

12 JANUARY 2010

REPORT OF THE DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE / DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE SERVICES

DESTINATION MARKETING - IMPLEMENTATION PLAN UPDATE (OCTOBER TO DECEMBER 2009)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A recent report from The Mersey Partnership (TMP - Merseyside's Tourism Board) highlights, that in 2008 the total revenue of Wirral's tourism industry increased by a substantial 12% from 2007, adding an extra £25,880,000 into Wirral's local economy, (ie compared to a 4% increase from 2006 to 2007). In addition, tourism expenditure in Wirral's food and drink sector increased by 13% in 2008, confirming the strength of the peninsula's food offer, and its potential to attract tourists. These results highlight the importance of the Destination Marketing plan, which directly supports Wirral's tourism businesses, via the Wirral Tourism Business Network and its six Partnerships (ie accommodation, attractions, coast, food, golf, and history and heritage). The plan also links to the annual Destination Management Plan delivered by TMP, and follows the Northwest Development Agency (NWDA) strategy objectives. This strategic approach has been taken to market Wirral Peninsula's tourism offer more effectively, help local businesses increase trade by attracting more spend and visitors to the Borough, and ultimately encourages long-term economic sustainability.

This progress report updates Committee Members on the activities of the Destination Marketing Office, during the last quarter of 2009, details plans for 2010 and highlights the support being provided to Wirral's tourism business community, to help them through the economic downturn. Committee Members are requested to note and support the contents of this progress report.

1. Wirral Tourism Business Network (WTBN)

The Council's Destination Marketing Office (DMO) continues to support the activities of the WTBN, which is made up of over 250 stakeholders, from the accommodation, attractions, coast, food, golf and heritage sectors. In particular, they are working with a number of Wirral rural businesses to secure grant funding from the Mersey Rural Leader local authority programme (ie an active partnership, with NWDA funds of over £2 million until 2013, to support businesses within Merseyside's rural economy). Businesses currently being supported include Claremont Farm in Bebington, Sheldrakes Restaurant in Heswall, Gregory's Farm at Brimstage, Gorge Us Tea Rooms in Port Sunlight and Brian Mellor Cookery School at Claremont Kitchen in Bebington.

The DMO has also successfully secured £300,000 of European Regional Development Funds (ERDF) from the NWDA's Northwest Operational Programme, matched against £300,000 from the Council's existing budget (ie DMO staff time and marketing budget), as agreed at Cabinet on 15 October 2009. Plans are well underway to develop the three key elements of the project (see 5. Plans for 2010).

2. Year of the Environment 2009 - European Capital of Culture Legacy

Following the success of the Liverpool City Region's European Capital of Culture in 2008, last year was designated Year of the Environment. The DMO have taken advantage of this opportunity by

launching four new Walk and Cycle Trails (ie north, south, east and west), and a beautifully illustrated Nature Trail, launched last autumn. These have been developed in association with the experts from the Wirral Coast Partnership, Officers from Cultural and Technical Services, and grant funding from the Mersey Waterfront Regional Park. The Trails will be actively promoted and distributed throughout 2010.

A small grant was also secured to promote a Wirral element of the wider Liverpool City Region legacy project, "Go Penguins". The grant was matched with funds from Wirral's attractions and retail businesses, to purchase replica penguins (ie individually designed and so following the "Superlambanana" model), forming a unique trail that was promoted through the regional press and other marketing literature. The Wirral element of the Go Penguins trail included Birkenhead Park Pavilion; Lady Lever Art Gallery and, Museum and Garden Centre in Port Sunlight; Floral Pavilion in New Brighton; Church Farm in Thurstaston; Brimstage Hall; The Grange and Pyramids Shopping Centres in Birkenhead; and Ness Botanic Gardens.

3. Make It Easy

The following initiatives aim to better inform Wirral visitors, stakeholders and partners (internal and external) and improve business/customer connectivity:

www.visitwirral.com

The DMO has seen a significant increase of people visiting the site. In 2009, visitwirral.com had 97,081 unique visitors compared to 2008, when there were 70,646 unique visitors (ie a substantial increase of 37%). The site has been developed and promoted throughout 2009; particularly through a short break led competition, with prizes generously donated by Wirral's tourism sector. The most popular pages are "Restaurant of the Month", "Gastro-pubs" and "Activities", and it is this last section that hosts the Walk & Cycle and Nature trails, which visitors can download for themselves or request hard copies.

Promotional Literature

An all-new Wirral Peninsula branded Visitor Guide is currently in production. It will include new copy, images, maps and illustrations and will be launched later in the year. The Guide will be integral to the "Play, Eat and Stay in Wirral" spring marketing campaign in 2010, and highlight Wirral's full tourism offer, through themed sections (eg coast, countryside, food, etc).

To actively promote the Wirral Year of Food in 2010 (see 5.1), a Good Food Guide (part sponsored by The Grange and Pyramids shopping centres), will be launched in late January. It will build on the success of the past Gourmet Trails, however it will feature new images, more food related events, workshops and themed activities; more places to eat; more food producers, and hence stimulate more business for the whole of Wirral's food sector.

This year's new Attractions and Events leaflets were produced and distributed regionally. The DMO was instrumental in helping the Wirral Attractions Partnership improve their document, by including discount vouchers and a competition, kindly donated by the Leverhulme Hotel and Spa in Port Sunlight village.

Press and Stakeholder Familiarisation Visits

The DMO also hosted visits from the Blackpool Gazette, Leicestershire News and Worcester News resulting in a number of very positive double page features. The team also co-ordinated a number of

familiarisation visits from Norfolk Line ferry staff (based in Belfast and Dublin) as well as giving more personalised visits to TMP managerial staff. Familiarisation Visits give Wirral tourism businesses the opportunity to raise their profile. Feedback from those visiting, and those Wirral businesses who participated, has been excellent throughout the year.

Tourism Signage and Interpretation

The DMO have recently secured NWDA funds to develop a project to update Wirral's coastal signage. The project, led by Cultural Services, aims to help raise the positive profile of the coast, safely inform and disperse new and existing visitors/residents, and encourage visitor spend in the Borough. The scheme will mirror all the necessary Health and Safety criteria, incorporates the new Wirral Peninsula branding, and will eventually connect to the North West Coastal Trail initiative, currently being developed.

DMO Officers are also working with the Technical Services Department to update existing and develop new brown tourism signage. Phase 1 work has already been delivered in Port Sunlight, Woodside, Seacombe and New Brighton, and Phase 2 is currently being developed for Birkenhead and Bromborough. Members will appreciate good, quality signage greatly enhances the visitor experience and it is hoped the project will be rolled out throughout the Borough - budgets allowing.

Tourism Talk e-newsletter

The January 2010 edition is currently in production and will be circulated shortly. Tourism Talk has been developed to better engage partners and stakeholders, on current activities and developments, and allows for regular feedback.

4. Excellent Events

All the Core Events for 2009 have now been delivered including the International Kite Festival in New Brighton, six Chef Shine evenings (May to October) at various Wirral restaurants, the Wirral Food and Drink Festival (attracting over 30,000 visitors), and the sector's grand finale, the Wirral Tourism Awards for Excellence. Plans are already underway for the Core Events programme in 2010.

Following the agreement of the Supported Events Panel on the 8 December 2009, grant support will now be allocated to this year's select programme of Supported community-led events. These include the Hoylake RNLi Open Day, Coastal Walk, Port Sunlight Village, Birkenhead Park Transport and Folk on the Coast Festivals; and Wirral Egg Run, Wallasey Motor and Historic Vehicle Rallies. The Supported Events Panel includes Elected Members and Officers from Cultural Services and the Tourism and Marketing divisions. Decisions are made on visitor research conducted by TMP's England's Northwest Research Agency, income generated, potential for sustainability and guidance from Senior Officers.

In addition to the Supported Events Panel, the Wirral Events Advisory Group, administered by the DMO and including Officers from Corporate Services; HR, Law and Asset Management; Regeneration and Technical Services. The Panel will continue to advise and support various community groups in 2010, to develop and deliver their own activities and events, in a safe and sustainable way.

5. Plans for 2010

Wirral Year of Food (YOF)

Intelligence Led

Members will recall that throughout 2006, the DMO undertook a detailed visitor research study, which highlighted quality food as a key attractor for both existing and potential visitors to Wirral. With the expertise of Wirral's food community, and funding via the DMO's "Marketing Wirral for Tourism" European funded project (2006 to 2008), the Wirral Food and Drink Festival was created, attracting 14,500 in its first year.

In addition, Wirral Farmers' Market in New Ferry won the BBC Radio 4 Food and Farming award in 2008; Roses Tea Rooms in Heswall won the Taste of England's Northwest award in 2008, and was named one of the top eight places to eat in England by The Times.

Last January, Restaurant Fraiche in Oxtton was awarded Merseyside's first and only Michelin star, and along with Da Piero in Irby, is highlighted in the 2010 Which Good Food Guide. Fraiche was highly commended for its food, and was also awarded Best Wine List in the UK, while Da Piero was named Best New Entry.

Complimenting all of these achievements are Wirral Chef Shine, running from May to October each year, showcasing the best of Wirral's talent in the kitchen, as well as Claremont Farm's "farm to fork" themed days, Claremont Kitchen's workshops and other stakeholder activities.

Objectives

The objectives of the Wirral Year of Food are to:

- Raise the positive profile of Wirral as a key destination for quality food.
- Encourage trade for all local food-related businesses.
- Encourage innovation and training in the food industry.

Programme

The YOF will be launched at the 2009 and 2008 Chef Shine award winning Cowshed Restaurant in Raby on the 26 January. The event will highlight the all-new Wirral Good Food Guide, which includes all the very best Wirral has to offer, and give the local and regional press and media the opportunity to meet those responsible, as well as taste Wirral's delights for themselves.

Following stakeholder engagement, a full year's programme of activity is now in place, including Chef Shine, Food and Drink Festival, a business breakfast at 5 star, gold standard Mere Brook guesthouse in Thornton Hough, workshops at Claremont Kitchen in Bebington, a regional food/travel writers' visit, a national food/travel writers' dinner, food competitions on www.visitwirral.com, and the finale - the Christmas Gourmet Fair in Port Sunlight on the 4 and 5 December. This European funded, but traditional Christmas event (being developed by Port Sunlight Village Trust), will replicate the success of the Food and Drink Festival in the 19th century garden village.

Wirral Golf Classic

The all-new Wirral Golf Classic is a five-day (including rest day) amateur competition. The Wirral Golf Partnership, in association with the DMO and England's Golf Coast campaign manager, is helping to create, develop and market the event, which is again supported with European funds.

The Classic will take place from the 13 to 17 September at Caldy, Heswall, Wallasey and Royal Liverpool golf clubs. Promotional literature and a dedicated website are currently in production, to

efficiently and effectively market the event and assist in the booking of places, and it is hoped a minimum of 300 golfers will attend in its first year – all playing, eating and staying in Wirral.

The tournament is based on a similar, but well-established model in Northern Ireland, which regularly attracts over 800 golfers annually.

Marketing and Evaluation

European funds have also been secured to deliver a “Play, Eat and Stay in Wirral” marketing campaign, which will be delivered in the spring, and help market the YOF as well as Wirral’s award winning coast, countryside and accommodation. The “call for action” advertising campaign will drive potential visitors to a high-end competition, kindly donated by stakeholders, on the tourism website. Adverts will be placed in the quality northwest press, and a select number of outdoor northwest rail poster sites, to take advantage of the high commuter footfall.

As well as the campaign, the DMO will continue to put together a number of web-based competitions in the regional press, to drive existing and potential visitors to Wirral’s coast, countryside, eateries and accommodation. These will include Mother’s Day, Easter Break, Father’s Day, summer holidays, Halloween, Bonfire Night and Christmas. Prizes are currently being sourced from Wirral’s tourism businesses, and the competitions themselves are put together by the DMO and promoted through www.vistwirral.com, to help Wirral’s stakeholders during the current economic slump.

A full existing and potential visitor research study, to mirror the work done in 2006 by Ipsos MORI, and evaluate the Wirral Year of Food, Wirral Golf Classic and “Play, Eat and Stay in Wirral” marketing communications, is planned throughout 2011. This will then inform and help develop the future Destination Marketing Strategy and implementation.

Encouraging Tourism Business

A full WTBN Stakeholder Update will take place on the 28 January at the Royal Liverpool Golf Club in Hoylake. The event will help launch the Wirral Year of Food, and Wirral Golf Classic, and give representatives from Wirral’s tourism business community an insight into the other live tourism projects. Feedback will inform future Destination Marketing activity.

The DMO will also continue to support the WTBN through the Partnership meetings and Mersey Rural Leader programme.

6. Financial implications

There are no additional financial implications to the Council arising out of this update report.

7. Staffing implications

There are no additional staffing implications arising out of this report.

8. Equal Opportunities implications / Health Impact Assessment

The target group for the Implementation Plan is all visitors and businesses, and is fully inclusive. The Destination Marketing Office will endeavour that all Council core events and attractions are accessible to everyone regardless of age, ability, and social and/or ethnic background. A number of events/activities will be offered free of charge, however where a charge is necessitated to help sustain the activity, concessions will be made available.

In terms of those with physical disabilities, and accessing Council events and related activities, provision will be made available wherever possible. The Council is committed to being an equal opportunities service provider, so all Council visitor attractions, and public buildings are accessible, or are reviewing and improving their accessibility requirements. This relates directly to the duties placed upon it, by the Disability Discrimination Act 2004, and is provided in conjunction with the Council's Access Officer.

The Destination Marketing Implementation Plan encourages health through both tourism activities such as walking and cycling and the promotion of quality food.

9. Community Safety implications

All events are evaluated by the Wirral Events Advisory Group, which includes Merseyside Police, and Merseyside Fire and Ambulance Services. Public health and safety is of the highest priority and is evaluated by the Group, as well as through individual event plans, and risk assessments.

10. Local Agenda 21 implications

There are no Local Agenda 21 implications arising out of this update report.

11. Planning implications

There are no planning implications arising out of this update report.

12. Anti-poverty implications

There are no anti-poverty implications arising out of this report.

13. Human Rights implications

There are no human rights implications arising out of this report.

14. Social Inclusion implications

The target group for the Implementation Plan is all visitors, and all Council events and activities will aim to be culturally sensitive, all embracing and fully inclusive.

15. Local Member Support implications

The Implementation Plan hopes to benefit all of Wirral by increasing business, visitor numbers and related spend in a sustainable way, so encouraging the regeneration of the local economy.

16. Background Papers

The Destination Marketing Office, within the Tourism and Marketing Division, holds all background papers in relation to this update report.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Committee Members are requested to note and support the contents of this progress report.

J. WILKIE

Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Services

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