

Wirral Growth Company
Proposed Approach: Public Consultation, Outreach and Engagement

1. Overview

Wirral Council is creating a long term, ambitious vision for the whole of Birkenhead which will strengthen its appeal as a great place to live, work and visit.

We will deliver a programme to improve and enhance the town as a location; one with thriving residential neighbourhoods, acknowledged as a place to do business, and offering a distinct retail, leisure and entertainment experience. The strategy and subsequent plan will provide a long list of projects which could be delivered by the council and its stakeholders during 2019.

Within our wider programme we will ensure Birkenhead Town Centre strengthens its reputation as Wirral's primary retail and commercial centre. Our strategy will support Wirral's growth ambitions and respond to the big challenges we face; from a rapidly evolving retail environment; to a place which appeals to a greater number of people; to a destination providing more attractions and amenities which build a sense of ownership and belonging for the whole community.

To be successful in our ambitions we must generate awareness, interest and support with residents, businesses and other key stakeholders. Our strategy will be informed by in-depth public consultation, outreach and engagement into the needs of Birkenhead from engagement with local residents, workers, businesses and visitors.

2. Bespoke Consultation, Outreach and Engagement

We want to create a vibrant, positive future for Birkenhead as a key part of Wirral and we will listen to everyone who has an interest in achieving this, particularly those who live, do business in, work in or visit the town regularly.

This is not, and will not replace, formal planning consultation. However, many of the findings and conclusions identified should help to inform and shape the future plans of developers by painting a clearer picture of what residents and others aspire to for Birkenhead. It should also contribute to the strategic plans and spatial frameworks the Council and others must produce, and it should provide evidence and opinion which creates a single and focussed ambition for the town centre amongst its residents, businesses and key stakeholders.

Wirral Growth Company – Cabinet Paper 26.11.2018 – APPENDIX 4

There are some existing rules which we will adhere to as we shape our conversations. We will respect and enhance the physical space, character and heritage of the place and provide solutions which improve residents' liveability and experience.

To be able to do this we propose a bespoke consultation, outreach and engagement strategy which is tailored to the area, the community and their social, economic and environmental circumstances.

Our bespoke Consultation, Outreach and Engagement Plan will inform an ambitious set of projects which respond to the many challenges and opportunities identified.

A priority amongst these will be to understand the ambitions and aspirations held by residents, businesses and communities for the future of Birkenhead Town Centre.

3. Key Issues

Wirral Council already holds a range of evidence on the challenges and opportunities facing Birkenhead and these represent a starting point for planned Consultation, Outreach and Engagement.

However, much of this evidence, such as the 2015 Wirral Retail and Leisure Study, has been surpassed by significant real-world changes, including the closure of BHS and Marks and Spencer and the ongoing threat of closure to House of Fraser, changes in employment patterns and growing economic uncertainty

It is clear there is a need for a review and refresh of the qualitative and quantitative evidence we have available to better understand the use, perception and ambition for Birkenhead amongst residents, businesses and visitors.

This work would play a key role in informing future retail and leisure strategies, investigate housing and residential needs and understand future employment and business opportunities in the town which could shape emerging proposals from Wirral Growth Company and others on the regeneration and economic development of Birkenhead.

4. Consultation, Outreach and Engagement Objectives

The principal needs from the bespoke consultation, outreach and engagement are:

4.1 Produce Evidence Base: Develop and deliver primary research to provide qualitative and quantitative evidence from a significant sample of residents, businesses and communities on key topics and issues. This evidence base would confirm what local people and visitors to Birkenhead think of the town and how its offer could be improved. It is proposed to review the methodologies used in previous surveys so where possible 2019 comparisons can be drawn to illustrate trends and shifting perceptions.

4.2 Generate Awareness, Excitement and Support: Host a range of events and activities across Birkenhead to understand the ambitions and aspirations of local people for Birkenhead. Capitalising on events already planned, such as the Borough of Culture schedule and other activities, this work would enhance and build upon the outreach already undertaken by ‘*Wirral Well Made*’ engagement programmes to generate awareness, excitement and support for the regeneration and transformation of Birkenhead Town Centre. In addition to engaging local residents and visitors, there also needs to be bespoke engagement with other key stakeholders including politicians, investors, developer/construction organisations and opinion leaders.

To support these two objectives a detailed advertising and media strategy would be required, using online and offline channels, *WirralWellMade* and other digital properties, Merseytravel and other OOH opportunities and through local media and business/trade titles to communicate and promote the Consultation, Outreach and Engagement events and programmes.

To ensure the Consultation, Outreach and Engagement is open and encourages meaningful exchanges of opinions, it is suggested early work is themed and framed by key issues already identified via previous consultation, including:

- **Public Realm** - Quality, Identity and Place
- **Resident/Visitor Experience** - Safety and Security, Access, Amenities
- **Traffic and Transport Options** - Bus, Taxi, Train, Cycling, Car Parking, Servicing, Loading and Kerbside Activity
- **Economy and Employment** – Job Creation, Training, Protecting Retail and Commercial Employment Numbers
- **Mix of Use** - Residential, Retail, Commercial, Industrial, Leisure and Evening Economy
- **Culture** - Youth, Art, Leisure, Play
- **Sustainability** - Landscape, Trees, Green Space, Air Quality, Waste and Ecology
- **Management and Enforcement** – Litter, Waste Management, Trader’s Associations, Community Patrols, Policing

5. Time Frame/Next Steps

If agreed by Cabinet, the Consultation, Outreach and Engagement programme could be commissioned during December and a detailed plan and timeline be in place for commencement of resident survey, briefings and outreach, events and activities, media and advertising in early 2019. This time frame would see significant Consultation, Outreach and Engagement occur during February, March and April with findings and results available in late April and May.

6. Support for Wirral Plan

It is anticipated the Consultation, Outreach and Engagement final reports would play a critical role in shaping a range of programmes being instigated or supported by Wirral Council, Wirral Growth Company or The Wirral Partnership and would contribute towards the key 2020 Pledges:

- Greater Job Opportunities
- Increase Inward Investment
- Thriving Small Businesses
- Vibrant Tourism Economy
- Assets and Buildings Fit for Purpose
- Wirral Neighbourhoods are Safe
- Community Services are Joined Up and Accessible
- Transport and Technology Infrastructure
- Attractive Local Environment

06.11.2018