

15 MARCH 2010

REPORT OF THE DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE / DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE SERVICES

## **DESTINATION MARKETING - IMPLEMENTATION PLAN UPDATE (JANUARY TO MARCH 2010)**

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This progress report, updates Council Members on the activities of the Destination Marketing Office (DMO) during the first quarter of 2010, and highlights the support being provided to Wirral's tourism businesses throughout a particularly difficult time. The Implementation Plan, in place to help these same businesses, has the full support of the Wirral Tourism Business Network; links directly to the annual Destination Management Plan delivered by The Mersey Partnership (ie Merseyside's Tourism Board), and follows the Northwest Development Agency (NWDA) strategy objectives. This strategic approach has been taken to market Wirral Peninsula's tourism offer more effectively, help local tourism businesses increase trade by attracting more visitors (and related spend) to the Borough, and ultimately encourage long-term economic sustainability. The Committee are requested to note and support the contents of this progress report.

#### **1. Wirral Year of Food (YOF)**

- 1.1 A very successful launch took place in January, with catering provided by 2009 and 2008 Chef Shine award winner, Emma Wombwell, at The Wheatsheaf's Cowshed Restaurant in Raby. Over 50 businesses attended the event, which highlighted the new Wirral Good Food Guide, promoting all the very best Wirral has to offer. The showcase event gave the local, regional and indeed national media the opportunity to meet those responsible as well as providing them with the opportunity to taste Wirral's delights for themselves. Double page press features are planned to appear in OK Magazine, Lancashire Life, Cheshire Life, Liverpool Daily Post, Wirral Globe and Wirral News.
- 1.2 A full year's programme of activity is now in place including Chef Shine, which takes place from May to October; Wirral Food and Drink Festival at Claremont Farm in Bebington; Wirral Flower and Vegetable Festival at Birkenhead Park; opening of 2 Gorge Us, the Edwardian tearoom in Port Sunlight Museum; workshops at Claremont Kitchen including vegetarian and international cuisine; Farmhouse Business Breakfasts at Wirral's premier guesthouses; Easter Egg hunt at Church Farm in Thurstaston; a number of Afternoon Tea events throughout the year, and food competitions on [www.visitwirral.com](http://www.visitwirral.com). Planning is also currently underway for a regional/national food and travel writers' dinner later in the year. The YOF finale will be the Christmas Gourmet Fair in Port Sunlight on the 4 and 5 December. This European funded, but traditional Christmas event in the 19<sup>th</sup> century garden village, is being developed by Port Sunlight Village Trust and the experts behind the Wirral Food and Drink Festival.
- 1.3 The Year is the result of visitor research conducted by Ipsos MORI, which highlighted food as well as coast and countryside, as a key attraction for existing and potential visitors to the Wirral Peninsula. This is reinforced by a recent report from The Mersey Partnership (TMP), which

highlights that in 2008 tourism expenditure in Wirral's food and drink sector increased by 13%, again confirming the strength of the Borough's food offer and its potential to attract even more tourists.

Members will recall the objectives of the YOF are to:

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

## **2. Wirral Tourism Business Network (WTBN)**

2.1 The Council's DMO continues to support the activities of the WTBN, which is made up of over 250 stakeholders, from the accommodation, attractions, coast, food, golf and heritage sectors. A successful Stakeholder Update event took place in January at the Royal Liverpool Golf Club – now hosts of the Womens Open Championship in 2012, Boys Amateur Championship in 2013 and The Open Championship in 2014. Key presentations included Neptune Developments on the continued regeneration of New Brighton and the opportunities available to tourism businesses; how businesses could better use new media by The Mersey Partnership, and the new Wirral Golf Classic (see 3.1.1).

2.2 The DMO are working with a number of Wirral rural tourism businesses to help secure grant funding from the Mersey Rural Leader local authority programme (ie an active partnership, with NWDA funds of over £2 million available until 2013, to support businesses within Merseyside's rural economy). Grant approval has now been secured for the following businesses;

- Gregory's Farm at Brimstage: to develop an indoor/outdoor play and activity area, interactive learning centre, nature trail, outdoor animal paddock and café.
- Brian Mellor Cookery School at Claremont Kitchen in Bebington: digital recording and presentation equipment to enhance his workshops and customer experience.
- Claremont Farm in Bebington: catering equipment to enhance the farm shop and provide in-house training opportunities.

In addition, both Sheldrakes Restaurant in Heswall and 2 Gorge Us, the new Edwardian tearooms in Port Sunlight, have also submitted initially expressions of interest into the Mersey Rural Leader programme, and are awaiting formal invitation to apply (ie 40% maximum grant available).

## **3. Excellent Events**

### **3.1 Golf**

#### **3.1.1 Wirral Golf Classic**

- 3.1.1.1 The Wirral Golf Classic is a new five-day (including rest day) amateur competition. A steering group from the Wirral Golf Partnership (including all of Wirral's golf club secretaries and accommodation providers), in association with the DMO and England's Golf Coast campaign manager, are helping to create, develop and market the event, which is supported with European funds (2010 and 2011 only).

- 3.1.1.2 An event manager has been secured to help market and deliver the Classic, which will take place from the 13 to 17 September at Caldy, Heswall, Wallasey and Royal Liverpool golf clubs, for the very competitive price of £199 plus VAT (ie less than half the price of the usual green fees). Promotional literature and a dedicated website – [www.wirralgolfclassic.co.uk](http://www.wirralgolfclassic.co.uk) - have been produced, to efficiently and effectively market the event, and assist with the booking of players. It is hoped a minimum of 300 golfers will attend in its first year – all playing, eating and staying in Wirral.
- 3.1.1.3 The tournament will take full marketing advantage of the news that The Open Championship will return to the Royal Liverpool Golf Club in 2014, and the Classic itself is based on a similar but well-established model in Northern Ireland, which regularly attracts over 800 golfers annually. A main sponsor is still being sort to sustain the event beyond the initial funding.

### 3.1.2 British Golf Championships

Following the fantastic news that The Open Championship will return to Hoylake in 2014, as well as the Womens Championship in 2012, and the Boys Amateur Championship in 2013, the DMO are now in the early stages of planning how to help all of Wirral's tourism businesses make the most of these prestigious events.

### 3.2 Christmas Gourmet Fair in Port Sunlight

- 3.2.1 This new Christmas Fair forms the finale to the Wirral Year of Food by helping to highlight Wirral's quality food offer, in the beautiful village of Port Sunlight. The event is being managed by the Port Sunlight Village Trust, and supported and steered by the Wirral Food and Drink Festival experts, the Wirral Food Partnership and the DMO.
- 3.2.2 The Fair hopes to include over 100 stalls in a festive marquee, adjacent to Lady Lever Art, a lantern parade of local school children, a grotto and a host of activities around the village. The event is beginning to spark the imagination of stakeholders within and beyond the village, and with appropriate marketing is sure to attract more visitors to Wirral.
- 3.2.3 The Fair is also being supported with European funds for two years; however a main sponsor is still being sort to sustain the event beyond the initial funding.

### 3.3 Core and Supported Events

- 3.3.1 Plans are already underway for the Core Events programme in 2010. These include the International Kite Festival in New Brighton in June; six Chef Shine evenings as mentioned at various Wirral restaurants; the Wirral Food and Drink Festival in August; and the WTBN grand finale, the Wirral Tourism Awards for Excellence in November.
- 3.3.2 Following the agreement of the Supported Events Panel in December last year, grant support is in the process of being allocated to this year's programme of Supported community-led events. These include the Hoylake RNLi Open Day, Coastal Walk, Port Sunlight Village, Birkenhead Park Transport and Folk on the Coast Festivals; and Wirral Egg Run, Wallasey Motor and Historic Vehicle Rallies, and the Wilson Trophy (or British Open Dinghy Team Racing Championships).

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

#### 4. Make It Easy

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

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

The site will continue to be developed and promoted throughout 2010; particularly through regular competitions and campaign activity, with prizes generously donated by Wirral's tourism sector. There has been a 12% increase in unique visitors to the site, when comparing January 2009 to January this year, and the most popular pages are "Activities" and "Year of Food", and it is this last section that hosts the Wirral Good Food Guide, which visitors can download for themselves or request hard copies.

##### 4.2 Promotional Literature

- 4.2.1 At the time of this report being written, a new Wirral Peninsula branded Visitor Guide is in the process of going to print, and includes new images, text, maps and illustrations, and will be launched to coincide with the "Play, Eat and Stay in Wirral" spring marketing campaign. The Guide promotes Wirral's full tourism offer through themed sections (eg coast, countryside, food, etc), and will be circulated throughout the northwest of England and beyond.
- 4.2.2 The Wirral Good Food Guide, part sponsored by The Grange and Pyramids shopping centres, has now been launched and is being actively distributed to promote the Wirral Year of Food (see 1.)
- 4.2.3 This year's new Attractions and Events leaflets are currently in production, and again will be produced in-house and distributed regionally. The DMO was instrumental in helping the Wirral Attractions Partnership improve their self-funded document, by including discount vouchers and a competition, kindly donated by our stakeholders.

##### 4.3 Press Familiarisation Visits

The DMO are in the process of finalising a number of press visits for May. These include the Bradford Telegraph, Cumbria News, Gloucestershire Echo, Huddersfield Daily, Hull Daily Mail, North West Evening Mail, Sheffield Star and Worcester News. Members will recall the visitor research conducted, highlighted that the key target audience for Wirral to attract potential visitors, was within a two hour drive.

##### 4.4 Tourism Signage and Interpretation

- 4.5.1 Due to delays beyond the control of the DMO, NWDA funds have only recently been confirmed, to develop a project to update Wirral's coastal signage. The project, led by Cultural Services, aims to help raise the positive profile of the coast, safely inform and disperse new and existing visitors/residents, and encourage visitor spend in the

Borough. The scheme will mirror all the necessary Health and Safety criteria; incorporates tourism information and the Wirral Peninsula branding; and will eventually connect to the North West Coastal Trail initiative, also being developed by the NWDA. Due to the funding being time limited, discussions are taking place with the Finance Department's Print Section, at the time of this report being written, so payment for the signs can be defrayed before the end of the financial year.

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

#### 4.5.3 Tourism Talk e-newsletter

The January edition was circulated, highlighting the YOF, and the summer edition already being planned. Tourism Talk has been developed to better engage partners and stakeholders, on current activities and developments, and allows for regular feedback from partners and customers.

### 5. Intelligence Led – Marketing and Evaluation

5.1 Members will be aware that European funds have been secured to deliver a "Play, Eat and Stay in Wirral" marketing campaign each spring for the next three years to help market the peninsula's award winning coast, countryside, attractions, eateries and accommodation. The "call for action" advertising campaign will drive potential visitors to a high-end competition, kindly donated by stakeholders, on the tourism website. Adverts will be placed in the quality northwest/national press and trade journals including the Sunday Telegraph, Observer, BBC Country Life, Walk and Coast magazines, Good Travel Guide and Virgin Rail's Hotline magazine. In addition, a select number of northwest rail and underground poster sites will be utilised, including Manchester Piccadilly and Victoria stations, to take advantage of the high commuter footfall.

5.2A full visitor research study, to mirror the work done by Ipsos MORI, will be undertaken throughout 2011 to evaluate the Wirral Year of Food, Wirral Golf Classic, Christmas Gourmet Fair in Port Sunlight and "Play, Eat and Stay in Wirral" marketing communications. This will inform and help develop all future Destination Marketing activity and implementation.

### 6. Financial implications

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

### 7. Staffing implications

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

### 8. Equal Opportunities / Equality Impact Assessment

7.1 The target group for the Destination Marketing implementation plan is all visitors and businesses, and is fully inclusive. The Destination Marketing Office will endeavour that all Council events are accessible to everyone regardless of age, ability, and social and/or ethnic

background. A number of events/activities will be offered free of charge, however where a charge is necessitated to help sustain the activity, concessions will be made available.

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

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

## **9. Community Safety implications**

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

## **10. Local Agenda 21 implications**

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

## **11. Planning implications**

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

## **12. Anti-poverty implications**

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

## **13. Human Rights implications**

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

## **14. Social Inclusion implications**

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

## **15. Local Member Support implications**

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

## **16. Background Papers**

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

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

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

### **J. WILKIE**

Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Services

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