

## **WIRRAL TOURISM STRATEGY - IMPLEMENTATION PLAN UPDATE (JULY TO SEPTEMBER 2007)**

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This Implementation Plan quarterly progress report updates Members on the work of the Tourism and Marketing Office between July and September 2007. It follows on from the results of the Wirral Visitor Research completed last year, and the more strategic approach taken to market Wirral's tourism offer, to help ensure long-term sustainability. Cabinet approved a more robust and transparent Action Plan in April 2006, and this is now helping to evaluate and monitor the needs of tourism businesses, as well as visitors to the Wirral Peninsula.

### **1. Background**

#### 1.1 Intelligence Led

##### 1.1.1 Wirral Peninsula

In order to create, develop and implement the Wirral Peninsula brand and marketing campaign, the Wirral Coast Partnership, made up of Wirral's key coastal stakeholders and partners, (eg landowners, businesses, volunteers, North West Coastal Forum, English Nature, Mersey Waterfront Regional Park and the Council), was established this year. A number of productive meetings have taken place to focus and steer work, and with their support, the Council's Tourism and Marketing Office have now undertaken the following:

- Audit of Wirral's coastal and countryside assets (ie completed February 2007).
- Implementation of key recommendations from the Asset Audit (ie establishment of the Council's Coastal Strategy Group in May 2007)
- Brand Development and Guidelines (ie "Wirral Peninsula" - completed July 2007).
- Campaign to help brand and market Wirral's coastal and countryside assets as one attractive, integrated offer (ie spring 2008).

The Coastal Strategy Group Action Plan, formed in May, has now had an initial meeting and plan to:

- Develop a Wirral Peninsula Integrated Coastal Management Plan to "join up" the various policies that have an effect on the coast (ie land and marine). This new Plan will be shared with all partners and stakeholders for input and agreement, to then help support and implement these policies to promote sustainability, economic development, regeneration, and improved land and marine use.
- 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, Woodside, etc).

- Identify new, and help enhance existing, coastal and countryside customer-focused tourism products that have visitor growth potential (eg attractions, accommodation, restaurants, etc).

The Wirral Peninsula marketing campaign is now planned from April 2008, with the support of The Mersey Partnership (TMP), Wirral Coast Partnership and the Council’s Coastal Strategy Group. It will take the form of advertising in the North West’s quality newspapers and publications. In addition, billboards and posters at specific, high footfall sites including national rail and underground stations have been booked, and postcards giving a taste of Wirral’s coastal and countryside offer will be distributed through a weekend edition of a quality, national, weekend broad-sheet.

Working with partners (eg Northwest Development Agency; TMP; Mersey Waterfront; Merseytravel and Mersey Ferries; Liverpool, Chester and Sefton Councils; Business Network; Attractions Group, etc) is essential to the successful delivery of the Wirral Peninsula campaign.

### 1.1.2 Wirral Events Research

Annual event research, conducted by TMP’s England 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 3<sup>rd</sup> annual Supported Events Panel meeting is planned for November.

## 1.2 Progress on the Implementation of Key Signature Projects

### 1.2.1 Historic Birkenhead

The official re-opening of Birkenhead Park took the form of a ribbon-cutting ceremony, with the Mayor of Wirral, at the Grand Entrance on the 30 June. The hundred plus guests included Patricia Routledge CBE; Wirral’s Cultural Ambassador Mike McCartney; Leader of the Council and the Friends of the Park. A two-day Multicultural Festival of music, song, dance and poetry, performed by local artists and developed by the Wirral Multicultural Centre, also took place over the same weekend. This follows last year’s opening of the Pavilion, and completes the celebration of the restoration of Birkenhead Park, worth over £10 million. The Tourism and Marketing Office are now exploring a number of ideas, in conjunction with Cultural Services, to maximise the community benefits and media opportunities of the Park’s re-opening. This includes an event that will link directly with the Celebrate Christmas Festival (see 1.5 Superb Shopping) that is already planned in Hamilton Square. The joint activity will help disperse visitors and give them a more varied, quality experience. This all takes 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.

### 1.2.2 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 Golf Development Manager, based within TMP. He leads the work of England’s Golf Coast Marketing Group, which is made

up of the NWDA; Lancashire and Blackpool Councils; Cumbria Tourism; Visit Chester and Cheshire, and Fylde, Sefton and Wirral Councils; to take advantage of the 2008 Open at Royal Birkdale. Tourism and Marketing Officers attended the Open Golf Championships at Carnoustie this July, joining England's Golf Coast stand and promoting golf in the region. Wirral Officers will also be sharing their expertise, knowledge and experience, gained from last year's magnificent success at Royal Liverpool, with Sefton shortly. They recently supported Southport's exhibition by promoting The Open offer at Birkdale, and highlighting the unique coast and countryside facilities, quality food and drink, varied accommodation, etc on offer in Wirral, and the rest of the region. In addition, a number Wirral's Clubs now offer on-line tee time bookings via [www.englandsgolfcoast.com](http://www.englandsgolfcoast.com) so promoting our golf offer worldwide.

### 1.2.3 Wirral Country Park

Wirral Country Park, as Members will appreciate, 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 coastal park at Thurstaston, by improving the Visitor Centre and surrounding environment including access, signage and interpretation. The project steering group of Officers from Corporate Services and Regeneration are developing the Stage 1 application for submission this September. 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, identified as key within the Wirral Coastal Asset Audit, builds on its coastal/countryside importance, particularly in terms of conservation and education. It can then be more effectively marketed through the planned Wirral Peninsula day visitor campaign already mentioned.

## 1.3 European Capital of Culture Opportunities

### 1.3.1 Merseyside Local Authority Cultural Fund

Officers in Tourism and Marketing are in the process of submitting an application to Liverpool Culture Company, to support the infrastructure, stewarding and dispersal of visitors, all necessary for the efficient and safe viewing of the Tall Ships from Wirral's coast. The funds (ie a maximum grant of £40,000) aim to give financial support to all the Merseyside boroughs, and help to identify events and programmes that add value to the European Capital of Culture celebrations next year. Allocation of funds is based on evidence of matched public sector funds against identified achievable outputs. Once the Wirral application has been assessed (and if successful) funds will be released from April 2008.

### 1.3.2 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 all the plaques, to extend the Trail's marketability and media opportunities, and the first plaque at Eastham is going into position imminently, with the other four to follow soon. The Trail includes elements of Wirral's American Civil War recognition, highlighted on the Birkenhead plaque to be located at Woodside, which was officially awarded by the Civil War Preservation Trust last year. To

encourage cost-effective distribution and environmental efficiency, a downloadable version of the leaflet will also be available on [www.vistwirral.com](http://www.vistwirral.com).

### 1.3.3 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 is produced in partnership with the Culture Company and pulls 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. Wirral has booked two tables at the Big History Show in St George's Hall in Liverpool city centre, planned for the 14 and 15 September, to promote Wirral's excellent array of assets to a wider audience, via the Culture Company's marketing portfolio (eg advertising, literature, website, etc).

In addition, a series of heritage leaflets is being produced, to better promote Wirral 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 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. Leaflets for Flaybrick Memorial Gardens, New Brighton, Birkenhead Park, Eastham and Hoylake have gone to print, in order to be ready for the Big History Show already mentioned.

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 themes of 'Workers' and 'Landscape and Architecture'.

### 1.4 Fantastic Food

Identified in the Visitor Research, 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" when 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 1 November. Three restaurants have now held their Chef Shine evenings and all sold out. Indeed, most restaurants are holding additional evenings where they are now serving their Chef Shine menu due to popular demand. Partners within this very worthwhile activity are TMP, Skillworks, Wirral News, Liverpool Community College and Wirral Metropolitan College.

The second Wirral Food and Drink Festival is again taking place 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 (ERDF). The organisers have attracted more than 100 producers who will be offering a range of local and regional produce. The Festival is a non-profit organisation run by volunteers for the benefit of the region. It has already attracted substantial press coverage due to its location and events organised as part of the build up, including the 'Peoples Choice' Cheese Awards. Traffic congestion was an issue last year, however the organisers have worked with Merseyside Police and the Council's Traffic Management division to help resolve these issues. Festival sponsors this year include Cains Brewery and Buzz FM.

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 food and drink opportunities across Merseyside, and has worked with Tourism and Marketing Officers to develop the new Wirral Gourmet Trail. The concept, to help inform and cross-sell Wirral restaurants, was well received by the Group, and will now be launched at the Food and Drink Festival, in August. The Grange and Pyramids shopping centre has agreed to financially support the Trail leaflet. There will be an initial print of 50,000 leaflets, which will be distributed within a 90 minute drive time of Wirral, targeting day visitors as highlighted by the research findings. To encourage cost-effective distribution and environmental efficiency, a downloadable version of the leaflet will also be available, from the Food and Drink section on [www.vistwirral.com](http://www.vistwirral.com).

## 1.5 Superb Shopping

This year's Celebrate Christmas Festival in Hamilton Square, supported by North West Fine Foods and Merseytravel, is financed by private sector contributions and ERDF, and again delivered by the Tourism and Marketing Office. It will be held on Friday 14 and Saturday 15 December, and includes a Continental Christmas Market, local food and craft producers, Celebrity Chef demonstrations, street theatre, a Santa Tram and a number of fun activities including a Lantern Parade with local school children. The Festival will be held in and around Wirral Museum in Hamilton Square and a heritage bus shuttle service will transport visitors around Birkenhead. This provides an opportunity to promote the town centre's wider shopping offer, including The Grange and Pyramids shopping centre and Birkenhead Market. Events are also being planned for Birkenhead Park, during the same festive period, and the heritage buses will link these too.

## 1.6 Encouraging Business Tourism

The Director of Children's Services has confirmed that Wirral Council will be the joint delivery agent, with 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 annually 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, a select group will attend the 2008 Conference in Cardiff, to evaluate best practice. Officers within Tourism and Marketing will assist and steer on the media and marketing elements of the project.

The Tourism and Marketing Office is also working closely with TMP's and VCC's business tourism teams, and series of familiarisation trips have taken place for stakeholders to give

Wirral tourism businesses the opportunity to raise the profile of their collective offer. Officers 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.

## 1.7 Make It Easy

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

### 1.7.1 [www.visitwirral.com](http://www.visitwirral.com)

The [www.visitwirral.com](http://www.visitwirral.com) website, developed in partnership with TMP, is seen as a key tourism marketing tool for Wirral. It is currently undergoing a massive overhaul, which includes rewriting, the addition of more attractive and informative sections, the ability to create e-newsletters, and inclusion of downloadable versions of Wirral's promotional material as already highlighted. The site will reflect the Wirral Peninsula brand and continue to provide information on Wirral's attractions, events, accommodation, places to eat and drink, golf courses, etc. It is a significant feature of Wirral's strategic marketing activity, and the improvements will ensure the site contains the most current and accurate information for both Wirral's visitors and residents alike.

### 1.7.2 Promotional Literature

The Wirral Peninsula branded Visitor Guide is currently under development, to give visitors all they need to know for an enjoyable day out, or hopefully even 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 downloadable from [www.visitwirral.com](http://www.visitwirral.com). Indeed, Wirral's Visitor Research highlights that a "one size fits all" approach does not work when thinking about new promotional literature and a variety of target specific publications works best.

All promotional literature is now circulated to target specific audiences (ie again led by the Visitor Research) in the North West region. A concentrated distribution takes place to a number of tourism related outlets, within a 90 minute radius of Wirral, for maximum effect in the North West region. Distribution agency, LDS has been appointed, following the Council's procurement procedure, and delivery now takes place from Denbighshire and Wrexham, through to Chester and Merseyside, and beyond to Manchester and Lancashire.

### 1.7.3 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.

### 1.7.4 Tourism Talk

This quarterly e-newsletter helps the Tourism and Marketing Office inform all partners and stakeholders on current activities and developments. The next Tourism Talk is due in late September and feedback is actively sought to help guide and focus work.

## 1.8 Excellent Events

This year's programme of Core Events, developed and delivered by the Tourism and Marketing Office, includes the Wirral International Kite and Celebrate Christmas Festivals, the Tourism Awards for Excellence 2007 and Monks Ferry Crossing.

Tourism and Marketing Officers worked in partnership with the Liverpool Culture Company to co-ordinate the Monks Ferry Crossing this year. This re-enactment of the Monks of Birkenhead Priory, rowing across the Mersey, was just one element of the European Capital of Culture Heritage celebrations last June. Officers are now working with Liverpool City regarding the presentation of a large birthday card, from the Mayor of Wirral to the Lord Mayor, and the provision of public viewing at Woodside for the 800<sup>th</sup> Birthday Fireworks display, both in August. In addition, a Tall Ships Operations Group, consisting of various relevant Council Departments and the Emergency Services, is currently being developed with the Culture Company, to address essential requirements for the safe viewing and dispersal of visitors around the Wirral waterfront. These include traffic management, stewarding, waste management, marketing, etc for the visit of the Tall Ships to Liverpool and in particular the "Parade of Sail" on 21 July 2008.

This year's Wirral International Kite Festival took place, at The Dips in New Brighton, on the 30 June and 1 July, and welcomed flyers from Japan, Indonesia, China, the USA, Holland, Switzerland and Austria, along with top class British flyers. During the week prior to the festival, several of the International guest flyers joined pupils at Wirral Schools, holding a number of workshops and demonstrations. Sponsors this year included Urenco and Showtime.

The closing date for nominations for the 11 awards in this year's Wirral Tourism Awards for Excellence is 14 September, judging then takes place in October, and the Awards Gala Dinner will be hosted by the Mayor on the 1 November. Category sponsors this year include Scientiam, The Grange and Pyramids shopping centre, Merseytravel, Learning Skills Council and the Wirral News.

A highlight during this year will be the European Sand Yacht Championships, from the 16 to 21 September, when approximately 150 pilots from more than six countries will race at speeds of up to 60mph on the ideal arena that is Hoylake beach. The event is organised by the Wirral Sand Yacht Club and supported with ERDF. Months of planning has involved a range of Council Officers and partners assisting on issues ranging from beach and waste management to marketing and policing. The event has already attracted local attention and it is hoped the event is worthy of regional and national media coverage highlighting Wirral's unique assets.

This year's programme of completed Supported Community-led Events includes the Wirral Coastal Walk; Food and Drink and Folk on the Coast Festivals; Port Sunlight Fete; Historic Vehicle Rally; Beach Soccer; Hoylake RNLi Open Day and the Wirral Show. The Wirral Supported Events Panel will meet at the end of the year to evaluate applications and agree the allocation of grants for 2008. 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.

## 2. Financial implications

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

### **3. Staffing implications**

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

### **4. 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, however where a charge is necessitated, 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, 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.

### **5. Community Safety implications**

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

### **6. Local Agenda 21 implications**

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

### **7. Planning implications**

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

### **8. Anti-poverty implications**

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

### **9. Human Rights implications**

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

### **10. Social Inclusion implications**

The target group for the Implementation Plan is all visitors and is fully inclusive. 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.

### **11. Local Member Support implications**

The Implementation Plan hopes to benefit all of Wirral by increasing visitor numbers and spend, so helping regenerate the local economy.

## **12. Background Papers**

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

## **13. Community Safety implications**

All events are evaluated by the 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 and through individual event plans and risk assessments.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

That Committee notes and supports the contents of this update report.

## **J. WILKIE**

Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Services

*This report has been prepared by Emma Degg, Head of Tourism and Marketing in the Corporate Services Department, and she can be contacted on 691 8688.*