention Centre, Newport.

Higher Education Representation

21 The Western Gateway is currently recruiting roles for two leaders from the higher education, innovation and research community to join the Western Gateway Partnership Board. [Independent Representative – Higher Education, Innovation and Research - Western Gateway in - South Gloucestershire Council \(southglos.gov.uk\)](#)

Consultation

22 The Western Gateway is happy to arrange for stakeholder briefing sessions in respect of STEP Fusion and is expecting further engagement in February 2022.

Risk Management/Assessment

23 West of England Joint Committee Members are Members of the Western Gateway Partnership Board. The Western Gateway Secretariat has prepared an Indemnity Agreement for all partners to manage any risk exposed by Membership.

Public Sector Equality Duties

24 The public sector equality duty created under the Equality Act 2010 means that public authorities must have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimization and other conduct prohibited by the Act.
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

25 The Act explains that having due regard for advancing equality involves:

- Removing or minimizing disadvantages suffered by people due to their protected characteristics.
 - Taking steps to meet the needs of people from protected groups where these are different from the needs of other people.
 - Encouraging people from protected groups to participate in public life or in other activities where their participation is disproportionately low.
- 26 The general equality duty therefore requires organisations to consider how they could positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations. It requires equality considerations to be reflected in the design of policies and the delivery of services, including policies, and for these issues to be kept under review.
- Climate Change Implications**
- 27 The Members of the West of England Joint Committee have declared a climate emergency, recognising the huge significance of climate change and its impact on the health, safety and wellbeing of the region's residents. The Combined Authority is committed to taking climate change considerations fully into account as an integral part of its governance and decision making process.
Each report/proposal submitted for Combined Authority / Joint Committee approval is assessed in terms of the following:
Will the proposal impact positively or negatively on:
* The emission of climate changing gases?
* The region's resilience to the effects of climate change?
* Consumption of non-renewable resources?
* Pollution to land, water or air?
Particular projects will also be subject to more detailed environmental assessment/consideration as necessary as part of their detailed project-specific management arrangements
- 28 The Severn Edge STEP Fusion project is expected to make a positive contribution to tackling climate change by providing long-term safe and sustainable energy

Finance Implications, including economic impact assessment where appropriate

29 None directly in relation to this report

Legal Implications

30 None directly in relation to this report

Land/Property Implications

31 None directly in relation to this report.

Human Resources Implications

32 None directly in relation to this report

Background papers:

[About Us - Western Gateway \(western-gateway.co.uk\)](http://About Us - Western Gateway (western-gateway.co.uk))

West of England Combined Authority Contact:

Any person seeking background information relating to this item should seek the assistance of the contact officer for the meeting who is Ian Hird on 07436 600313; or by writing to West of England Combined Authority, 3 Rivergate, Temple Quay, Bristol BS1 6EW; email: democratic.services@westofengland-ca.gov.uk