

WIRRAL COUNCIL

CULTURE, TOURISM AND LEISURE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

14 JUNE 2007

REPORT OF THE DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE / DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE SERVICES

WIRRAL TOURISM STRATEGY - IMPLEMENTATION PLAN UPDATE (APRIL TO JUNE 2007)

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Implementation Plan progress report updates Members on work completed between April and June 2007. It follows the more strategic approach taken to market Wirral's tourism offer, and so help ensure long-term project sustainability. Cabinet approved a more robust and transparent Action Plan last year, and this is now helping to monitor and evaluate the needs of tourism businesses, as well as existing and potential visitors to Wirral.

2.0 INTELLIGENCE LED

2.1 Wirral Events Research

Annual event research, conducted by The Mersey Partnership's England's Northwest Research Agency, now takes place at all Core and Supported events. This research helps the Tourism and Marketing Office evaluate visitor numbers, spend, appeal, trends, etc at Core events, and helps the Supported Events Panel decide on grant allocation to community organisations. The process includes the receipt of applications from Supported Event organisers, scoring of applications against set criteria, the Panel meeting to evaluate applications, and Panel agreement on the allocation and amount of grant. This data and better informed procedure helps forward plan activity and forecast budgets. The 3rd annual Supported Events Panel meeting is planned for November.

2.2 Wirral Peninsula – Develop and Implement a Wirral Coast and Countryside Brand and Marketing Campaign

Following last year's Visitor Research, the Wirral Coast Partnership is now established, and with their support, the Council's Tourism and Marketing Office have undertaken the following:

- Audit of Wirral's coastal and countryside assets (ie completed February 2007).
- Brand Development and Guidelines for Use (ie "Wirral Peninsula" - completed May 2007).
- Implementation of key recommendations from the Asset Audit (ie establishment of the Council's Coast and Countryside Strategy Group in May 2007)
- Campaign to help brand and market Wirral's coastal and countryside offers (ie to be undertaken from spring 2008).

The Coast and Countryside Strategy Group Action Plan will:

- Inform and steer new and existing Product Development to continue to enhance the quality and range of Wirral's coastal and countryside offers (eg Hoylake and West Kirby Regeneration including "The Sail", Wirral Country Park and Visitor Centre, New Brighton Regeneration, Woodside Development, etc).

- Review, guide and focus coast and countryside operational and technical services to achieve maximum appeal for visitors and residents alike (eg coastal, environmental, waste, etc management).
- Continue to raise the profile of Wirral's coast and countryside, as a key visitor destination, and so help regenerate the local economy (eg River of Light, European Sand Yacht Championship, pan-Merseyside coastal signage in partnership with Merseytravel and Mersey Waterfront, web-site development, trails, etc).
- Identify new, and help enhance existing, coastal and countryside customer-focused tourism products that have visitor growth potential (eg attractions, restaurants, etc).

Closer workings with partners (eg Northwest Development Agency, The Mersey Partnership, Mersey Waterfront, Merseytravel, Mersey Ferries, Liverpool, Chester and Sefton Councils, Business Network, Attractions Group, etc) are essential in the successful delivery of Wirral's coastal offer.

3.0 PROGRESS ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF KEY SIGNATURE PROJECTS

3.1 Historic Birkenhead

Last year saw the official opening of the new Pavilion as part of the full restoration of Birkenhead Park worth over £10 million. The Tourism and Marketing Office have explored a number of ideas, in conjunction with Cultural Services, to maximise the community and media benefits of an official re-opening of the Park, however cost has been the key consideration. A number of community activities have now been put together, by Cultural Services, for the 30 June. This will take place, in this the European Capital of Culture Year of Heritage, and it is hoped the activities planned will appeal to all ages and bring community life back into the park.

3.2 Golf

To help sustain the interest in Wirral's Golf Offer, following last year's Open Championship, work is currently underway with a range of partners, including The Mersey Partnership's Golf Development Manager, to take advantage of the 2008 Open at Royal Birkdale golf course. A number Wirral's courses now offer on-line tee times via www.englandsgolfcoast.com. Tourism and Marketing Officers will also highlight Wirral's assets at various trade shows, exhibitions, events, etc in the lead up to this year's Open at Carnoustie in Scotland.

3.3 Wirral Country Park

Wirral Country Park, as Members will know, is an area of outstanding natural beauty with multiple appeal including walking, cycling, horse-riding, bird watching as well as being of conservation, educational and scientific interest. Cabinet have already approved the recommendation that Officers develop and submit an application for funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund's 'Parks for People' programme. Led by the Special Initiatives Team, the ambition of this £2 million project is to re-focus and upgrade the Dee Coastal Park at Thurston, by improving the Visitor Centre, access, signage and interpretation. The project steering group, including Officers from Corporate Services and Regeneration are developing the Stage 1 application for submission for September 2007. Supporting and planning documents are currently being compiled as well as the outline design work for the new landscaping and refurbished Visitor Centre. It is hoped that Wirral Country Park becomes a key part of the coastal/countryside tourism offer, which can then be more effectively marketed through the planned Coastal Campaign already mentioned.

4.0 EUROPEAN CAPITAL OF CULTURE OPPORTUNITIES

4.1 Merseyside Local Authority Cultural Fund

The funds provided by Liverpool Culture Company, aim to give financial support to all the Merseyside boroughs, and also help to identify events and programmes that add value to the European Capital of Culture celebrations next year. Allocation of funds is on an application basis, detailing evidence of matched public sector funds, and identifying achievable outputs. Once completed, returned and assessed, (and if successful), funds will be released from April 2008. Officers in Tourism and Marketing are currently evaluating the application, which has a maximum grant of £40,000, and will be submitting an application this summer.

4.2 Wirral Maritime Heritage Trail

The Trail has five key sites (ie New Brighton, Seacombe, Egremont, Woodside and Eastham), and a distinctive plaque will mark each. They will be linked and marketed by a Trail leaflet, so telling an individual but integrated maritime story. The plaques will be located in areas that provide essential facilities (eg toilets, refreshment stops, transport links, etc), to enhance the visitor experience. Advertising consent has already been granted for the Eastham plaque, and has been requested for each of the other four locations, to extend the Trail's marketability and media opportunities. The Trail also includes elements of Wirral's American Civil War recognition, which was officially awarded by the Civil War Preservation Trust last year.

4.3 Other Heritage Events, Literature and Walks

Tourism and Marketing are linking in with Cultural Services, Wirral's History Societies, Liverpool Culture Company, the Civic Trust and various historic venues in Wirral, to ensure that the peninsula has a full and comprehensive programme included in this year's Merseyside Heritage Guide. The Guide will be produced in partnership with the Culture Company and pull together trails, transport, tours and talks from respected historians to enhance the visitor experience at participating venues in this the Year of Heritage.

Liverpool Culture Company has also created a monthly, themed Heritage programme for 2008, and this opportunity has now been shared with the Attractions Consortium, History Societies and Rangers for their participation. This opportunity promotes Wirral's excellent array of assets to a wider audience, via the Culture Company's marketing portfolio (eg advertising, literature, website, etc).

Led by the work originated through the Wirral Coast brand development, a series of heritage leaflets is being produced, to better promote the peninsula's historic attractions. To create and promote a consistent quality message a range of templates have been created and agreed by Wirral's History Societies. These will form a "family" of leaflets that reflect the quality of Wirral's heritage offer and follow a consistent style and quality that reflects the best of Wirral's offer.

Industrial Powerhouse is a web based marketing company, which promotes the North West's industrial heritage to a wide audience, regionally, nationally and internationally. Tourism and Marketing has created links between this project and several of Wirral's attractions and activities (eg Wirral Maritime Heritage Trail, Port Sunlight Village, Birkenhead Heritage Trail, etc). Wirral Country Park and Birkenhead Park have also established links under the two new themes of 'Workers' and 'Landscape and Architecture'.

5.0 FOCUS ON STAR BRANDS

Wirral's Visitor Research identifies that attracting potential visitors, within a 90minute drive time, is the key tourism opportunity for the peninsula. Tourism Officers are now working with The Mersey Partnership (ie TMP) and their media partners to deliver a cost effective, target specific coastal campaign throughout the North West. The Tourism and Marketing Office is also continuing to progress the work of the Wirral Coast Partnership, in association with Mersey Waterfront, as well as the work of the Tourism Business Network, Attractions Consortium, Hoteliers Group and Restaurant Group.

Two projects in the early stages of planning are the River of Light, being developed with Mersey Waterfront, Merseytravel, Liverpool Culture Company and Laser Creations International; and Wirral Celebrates Liverpool's 800th Birthday. The former sees the creation of a bespoke cross Mersey laser light show and, the later is for the Mayor of Wirral to present a large birthday card to the Lord Mayor of Liverpool. Both activities are seen as positive media opportunities, at very minimal cost, during this summer.

6.0 FANTASTIC FOOD

Identified in the Visitor Survey, and TMP's and Visit Chester and Cheshire's (ie VCC) Destination Management Plans, as an important part of the tourism experience, quality food tourism is a growing market in Wirral.

The theme of this year's popular Wirral Chef Shine is "home-grown" and again local chefs will prepare a three-course meal using locally sourced produce. Celebrity chef, Brian Mellor, will select five finalists who then hold Chef Shine evenings, at a competitive price, in their restaurants from June to October. Diners vote on quality, presentation and general menu balance (eg local ingredients, organic suppliers, etc). The highest scoring chef will be awarded Chef of the Year at the Wirral Tourism Awards for Excellence as part of this year's gala dinner at Thornton Hall Hotel on the 1st November.

The second Wirral Food and Drink Festival is planned for this August Bank Holiday at Claremont Farm near Clatterbridge, following the success of last year's event, which attracted almost 15,000 food-lovers from around the region. The event is led by the team behind the successful Wirral Farmers' Market and supported with European Regional Development Funds (ie ERDF). The organisers have already attracted some 70 producers, offering a range of local/regional produce. The Festival has secured sponsorship from Cains Brewery and is attracting a substantial amount of press coverage already. Traffic congestion was an issue last year, so the organisers are currently involved in discussions with Merseyside Police and the Council's Traffic Management division, to help resolve the issues.

The Wirral Restaurant Group is an active association of approximately 40 businesses co-ordinated by the Council in partnership with TMP. The Group allows for the dissemination of information on tourism opportunities across Merseyside, and is currently working with Tourism and Marketing Officers to develop a Wirral Gourmet Trail. The concept, to help inform and cross-sell Wirral restaurants, has been very well received by the Group, and once launched at the Food and Drink Festival, has the potential to be replicated Merseyside-wide. Indeed, The Grange and Pyramids shopping centre has already kindly agreed to financially support the Trail leaflet, which is currently under development.

7.0 SUPERB SHOPPING

This year's Celebrate Christmas Festival in Hamilton Square, supported by Birkenhead Market, North West Fine Foods and Merseytravel, is financed by private sector contributions and European funds, and conceived and delivered by the Tourism and Marketing Office. It is being planned over two days in mid-December, and will include a Continental Christmas Market, Celebrity Chef Demonstrations, Street Theatre, a Santa Tram and a number of activities/attractions including a Lantern Parade involving local schools. A ticketed Carol Concert is also planned at Pacific Road Theatre to enable financial sustainability beyond the ERDF grant. The Festival will be held in and around Wirral Museum in Hamilton Square, and by linking the town centre through the use of heritage buses, will provide an opportunity to promote Birkenhead's wider shopping offer, including The Grange and Pyramids shopping centre, and Birkenhead Market.

8.0 ENCOURAGING BUSINESS TOURISM

The Tourism and Marketing team is working closely with TMP's business tourism team, and developing a better relationship with VCC. A series of familiarisation trips are planned for partners and stakeholders to give Wirral tourism businesses the opportunity to raise the profile of their collective offer.

In addition, the Director of Children's Services have confirmed that Wirral Council is the joint delivery agent with the University of Chester, for the North of England Education Conference in January 2009. The Conference has national appeal and significance, and attracts high profile, key speakers (eg Secretary of State for Education and Skills), and influential delegates (eg Chief Executives, Directors of Children's Services/Education, etc). The University of Chester will host the Conference, which attracts approximately 450 delegates over three days, and Thornton Hall Hotel will host the Gala Dinner, and provide the main speaker/delegate accommodation. A project team has now been identified and, Officers within Tourism and Marketing will assist and steer on media and marketing elements of the project.

Tourism Officers also continue to work with the Liverpool Film Office, to attract film crews, production companies and directors, and so raise the positive media perception of Wirral as an attractive filming location. Joint work with Liverpool Culture Company has resulted in the filming of a live broadcast by the BBC, re-telling the story of the Nativity but in a contemporary way, planned for Christmas.

9.0 MAKE IT EASY

The following projects aim to better inform Wirral visitors and improve the connectivity of stakeholders:

- www.visitwirral.com

Considered one of Wirral Tourism's major marketing tools, the www.visitwirral.com website has recently moved onto a new web platform and is currently undergoing a massive overhaul. This includes rewriting, the addition of attractive and informative sections, the ability to create e-newsletters, and inclusion of downloadable versions of Wirral's promotional material.

The site has been live for three years and provides information on Wirral's attractions, events, accommodation, places to eat and drink, golf courses, etc and links directly to the other Merseyside tourism websites. It is a significant feature of Wirral's strategic tourism marketing

activity, and the improvements will ensure the site contains the most current and accurate information for Wirral's potential and existing visitors, as well as its residents.

- **Promotional Literature**

Wirral's Visitor Research highlights that a "one size fits all" approach does not work when thinking about new promotional literature. With this in mind, the new coast and countryside branded Visitor Guide is currently under development to give visitors all they need to know for an enjoyable day out or perhaps longer stay. This, together with the Wirral Maritime Heritage Trail, Attractions leaflet, Gourmet Trail, Tourism Map and History Group leaflets, provides visitors with a range of information of what Wirral has to offer, and all will be soon downloadable from www.visitwirral.com. All promotional literature will also be circulated to target specific audiences (ie again led by the visitor research) in the North West region.

- **Attraction Familiarisation Visits**

A programme of Familiarisation Visits, highlighting the quality offer of Wirral's attractions, is a regular activity of the Tourism and Marketing Office, and Group Travel Operators and the other boroughs of Merseyside have welcomed this. In addition, a DVD of suggested itineraries, for cruise liner passengers, has been produced for Liverpool Culture Company, to again help highlight Wirral's offer and increase visitors/spend.

- **Tourism Talk**

This quarterly e-newsletter helps the Tourism and Marketing Office inform all partners and stakeholders on current activities and developments. Feedback is actively sought to help guide and focus work.

- **ICT Kiosks**

Two indoor Kiosks have been re-located at strategic locations (ie Wirral Country Park Visitor Centre and Woodside Ferry Terminal) to give visitors access to Wirral's collective tourism offer.

10.0 EXCELLENT EVENTS

Last year's programme of Core Events, developed and delivered by the Tourism and Marketing Office, included the International Kite, Folk on the Coast and Celebrate Christmas Festivals, and the sell-out Tourism Awards Gala Dinner at Thornton Hall Hotel. Work is underway to make these bigger and better this year, and to help sustain them without the need for Council and/or European funds.

Indeed, this year's Wirral International Kite Festival welcomes flyers from Japan, Indonesia, China, the USA, Holland and Austria. Wirral Schools are holding a number of workshops and their work will be exhibited during the two-day event on The Dips in New Brighton. Sponsors this year include Urenco and Showtime. The launch for this year's Wirral Tourism Awards for Excellence takes place in June and the 11 awards are sponsored by the likes of Scientiam, The Grange and Pyramid shopping centre, Learning Skills Council, Merseytravel and Wirral News.

In addition, a Tall Ships Operational Group is currently being developed, in partnership with Liverpool Culture Company, to address various issues including traffic management, promotion, etc for the planned "Parade of Sail" in July 2008.

This year's programme of Supported Community-led Events includes the Wirral Coastal Walk; Food and Drink and Port Sunlight Festivals; Historic Vehicle Rally; Beach Soccer; Hoylake RNLI Open Day and Wirral Show. The Wirral Supported Events Panel sat to evaluate applications, at the end of last year, and agreed the allocation of grants for 2007. The Panel includes representatives from the three main political parties, Officers from Regeneration and Corporate Services and, is chaired by the Head of Tourism and Marketing. Members are asked to note that the International Guitar Festival is seen as a Core Event, conceived and delivered by Cultural Services, and will be supported with ERDF until 2008.

Event Research will continue to take place at all Core and Supported events this year (see 2.1 Wirral Event Research).

11.0 FINANCIAL AND STAFFING IMPLICATIONS

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

12.0 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS

The target group for the Implementation Plan is all current and potential visitors and is fully inclusive. The Council will endeavour that all Council events and attractions are accessible to everyone regardless of age, ability, social or ethnic background. A number of events/activities will be offered free of charge, and where a charge is necessitated, concessions will be made available. In addition, and in keeping with the ethos of the European Capital of Culture, all Council events and activities will aim to be culturally sensitive and all embracing.

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, have accessibility, or are reviewing and improving their accessibility requirements. This relates directly to the duties placed upon it, by the Disability Discrimination Act 2004 (DDA), and in conjunction with the Council's Access Officer.

13.0 HUMAN RIGHTS IMPLICATIONS

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

14.0 LOCAL AGENDA 21

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

15.0 LOCAL MEMBER SUPPORT IMPLICATIONS

There are no local member support implications arising out of this update report.

16.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

The Tourism and Marketing Office, within the Corporate Services Department, holds background papers in relation to this update report.

17.0 PLANNING IMPLICATIONS

Advertisement consent has been granted for the plaques at New Brighton, Seacombe, Egremont and Eastham, and together with Woodside, they form the Wirral Maritime Heritage Trail. It is hoped that the plaque at Woodside will be granted advertisement consent soon, and no further implications are foreseen as a result of this update report.

18.0 COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

There are no community safety implications arising out of this update report.

19.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

That Committee note and support the contents of this update report.

J. WILKIE

Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Services

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