1. Introduction

1.1 One of the strategic objectives of the Mersey Gateway Project is “To improve accessibility in order to maximise local development and regional growth opportunities”. As part of fulfilling this objective and the Council’s obligations in accordance with Government guidance on compulsory purchase procedures contained in Circular 06/2004 it is necessary to provide a strategic framework within which the various options to minimise the impact of the scheme on affected businesses can be formulated.

1.2 The objectives of this strategy can be achieved in part by relocating businesses and where it is appropriate purchasing businesses in advance of the exercise of any compulsory purchase powers. The Council will offer assistance for relocation based on the advice and guidance provided in Circular 06/2004, which is incorporated into the following policy.

2. Policy

2.1 Before embarking on compulsory purchase and throughout the preparation and procedural process the Council will seek to acquire land by agreement wherever practicable and this will include relocation of existing businesses where necessary.

2.2 The Council will initiate action to provide full information about the CPO process including timetable and the rights and duties of those affected. It is important that the Council is accessible to various parties and a specific case manager will be available to those concerned.

2.3 The Council may offer to alleviate concerns about future compensation entitlement by entering into agreements. Agreements can be used as a means of guaranteeing minimum levels of compensation including the basis upon which disturbance costs would be assessed.

2.4 The Council will consider making early payments where justified to enable claimants to proceed with reinstatement. The Council will consider using its wide-ranging powers under section 111 of the Local Government Act 1972.
2.5 The primary objective of this policy is to ensure that the benefits of the Mersey Gateway can be delivered whilst minimising the extent of the impact upon those businesses that are suitable for relocation. To achieve this such existing businesses will need to be transferred to locations that are appropriate to the present and future needs of the businesses concerned.

2.6 This policy details the approach required to understand and address the relocation needs of the businesses. Its purpose is to demonstrate that:

- HBC recognises the scale, character and diversity of the businesses and their associated need to relocate
- A strategy exists to support businesses throughout the relocation period, from pre-relocation support and identifying requirements through the actual process and appropriate aftercare to ensure that the effects of relocating are minimised

2.7 To address the needs of a range of existing commercial occupiers, an assessment will be carried out which will include:

- Level of demand - The overall demand for alternative commercial premises and sites, this will be based upon an emerging understanding of the current business requirements
- Level of supply – An overview of the current supply of premises within the borough and if appropriate the neighbouring authorities
- Matching supply and demand – Initial assessment of supply against demand and identification of shortfalls

2.8 The most effective method for achieving a successful business relocation in any individual case is through a detailed assessment of the needs of each individual business. This assessment will be achieved through direct, proactive face-to-face meetings with the individual businesses.

3. Initial Level of Demand

3.1 It was resolved at the Mersey Gateway Executive Board meeting on 15th November 2007 that the Mersey Gateway Team should enter into discussions with affected stakeholders with a possible view to making a purchase in advance of a CPO. Following this resolution affected businesses were written to asking them if they wished to be considered for an advanced purchase.

3.2 A number of the affected businesses have come forward for consideration and some have expressed an interest in relocation. (Liaison with affected businesses will continue during the CPO process and efforts will be made to relocate affected businesses where appropriate).

3.3 Detailed discussions are now taking place with the businesses already identified as wishing to relocate. This is a specialised area of work and the following resources are involved in the process:

- Mersey Gateway Team;
- HBC Economic Development;
3.4 The Council has committed funding to support advanced property purchase and this commitment will be reviewed alongside the take up of early acquisition opportunity.

4. **Current Supply of Sites and Premises**

4.1 The Economic Regeneration Service maintains a comprehensive database of all commercial premises and sites in Halton, regardless of ownership.

4.2 The table below indicates the availability of commercial premises in Widnes and Runcorn as at 31 March 2008. It does not include premises which are proposed but not yet under construction.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Size Range</th>
<th>Widnes</th>
<th>Runcorn</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 – 5,000 ft²</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5,000 – 10,000 ft²</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10,000 ft² +</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site &lt; 5 acres</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site &gt; 5 acres</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.3 Due to the unique nature of each business the suitability and requirements for each business will be managed on a case by case basis. The variability of requirements counts against providing a single development site for relocation, although this has not been ruled out if a site can be identified which could accommodate a number of businesses. However, the current support is focused on assisting businesses in finding their own relocation sites.

5. **Ability to Meet Demand**

5.1 There is currently a shortage of possible sites for businesses to relocate to.

5.2 Should a business affected by the CPO be unable to identify a suitable site within Halton, then HBC will work with adjacent Local Authorities to identify suitable sites which are likely to be in neighbouring regeneration areas.

6. **Understanding the needs of individual businesses**

6.1 There have been ongoing discussions with businesses who have asked to be considered for a purchase in advance of a CPO in order to understand the more detailed characteristics of each and their potential needs, in some cases this has involved a possible relocation.

6.2 This process will continue throughout the CPO procedure. In order to balance the various demands of the businesses, the following factors are considered to be relevant in identifying a suitable site;
• Location of business customers
• Contribution to the local economy in terms of employment
• Transport requirements
• Intensity of land use on current site
• Scope for integration on a business park
• Individual business and investment plans
• The emerging Mersey Gateway regeneration strategy.

7. **Identifying relocation options**

7.1 The outcome of the business engagement process will be to identify suitable relocation sites for each of the businesses.

7.2 Following initial contact between the team and the business a support package will be developed from a number of different elements to aid the business concerned.

7.3 The elements will include

• Assistance in finding space / premises within the Halton area
• Assistance in finding space other locations, were this is the preferred choice of the business.
• Access to support through the Business Link were appropriate
• Access to training through the Learning and Skills Council.

8. **Business and Relocation Support Process**

8.1 The key elements of the process are;

8.1.1 Setting up a team with clear lines of communication with the businesses

8.1.2 Delivering proactive one-to-one support to the businesses to:

• Establish a working relationship between the team and business
• Understand the characteristics and requirements of the individual businesses
• Identify through discussions with businesses support measures and property options available

8.2 The Mersey Gateway Project is committed to helping businesses relocate where appropriate. A key element of this objective is to ensure that proactive assistance to businesses is available, helping them to find alternative premises that are suitable to their needs.

8.3 The Team will be headed by Steve Eccles of Mersey Gateway Team (0151 906 4899) and draw upon the following expertise as required:

• HBC Property Services, Alan Scarisbrick
• HBC Economic Regeneration, David Lyon 01928 516125
• GVA Grimley, John Rhoades and Helen Kirkham.
8.4 It is recognised that the process of relocation must be managed both carefully and sensitively so that the disturbance to the businesses is kept to a minimum.