

Mayor aims to boost business with China trip

Pippa Crerar City Hall Editor

BORIS JOHNSON will steal a march on David Cameron when he leads a major trade mission to China next month.

The Mayor will meet Chinese political leaders and business tycoons as he attempts to build bridges between London and the Far Eastern superpower.

His visit will coincide with a trip to Beijing by Chancellor George Osborne, raising the prospect of the pair co-operating to promote Britain to investors.

It comes after Beijing apparently barred the Prime Minister from visiting when he met the Dalai Lama in London last year, although this is denied by No 10 – and Mr Cameron is expected to visit before the end of the year.

Downing Street noted there have been a number of ministerial visits and an increase in trade links since.

Mr Johnson's visit will aim to cement already strong links between the capital and Beijing.

City Hall aides said they expect the Mayor to get the "red carpet" treatment on the week-long visit which will take

in Beijing, Shanghai and Hong Kong. He will be accompanied by British business leaders and hold high-level talks, effectively overtaking plans by No 10 to mend broken ties.

Chinese investment in Britain was worth £8 billion last year, a substantial chunk of which was in London – including a £1 billion Asian "business port" to be built in Docklands.

One Tory source told the Standard: "The truth is that Cameron can't get in there because of the Dalai Lama but they'll roll out the red carpet for Boris so there's a lot we can do."

He claimed the Mayor believed Mr Cameron was wrong to meet the Dalai Lama. "There are bigger things at play here. We wouldn't have done it."

But he conceded: "We can be selfish and concentrate on getting business for London and what's best for Londoners. We can leave the big world politics to other people."

Beijing has previously sought to punish countries whose leaders meet the Dalai Lama, who disputes China's territorial claims on the region.