



## **Tourism Scrutiny Review**

**A report produced by a Scrutiny Panel for the  
Business Overview & Scrutiny Committee**

**January 2017**

# **TOURISM SCRUTINY REVIEW**

## **FINAL REPORT**

### **CONTENTS**

<b>1</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>ORIGINAL SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY &amp; RECOMMENDATIONS .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>MEMBERS OF THE SCRUTINY REVIEW PANEL.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>KEY FINDINGS.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>APPENDICES</b>	
	<b>Scope Document.....</b>	<b>18</b>

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

As part of the former Regeneration & Environment Policy & Performance Committee's Work Programme, a Task & Finish Scrutiny Review of Tourism was agreed to be carried out and a Review Panel comprising of four Members of the Committee was established. The purpose of the review was to look at how the Council promotes and markets its tourism offer and to identify any gaps in its offer that can be exploited.

## **2. ORIGINAL SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY**

### **2.1 Scope**

A scoping meeting was convened with the Senior Manager for Visitor Economy and the agreed scoping document is included as Appendix 1.

### **2.2 Methodology**

The scrutiny review was informed by a number of question and answer evidence sessions with Council officers and external stakeholders. These included:

- The Head of Visitor Economy, Wirral Council
- The Strategic Commissioner for Growth
- The Head of Visitor Economy Development, Local Enterprise Partnership
- Wirral Council's Heritage Officer

To support Members of the Review Panel, the evidence sessions were supported with a number of briefing papers and presentations. These included:

- A summary of tourism marketing activity carried out by the Council
- An overview of Wirral's heritage assets
- A presentation covering the roles and responsibilities of the Local Enterprise Partnership for marketing tourism across the Liverpool City Region.

### 3 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATIONS

The Review Panel identified that Wirral has the fastest growing economy in the City Region (Valued at £386 million in 2016). This is also remarkable considering the operational budget available to promote Wirral's tourism assets.

Members were interested in understanding what marketing activity was carried out to promote tourism in Wirral, with consideration also given to the demographics targeted. Key marketing activity included short break and day visitor campaigns, press visits, website promotion and a more focussed approach to using social media. Wirral also has service level agreements in place with both Marketing Liverpool and Marketing Cheshire to promote Wirral's tourism offer, with a focus on tourism literature distribution and through their respective websites.

A perception from some Members leading up to the review was the perception that the Local Enterprise Partnership was heavily focussed on tourism for Liverpool and this was one of the initial triggers for the review. However, Members acknowledged the more strategic focus that has developed across the Liverpool City Region and this is positive for Wirral in moving forward in marketing its tourism offer.

Although there has been more emphasis on marketing to the over 55s and families, this is consistent with research carried out in 2011 which highlighted Wirral's visitor demographics. Early indication from new research carried out in 2016 highlighted new market segments that could be attracted to Wirral's offer and the research will be used to help develop the new Tourism strategy going forward in 2017.

Wirral's heritage offer was explored and the Review Panel praised the success of Wirral's Heritage Open Days which are scheduled every year and attract a high number of visitors to buildings which are normally closed to the public or provide free access to those that charge. The review identified the importance of volunteers as most heritage activity is delivered by them. The Review Panel recognised a need to understand what support can be provided to volunteers to help ensure volunteer activity can be maintained and potentially increased. There is also potential to advise volunteers on promoting events through Wirral Council media and other media platforms and further develop their knowledge on Wirral's Tourism heritage assets through Welcome Host sessions delivered by Wirral Met College.

#### **Recommendation 1**

*Wirral Council should engage with relevant stakeholders to develop and deliver workshop sessions for the benefit of Wirral's volunteer groups. The objectives of these sessions should include:*

- *Understanding the role of volunteers and how they could be supported more, where feasible;*
- *Providing advice and guidance on using social media and the opportunities available through Wirral Council media and other marketing opportunities to promote events; and*
- *Delivering 'Welcome Host' training through Wirral Met College.*

Although the Review Panel believes that the Council has not fully explored and developed its cultural offer in relation to tourism, Members are assured that the integration of culture with tourism, leisure and growth through the relevant strategies will address this moving forward.

Additionally, the Review Panel consider that the return of the Giants to Liverpool in 2018 is an opportunity to raise the profile of Wirral through developing a complementary programme of activities.

## **Recommendation 2**

*The Review Panel recognises the importance of Wirral's cultural offer as part of developing the Council's Tourism Strategy. The Review Panel therefore fully supports the drive to integrate culture with tourism, leisure and growth through the relevant strategies and that this commitment is maintained by the Council going forward to enable a more developed tourism offer.*

## **Recommendation 3**

*A strategy should be developed to enable Wirral to take advantage of the return of the Giants in 2018 and deliver a programme of activity that will raise the profile of Wirral. This should align to the Cultural Steering Group and emerging Tourism Strategy.*

There is potential for Birkenhead Market to be a key feature for developing its tourism offer as part of the regeneration of Birkenhead. The review highlighted that the Council should take a leadership role in ensuring that the market plays a key role in the developments within the core Town Centre if it wants Birkenhead to be a market town

## **Recommendation 4**

*It is recommended that Birkenhead Market should be a key feature in the regeneration of Birkenhead and linked to the emerging strategic framework for Birkenhead.*

The Review Panel considered Wirral's transport links to its key attractions. There are known issues as Wirral's offer is spread across the whole of the borough and that Wirral could benefit from travel cards / smart cards for visitors to get value from travelling around Wirral and the introduction of better routes to key attractions but this is a Liverpool City Region issue.

## **Recommendation 5**

*Wirral Council should ensure strategic conversations are held with Merseytravel to consider all issues relating to improving transport across Wirral. These should be linked to the emerging Integrated Transport Strategy for Birkenhead and wider Wirral which should address some of these issues.*

#### 4 MEMBERS OF THE SCRUTINY REVIEW PANEL

**Councillor Jerry Williams (Chair)**



*“I wish to thank my fellow Council colleagues for their help and support in undertaking this review. Although the Review Panel looked at how Wirral’s tourism offer, including heritage, is marketed, the review was initiated due to concerns raised by a number of people around the lack of support Wirral has received from the Local Enterprise Partnership for tourism in Wirral. In addition, there were also specific concerns around heritage tourism assets not being promoted in an inclusive manner. The Review Panel recognised the importance of culture to tourism and the development of a Culture Strategy is very positive.*

*The recommendations made as a result of this review should help the Council move forward in a more cohesive way. Regardless, Wirral can be very proud of its tourism and heritage and the work that is going on for the benefit of our visitors.”*

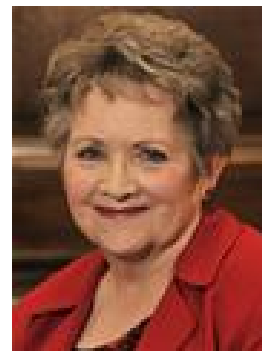
**Councillor Adam Sykes**



**Councillor Christine Spriggs**



**Councillor Jean Stapleton**



## 5 KEY FINDINGS

### 5.1 Background to Wirral's Visitor Economy

Wirral's visitor economy is driven by the Tourism Pledge detailed within the Wirral Plan for 2020:

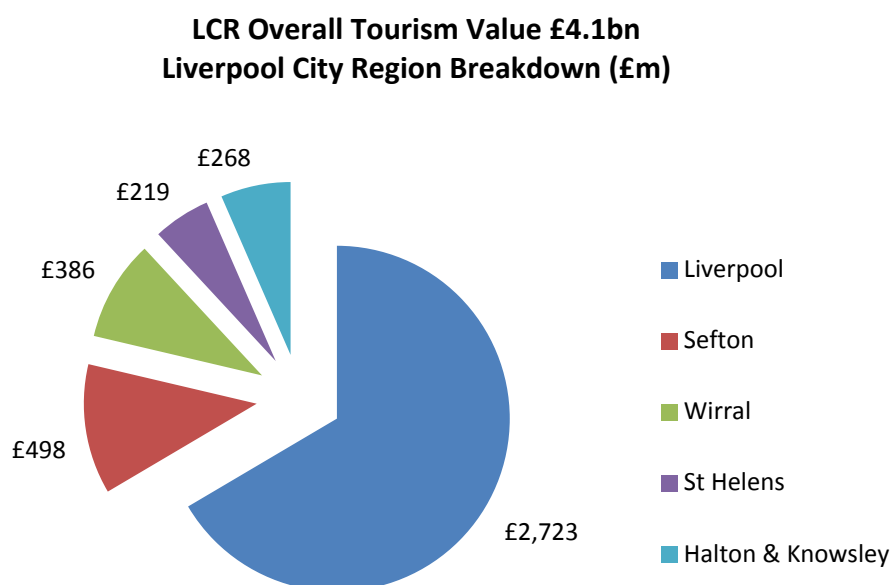
*"To increase jobs & revenue and achieve a total value of £450 million for Wirral's tourism sector by 2020."*

It is also driven by the Wirral Visitor Economy Network (WVEN) vision:

*"To increase Wirral's visitor economy to £550 million by 2025 by encouraging more visitors to come and discover our hidden peninsula, full of award winning surprises."*

The WVEN is a sector led network established by the Council to help drive Wirral's visitor economy. It consists of six partnerships (Accommodation, Attractions, Coast, Food & Drink, Golf, and History & Heritage) and is open to all tourism businesses in Wirral and beyond through annual membership fees. Led by partners from these sub-groups and senior council officers, it provides members with a number of benefits including promotional and marketing activity to attract more visitors, related spend as well as providing networking opportunities and support with grant aid.

The Review Panel was informed that in 2014, the Liverpool City Region Enterprise Partnership (LCR LEP) highlighted Wirral as having the fastest growing visitor economy in the City Region and valued at over £355 million. North West Research, which is a full-service research agency operated by the LCR LEP, reported in July 2016 that Wirral's tourism was valued at £386 million.



## 5.2 Wirral's Tourism Marketing Activities

The Review Panel was informed of the key marketing activities for 2016/17 to help deliver the Wirral Plan tourism pledge and the WVEN vision. The Review Panel also acknowledged that these activities would be delivered by Wirral's Visitor Economy Team with a reduced operational budget of £65K. However, this budget is also supported by approximately £26K in income from WVEN membership fees (£22K) plus advertising and sponsorship (£4K) for the same period giving a total budget of £91K. This budget also includes staffing costs.

A summary of the key marketing activities for 2016/17 is detailed below and these were further explored by the Review Panel as part of a question and answer session.

### 'Discover Wirral' Short Break Campaign

The 'Discover Wirral' campaign was carried out in the summer of 2016 to market Wirral as a destination for short break holidays with an outcome of contributing to a 5% increase in short break visitors to Wirral. This was delivered through the VisitWirral website, national magazines, national press supplements and radio features. The target demographic for this campaign was predominantly the 55 years and over age group and those within a 2 hour drive of Wirral.

### 'Wonders of Wirral' Day Visitor Campaign

The 'Wonders of Wirral' day visitor campaign aims to promote the best Wirral has to offer and to build on increasing visitor numbers and encourage repeat visits by focussing on the wide range of attractions. These include parks and gardens, culture and heritage, shopping and entertainment targeted at families and the more affluent. The campaign involved:

- A promotion on the VisitWirral website
- Promotion within the 2016 Visit Liverpool Guide (spring/summer)
- Promotion within the 2016 Chester & Cheshire Guide
- Promotion through regional magazines
- Radio features
- Gateway poster sites (e.g. Chester and Liverpool)
- Cruise Liverpool website advertising (i.e. day visitor packages).
- A 'Wonders of Wirral' for 2016/17 brochure, developed and distributed throughout the North West of England.

Both campaigns incorporate a number of competitions for the public to enter and these are delivered through various mechanisms, including social media. The number of competition entries received for each campaign is used as a measure of their success. As of November 2016, there were 15,700 competition entrants for the 'Discover Wirral' campaign and 7,800 for the 'Wonders of Wirral' campaign. Although these represent an 11% and 3% decrease respectively against entrants from 2015, it was explained that this was as a result of a reduced marketing budget but these figures are still very positive.

### 2017/18 Wirral Group Travel Guide

The Wirral Group Travel Guide is a new guide targeted at those across the North West of England and beyond who are looking to visit a "hidden gem" in Wirral. The guide will be used to market Wirral's tourism offer at Group Travel Trade events with a target demographic of age 55 years and over in a 2 hour and beyond drive-time of Wirral.



### 'Celebrate in Wirral' – Wedding and Celebration Guide

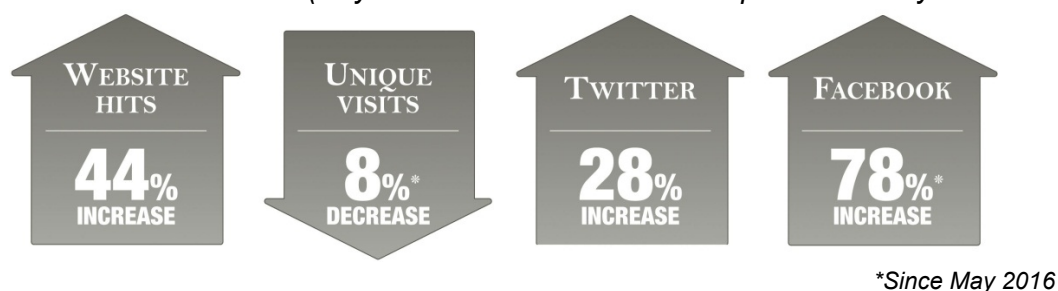
Celebrate in Wirral is a new guide which aims to market weddings or other celebrations to encourage people to visit a particular Wirral area or venue. It also targets people across the North West of England and beyond looking to marry or celebrate at a "hidden gem" in Wirral. As this is a new venture, the Review Panel was assured that the success of this will be measured by officers. At the Liverpool Wedding Show held in September 2016, the Celebrate in Wirral stand attracted 80 enquiries with provisional bookings received by WVEN members and although a new venture, this is seen as promising.

### Press Visits

A number of press visits are carried out each year, specifically targeted at the regional and national press, and these are seen as a cost-effective way of marketing Wirral's offer. Although the expenditure to carry these out is £3K, the Senior Manager for Visitor Economy explained to the Review Panel that the return on its investment is received through the publication of articles online or through national magazines and through radio which generates good PR for Wirral's tourism assets and offer. The Review Panel was informed that the value of press visits in 2015 was approximately £200k based on the equivalent advertising and readership. Based on this outcome, the continuation of press visits is supported by the Review Panel for the positive impact and contribution they have to promote Wirral's tourism offer.

### Website and Social Media

*Web Statistics (July 2015 to June 2016 compared to July 2014 to June 2015)*



The Review Panel recognised the growing importance of social media as a marketing tool. Members were informed that a 'Visit Wirral' Facebook page was deactivated in December 2014 but reinstated in May 2016 following a request from WVEN members and saw its reach increase significantly. More content is now being promoted through the platform going forward. Wirral also has an equivalent Twitter account and, as at August 2016, had 11k followers. Both social media tools are increasing its reach in number of followers.

Wirral's Visitor Economy Team administers and manages the 'Visit Wirral' website ([www.visitwirral.com](http://www.visitwirral.com)) which was originally created in 2006 in preparation for the The Open Championship held at the Royal Liverpool Golf Club. The website extensively promotes Wirral's key attractions, activities, festivals and its coast and countryside assets. The website also features Wirral's accommodation offer and bookings can be made online.

The VisitWirral website currently gets around one million hits per year and this is a 44% increase on the previous year (July 2014 to June 2015). 500K of these visits are unique which represents an 8% decrease on the previous year, but this has been attributed to the visit of the Three Queens in May 2015 which resulted in a higher pull to the website. Although the Review Panel initially queried whether visitors were actively using the site, i.e. to book accommodation or events, it was accepted that many people simply prefer to make bookings

directly with the provider. There has been a small increase in bookings made through the website but Wirral does not take any fee for these. This is covered through WVEN membership fees paid in each year.

The Review Panel heard anecdotally from the Senior Manager for Visitor Economy that positive feedback has been received from WVEN members who have commented that the website is working for them as a marketing tool. The Head of Visitor Economy Development for the LEP also added that a survey was carried out by the LEP as part of its research and this included surveying stakeholders in the Wirral Visitor Economy Network. The Review Panel was informed that the responses reported back indicated a general sense of satisfaction that the website is working well for the WVEN members alongside all other member benefits. The Review Panel was also assured that all booking activity through the website is monitored. However, it was the opinion of the Review Panel that WVEN members should have some responsibility for tracking website activity themselves.

The Review Panel's initial observation around the general marketing activity was that the key demographics targeted are the age 55 and over and families. Although Members recognised their importance as a target market, the marketing for the younger demographic and individuals were identified as segments which could be explored further as part of Wirral's marketing activity. However, Members were informed that its current target demographics were identified from the Wirral Visitor Research Study carried out in 2011 which was commissioned by Wirral to measure efficiency, effectiveness and gaps in the market. The research study highlighted:

- 57% of visitors are 55+ plus with 58% being women and 42% men
- 65% are ABC1s (i.e. more affluent) compared with 51% of the national population.

New research is in the process of being completed by the LEP which will inform the new Tourism Strategy as part of the delivery of the Wirral Plan Tourism Pledge. This research includes looking at existing visitor numbers, potential visitors, stakeholder feedback and the effectiveness of Wirral's marketing collateral (website, literature etc.). The Review Panel learnt that as part of the research, a segmentation model is also being developed with early indications of other market segments that could be attracted to Wirral's offer, including the younger demographic. The Review Panel was assured that these will be considered as part of the new Tourism Strategy.

The Review Panel was also interested in reviewing what other smaller cities are doing to market tourism when close to a large city. The Review Panel was informed that, as part of the new Wirral Visitor Research Study, this benchmarking activity will be carried out and the agreed that it would not be duplicated for the purpose of the review.

### **5.3 Partnership Arrangements**

#### Marketing Liverpool / Marketing Cheshire

To further promote Wirral's Tourism offer, Service Level Agreements are in place for both Marketing Liverpool and Marketing Cheshire. Marketing Cheshire is the agency for promoting Cheshire and Warrington nationally and internationally to visitors and businesses. Wirral's tourism offer is included in Marketing Cheshire's tourism distribution on its website, highlighted at high footfall locations and included in press visits. Measurement of its success includes press visits featuring Wirral, media coverage including Wirral and banner advertising on e-

newsletters featuring Wirral. It was reported that an effective working relationship has developed between Wirral and Marketing Cheshire, developed through regular meetings.

Promotion of Wirral's tourism offer through Marketing Liverpool is mainly digital with Wirral's products being included on the Visit Liverpool website. Additionally, WVEN members have their own dedicated page on the site. The Review Panel was informed that Wirral is currently evaluating the hits on the website to measure the impact the site is having for WVEN members. Wirral's offer is also being included on Visit Liverpool's social media (Facebook and Twitter) and the success of this will be measured when an appropriate benchmark is identified.

#### Liverpool City Region Local Enterprise Partnership

Wirral pays an annual membership fee of £7K to the Liverpool City Region Local Enterprise Partnership (LCR LEP) for research, strategic input and grant support. The role of the LCR LEP in relation to visitor economy across the City Region was explained to the Review Panel by the Head of Visitor Economy Development (Liverpool LEP). Previously, the LEP used to be The Merseyside Partnership but this changed from 2010 from being a broader investment agency with significant resources to how it operates now but with a reduced budget and staff resource. The key focus is on sector development and this includes visitor economy. The LEP works with other local authorities across the city region where they have particular interests in those sectors. It also provides support across the city region with grant funding opportunities, advice and guidance as well as taking a lead in policy and strategy. It is largely funded through membership with some funding from central government.

The Review Panel was informed that under a new operating model, a new way of working was developed. Instead of working in isolation, the LEP now operates in collaboration with the respective tourist departments from all local authorities within the Liverpool City Region. The Liverpool City Region Visitor Economy Board helps to shape and develop the vision and strategy within the visitor economy and also acts as the strategic advisory and decision making body for visitor economy across the region. The board includes the respective Chair of each local authority's visitor economy network or board in the City Region. However, the agenda was predominantly focussed on activity in Liverpool as Liverpool did not have its own visitor economy board. As Liverpool has now created a separate Liverpool Board and with the introduction of membership fees, there is now a more strategic focus across the City Region.

The LEP Visitor Economy Team operates as the official Liverpool City Region Tourist Board under Visit Liverpool. It was explained that the reason for its name is that people associate the City Region with Liverpool but this allows a better understanding of how the various authorities work alongside Liverpool, particularly overseas. Marketing Liverpool was commissioned to deliver the destination marketing activity for the tourist board ensuring that Wirral's core products are represented within domestic and overseas marketing and that Wirral has visibility on the website ([www.VisitLiverpool.com](http://www.VisitLiverpool.com)). Wirral is well represented with all key attractions detailed including the U-Boat Story, Spaceport, Lady Lever Art gallery, New Brighton, Wirral Sailing Centre and the borough's golf clubs. Information on location, public transport links, contact information, prices, and nearby attractions to draw in longer stays are also detailed.

The LEP's responsibility also includes managing the LCR Visitor Economy Board, carrying out research and intelligence and grant support. A key piece of research undertaken is applying the STEAM (Scarborough Tourism Economic Activity Monitor) economic impact modelling process to measure the value of Wirral's tourism economy every year. The LEP's role is to collect data such as hotel occupancy and attractions data which will be put into the STEAM

model to get a breakdown of visitor numbers, visitor spend, day visitors, etc. It was explained that this process is fundamental to how Wirral visitor economy is measured.

The Review Panel welcomed the more broadened strategic focus of the LEP as previous criticism from Members was that there was too much focus on Liverpool at the expense of Wirral and other local authorities in the City Region. The Strategic Commissioner for Growth acknowledged that the previous partnership working with the LEP was not as effective as Wirral did not engage as much as it could have. Wirral is now addressing this through its growth agenda which has much more of a wider partnership focus.

#### LEP Grant Support

As stated earlier in this report, one of the LEP's responsibilities is to identify grant funding opportunities for local authorities across the Liverpool City Region. The Review Panel was informed that a key funding opportunity accessed through the LEP is The Mersey Rural Leader Fund. This is an EU programme that aims to provide funding for businesses and organisations looking to begin or expand their operations in rural areas and is only open to areas in the Liverpool City Region that fall into a rural postcode. In the last round (2009-2014), a fund of £2.2 million was available of which Wirral secured over £1.25 million. This contributed to 40% of the project costs with the remaining 60% put in by businesses. For Wirral, this resulted in support for 12 rural tourism businesses with 73 FTEs created and is a positive outcome.

Although Wirral Council has not undertaken any mapping exercise to identify grant funders for key projects, an exercise to map funders across the Liverpool City Region is being completed by the LEP and the results will be presented to Senior Officers in the Strategic Hub to support future delivery. It was explained by the Head of Visitor Economy Development for the LEP that the difficulty with carrying out a mapping exercise is that local authorities don't always have projects at the time when funding is available as there are tight deadlines for applications. It is understood that this is a problem that has been identified for all local authorities in the Liverpool City Region.

The Review Panel was made aware of funding opportunities, such as Coastal Communities, Heritage Lottery and Arts Council funding that could be available to Wirral. Assurance was provided by the Senior Manager for Visitor Economy that these are being explored by the Council for key projects moving forward and that the process should be helped with the development of the new operating model and the focus of the Council on strategy and delivery.

#### **5.4 Wirral's Heritage Assets and Volunteers**

The Review Panel explored Wirral's Heritage assets and key sites as part of the Council's tourism offer. Members heard from the Council's Heritage Officer that heritage is an important tourism driver, particularly in the North West. It was the Heritage officer's opinion that given the wealth of assets and Wirral's strategic location, it is ideally placed to maximise tourism to the local economy and Wirral does have a good track record of doing this.

Members were informed that Wirral has over 1,000 listed buildings. 65 of Wirral's Grade 1 buildings (buildings which are of exceptional interest) are of national significance. 100 of Wirral's Grade 2 buildings (particularly important buildings of more than special interest) are of regional importance. There are also 9 ancient monuments of outstanding archaeological significance. One of these is Birkenhead Priory with another 3 being registered historic parks

and gardens. There are 26 Conservation Areas which may include listed buildings but designated locally through planning legislation because of their architectural or historic interest. Wirral also has hundreds of other buildings or sites which attract or have the potential to attract visitors.

Wirral's significant visitor destinations include the Williamson Art Gallery, Lady Lever, Port Sunlight and Birkenhead Priory which has changed through work done by volunteers and the introduction of craft fares. Although there is a desire to attract more visitors to transition itself from being regarded as a local person venue, the Review Panel acknowledge that its location is a significant problem.

Wirral has eleven buildings on the National Heritage at Risk Register because of poor condition. However, in the last 4 years, three of its heritage sites have been taken off and this was viewed as very positive by the Review Panel. Birkenhead Priory is one that was removed due to capital investment being matched by Heritage Lottery Fund.

The Review Panel acknowledged that there are challenges to marketing heritage to visitors. The Heritage Officer commented that one of the difficulties Wirral has, apart from flagship destinations such as Port Sunlight, Lady Lever and potentially Birkenhead Priory, is that it doesn't have the National Trust properties. Wirral also does not have the standout sites and most of its heritage interests are relatively small, low key and spread out.

The Review Panel is very supportive of Wirral's Heritage Open Days. Heritage Open Days are key events for Wirral and take place over a nine day programme held in September each year. During this period, free access is granted to buildings which are normally closed to the public or charge an admission fee. Heritage Open Days have been running for ten years with the Heritage Officer commenting that they are more successful each year in terms of drawing in visitors and promoting Wirral's heritage assets. In 2015, there were approximately 7000 visitors over the 70 different buildings which were open to the public. Most of these were listed. Wirral has the second largest number of Heritage Open Days in the country but other areas are catching up. Members were made aware that there is a lack of business engagement at these events but this is now growing through recent engagement by WVEN members at the event held in 2016 and it is hoped this will be replicated for 2017. This is beneficial as it encourages visitor interest in Wirral's heritage as well as visitor spend for WVEN members' businesses.

Through discussions with the Heritage Officer, one of the key challenges is to give greater prominence to heritage in literature and campaigns. The Heritage Open Day brochure now includes information on which buildings are open to the public outside of the actual Heritage Open Days. The brochure is distributed to 80 different outlets (10,000 copies printed), including Chester and Liverpool tourist centres. It is also available online through the 'Visit Wirral' website and on other key national websites. However, it was explained that there is a need to identify other outlets for distribution. It is understood that the Senior Manager for Visitor Economy will be looking at the distribution networks, as for example, part of the Council's membership with Marketing Cheshire does include distribution so some brochures can be distributed through this means.

Panel Members highlighted views brought to their attention from a number of heritage groups that that they are not being promoted as much considering the significant heritage connected with international events across the world. In relation to the Wonders of Wirral brochure, only sites that are paying members of the WVEN are included so Members were concerned that

key non-commercial sites are not being promoted. However, The Review Panel also accepts that it is important for the Council to be able to generate more income and to increase membership. As a result of discussions in the evidence session, there is now a focussed free heritage page in the Wonders of Wirral brochure which also gives a link to the Wirral History and Heritage website. The Review Panel was also informed that work is ongoing with the history and heritage groups to help them promote their activities and events in the 'Whats on' section of the Wirral View publication and website.

Members heard from the Heritage Officer that there should be a closer working relationship with existing community partners and to fully support the invaluable contribution made by volunteers which underpins much of the heritage activity. This is a priority as it was explained that most of the heritage activity in Wirral is delivered by volunteers, including Birkenhead Priory, which is developing volunteer networks. There is also reliance on local history societies and local people who provide all input into programmes delivered by the Council. It was highlighted that a large number of volunteer groups have an ageing membership and are not as active. There is therefore a need to increase volunteer activity as there will be reliance on them in the future. The Review Panel was also made aware of concerns from some heritage groups that they do not feel valued and appreciated by the Council with the work that they carry out.

The Review Panel agreed that Wirral could do more to understand the work of volunteers to enable the appropriate support to be identified and provided, where feasible. This includes taking advantage of social media and highlighting opportunities available through Wirral's own media to promote events, such as Wirral View. Members considered that this could be achieved through the delivery of workshop sessions led by officers and a representative from a heritage group for those volunteers involved in heritage. The Review Panel supported a suggestion made by the Strategic Commissioner for Growth that the Wirral Chamber of Commerce could be invited to help deliver social media training as well as assisting in the volunteering side of the session with a link to their volunteering strategy. The Review Panel also sees an opportunity to engage with Wirral Metropolitan College on delivering a Welcome Host session as part of a wider workshop session. Part of the Welcome Host training is about improving local knowledge of tourism which would better inform volunteers on Wirral's assets enabling them to advise visitors and promote Wirral when they are volunteering at events.

### **Recommendation 1**

*Wirral Council should engage with relevant stakeholders to develop and deliver workshop sessions for the benefit of Wirral's volunteer groups. The objectives of these sessions should include:*

- *Understanding the role of volunteers and how they could be supported more, where feasible;*
- *Providing advice and guidance on using social media and the opportunities available through Wirral Council media and other marketing opportunities to promote events; and*
- *Delivering 'Welcome Host' training through Wirral Metropolitan College.*

## **5.5. Developing Wirral's Cultural Offer**

The Review Panel acknowledged that the WVEN vision is to promote Wirral as a 'hidden gem' but also highlighted the importance of culture and creativity as part of Wirral's tourism offer. The research study carried out in 2011 highlighted that 78% of potential visitors considered

culture to be an important factor. The Review Panel agreed that Wirral's cultural offer has never been fully explored and developed. A Panel Member's observations from working in this area was that other authorities, such as Liverpool and Nottingham have a more developed cultural offer but also have the benefit of being large cities with significant additional resources to enable strategic delivery on culture. Barrow-in-Furness-Council is also reported to have long committed to supporting a wide range of creative and cultural organisations, businesses and initiatives and developing strong relationship with the Arts Council to attract funding. Blackpool was also used as a positive example which, through undertaking major projects, recognised how culture and creativity can support economic growth, including visitor economy.

The Review Panel and officers agreed that Wirral could learn from Liverpool being awarded Capital of Culture by embedding culture and creativity within its tourism offer which transformed many areas within Liverpool. The Review Panel believe that this is what Wirral should be aiming for as part of the Council's 2020 vision. The Strategic Commissioner for Growth and Members of the Review Panel agreed that tourism should not be looked at on its own but as part of an integrated offer.

The Review Panel is assured that the Council is now moving in the right direction with the drive to integrate the Council's Culture Strategy with tourism, leisure and growth. The Review Panel understands that the newly created Cultural Strategy Group will be driven by the Council but delivered externally by those who have a track record in delivering around a cultural agenda. A cultural partnership forum will also exist for smaller organisations and artists as a place to share within a network. If this is implemented successfully, it will help develop Wirral's cultural offer and may also attract more support from the Arts Council for funding which has not been as successful as other local authorities.

The Review Panel believes that supporting Wirral's creative entrepreneurs should be considered to help build on Wirral's cultural offer. However, the Strategic Commissioner for Growth identified a lack of an entrepreneurial community in Wirral. Despite having the assets and spaces, there is no clear strategy to develop this sector. The Strategic Commissioner for Growth identified the issue facing Wirral is that many of the Wirral based creative entrepreneurs are moving to Liverpool when the opportunities to enable them to develop their skills in Wirral should be made available. This is a complex area and as part of the Business Overview & Scrutiny Committee's work programme for the year, a separate Task & Finish review on supporting the creative sector was agreed.

## **Recommendation 2**

*The Review Panel recognises the importance of Wirral's cultural offer as part of developing the Council's Tourism Strategy. The Review Panel therefore fully supports the drive to integrate culture with tourism, leisure and growth through the relevant strategies and that this commitment is maintained by the Council going forward to enable a more developed tourism offer.*

The Review Panel considered the success of the Giants which drew tens of thousands of people to Liverpool in 2014 as part of the display commemorating the centenary of the outbreak of World War One. This was part of a year-long programme of major cultural events. As the Giants are scheduled to return to Liverpool in 2018, Members see this as an opportunity to take advantage of Liverpool's programme of events and develop a complementary programme of activity that raises the profile of Wirral and its own cultural heritage. This could include showcasing Wirral's fantastic ship building history, such as

developing a pop up museum through involvement with Cammell Laird, taking advantage of Wirral's waterfront and heritage assets and promoting Wirral's unique food offer and river views through pop up bars and restaurants. To help develop a programme of activities, the Review Panel consider that this is an opportunity for the LEP to be consulted to assist Wirral.

### **Recommendation 3**

*A strategy should be developed to enable Wirral to take advantage of the return of the Giants in 2018 and deliver a programme of activity that will raise the profile of Wirral. This should align to the Cultural Steering Group and emerging Tourism Strategy.*

## **5.6 Birkenhead Market**

During an evidence session, the Review Panel discussed the potential of Birkenhead Market as a key feature for developing its tourism offer. Although Members recognised that it does not have the same draw for visitors as St. John's Market in Liverpool, that there is now a potential opportunity to consider an alternative use for it with the regeneration of Birkenhead. The Review Panel considered the Time Out Market in Lisbon as a particular example of how a market can improve its tourism offer. Lisbon's Time Out Market hosts small restaurants and artisan kiosks from chefs offering local specialities and international cuisine and has become a top tourist attraction. The Review Panel acknowledges that the negative perception of Birkenhead is an issue and this links to the Growth Plan workstream around the promotion of Birkenhead as an investment location. It was agreed by Members and the Strategic Commissioner for Growth that if Wirral Council wants Birkenhead to be a market town, the Council should take a leadership role in ensuring that the market plays a key role in the developments within the core Town Centre.

### **Recommendation 4**

*It is recommended that Birkenhead Market should be a key feature in the regeneration of Birkenhead and linked to the emerging strategic framework for Birkenhead.*

## **5.7 Merseytravel and Transport Links**

The Review Panel recognises that transportation is an integral part of the tourism industry and good transportation links tourists with various tourist attractions. The Review Panel acknowledge that Wirral needs to improve in this respect as the tourism offer is spread across the whole of Wirral. This should be helped in part by the Wirral Waters Street Car project which would provide a light rail system connecting key attractions along the river front. The review Panel discussed the perception of Merseyrail as an unreliable diesel service where METRO or 'Underground' sounds much more reliable. However, there is a chance to address this with the new rolling stock replacement and the Council remaining engaged with Merseytravel. There is also a need for consideration to having routes to key tourist destinations and introducing travel cards / smartcards to enable visitors to get more value out of travelling around Wirral but this is an issue that needs to be addressed through the Liverpool City Region.



## **Recommendation 5**

*Wirral Council should ensure strategic conversations are held with Merseytravel to consider all issues relating to improving transport across Wirral. These should be linked to the emerging Integrated Transport Strategy for Birkenhead and wider Wirral which should address some of these issues.*

## Appendix 1 - Scoping Document

**Review Title: Tourism**

**Date: March 2016**

<b>1. Contact Information:</b>	
<b>Panel Members:</b> Councillors: Jerry Williams (Chair) Adam Sykes Jean Stapleton Christine Spriggs	<b>Key Officers:</b> Juggy Landay – (Senior Manager – Visitor Economy) <a href="mailto:juggylanday@wirral.gov.uk">juggylanday@wirral.gov.uk</a>
<b>2. Review Aims:</b>	
<b>Wirral Plan Pledge/s:</b>  Vibrant Tourism Economy  <b>Review Objectives</b> The panel agreed that the objective of the scrutiny review would be: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• To review how Wirral's tourism offer, including heritage, is marketed and to identify any gaps that can be exploited;</li><li>• To understand the role of the local Enterprise Partnership and to ensure that all opportunities for marketing of tourism is taken.</li></ul> <b>Scrutiny Outcomes:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Assurance is provided that marketing and promotion of Wirral's tourism/heritage assets is effective</li><li>• That the Scrutiny work supports the Council in delivering the Council's Tourism pledge as part of the Wirral Plan.</li></ul>	
<b>3. Review Plan</b>	
<b>Review Approach:</b> Workshop, Evidence Day, Task and Finish? Task & Finish  <b>Review Duration:</b>  It is proposed that a number of evidence sessions will be undertaken with key Council officers and external stakeholders. It is expected that the review will take 9 months.  <b>Scheduled Committee Report Date:</b> Business Overview and Scrutiny Committee - 24 <sup>th</sup> January 2017  <b>Scheduled Cabinet Report Date:</b> To be confirmed following report referral to Committee.	

#### **4. Sources of Evidence:**

##### **Key Witnesses:**

Strategic Commissioner – Growth

Head of Visitor Economy – Liverpool City Region Local Enterprise Partnership

Heritage Officer – Wirral Council

##### **Supporting Papers / Documentation:**

- Relevant Committee Reports
- Visitor Economy Team marketing activity – Background paper
- Benchmarking Information on other similar local authorities
- Overview of LCRCA Local Enterprise Partnership visitor economy

##### **Involvement of service users / public:**

Not applicable at this stage

#### **5. Key Communications:**

##### **Cabinet Member:**

The Scope document will be shared with the relevant portfolio holder at the start of the review.

##### **Press Office:**

- The Council's Press Office will be notified of the review
- The final report will be referred to the Council's press office for information