

TOURISM, COMMUNITIES, CULTURE & LEISURE COMMITTEE**25th October 2022**

REPORT TITLE:	BIRKENHEAD CULTURE AND HERITAGE STRATEGY PROGRESS REPORT AND PLANNING FOR BOROUGH OF CULTURE 2024
REPORT OF:	DIRECTOR: REGENERATION AND PLACE DIRECTOR: NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

REPORT SUMMARY

This report presents a progress report on the Culture and Heritage Strategy for Birkenhead, approved by the Committee on 8th March. It also incorporates an update on the Museums Service Strategy approved alongside the Culture and Heritage Strategy.

Appendix 1 sets out an update on the action plan agreed in March 2022, with particular points of interest for the Committee highlighted in the main body of the report (Section 3).

The report also requests endorsement from the Committee as to the proposed approach for developing plans for Wirral's next iteration as the Liverpool City Region Borough of the Culture in 2024. This proposed approach is detailed in Section 3.

The activities outlined in this contribute directly or indirectly to the objectives in the Wirral Plan 2021-2026:

- Sustainable Environment
- Brighter Futures
- Inclusive Economy
- Safe and Pleasant Communities
- Active and Healthy Lives

This report represents a key decision as it will have a significant impact on communities. The content of this report affects all Wards within the Borough, particularly in respect of the proposals for Borough of Culture in 2024. However, elements of the report have particular relevance for Birkenhead Wards in respect of the Culture and Heritage Strategy for the town and the location of key assets managed by Wirral Museums Service.

RECOMMENDATION/S

The Tourism, Communities, Culture and Leisure Committee is recommended to:

- (1) Note progress to date in respect of the Birkenhead Culture and Heritage Strategy and Museums Service Strategy as detailed in Section 3 and **Appendix**; and
- (2) Endorse the approach to planning for Borough of Culture 2024 as detailed in Section 3.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

- 1.1 To update Elected Members on progress in respect of the action plan agreed in March 2022 and to seek endorsement from Elected Members as to the proposed approach for progressing Borough of Culture 2024 planning.

2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2.1 Other options considered in respect of the substantive recommendations in this report (i.e., those pertaining to Borough of Culture 2024) were (a) not to deliver a programme and (b) to deliver a minimal programme within existing resources. Neither option was deemed feasible given the reputational risk as well as the opportunity presented by the initiative to celebrate culture and heritage and to highlight a number of capital projects which will come to fruition in the medium term as part of the regeneration programme and which will transform Wirral's visitor offer.

3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 As previously reported to Committee, the Culture and Heritage Strategy for Birkenhead was commissioned in support of the Council's ambitious regeneration plans and was presented for approval alongside the Museums Service Strategy in recognition of the critical relationship between these two work programmes. A joint action plan was agreed by the Committee and an update on progress is included at **Appendix 1**.
- 3.2 Elected Members are asked to note the following highlights, selected to show the breadth of activity taking place across the Council and with partners in respect of delivering visitor economy, culture and heritage outcomes for Wirral.

Destination Marketing

In respect of Wirral's visitor economy, the latest STEAM data released in June 2022 (relating to 2021), shows there were 5.5 million visitors, an encouraging increase of 77.9% since 2020, which is due to the relaxation of restrictions on travel from the pandemic. STEAM is a tourism economic impact modelling process which approaches the measurement of tourism from the bottom up, through its use of local supply side data and tourism performance and visitor survey data collection. As with many destinations, there is still a way to go to return to the visitor volumes seen before 2020.

2021 visitor numbers were down 38.4% on 2019; however, this year was Borough of Culture for Wirral and so had a spike in visitors due the various events that took place. 2018 was similar with events drawing very high visitor numbers. Therefore, a better comparison is 2017, for which 2021 is down 36.9% from 8.8m.

As reported previously to the Committee, Wirral is a partner in the City Region SIF-funded Destination Marketing project, which is enabling investment in dedicated marketing activity to grow visitor markets and reach new ones. The focus of the project is to attract visitors regionally, within a 90 minute 'drivetime', encouraging them to rediscover / discover Wirral. Active travel will be promoted as part of the project which includes Merseytravel as a partner.

The delivery phase has now begun and will continue over a three-year period, providing an opportunity to help recover visitors and further develop Wirral's identity as a destination. This is especially important as we head towards the opening of new and unique attractions funded via Town Deal and Levelling Up and events taking place such as the recently announced Eurovision song contest (May 2023), The Open Golf Championship (July 2023), and Wirral's Borough of Culture Year (2024). Marketing and campaign activity will be weighted towards Years 2 and 3 to tie in with these opportunities with Year 1 (i.e., the current year) focused on light touch activity to encourage visitors back to Wirral and raise the borough's profile through new and enhanced content and targeted campaigns. Regeneration and Place and corporate communications teams are also working closely with Eureka! Science and Discovery to maximise the Destination Marketing opportunities for Wirral which will result from the opening of this attraction later in the year.

Another element of the project is the development of the new [visitwirral.com](https://www.visitwirral.com) platform alongside other partner platforms (Visit Liverpool etc.) which has been commissioned via the Liverpool City Region and is now underway. This will be an essential part of Wirral's tourism toolkit, providing the inspiration and 'shop window' for returning and new visitors.

Museums Service Strategy

The visitor experience at Birkenhead Priory is set to be improved through Town Deal investment, which will also provide the catalyst for securing additional resources for displays and interpretation.

Birkenhead Priory is currently hosting a large globe installation as part of the national The World Reimagined project until the end of October. The project has been supported by of the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority's Race Equality Programme and provides an opportunity to face the shared history about the Transatlantic Slave trade with honesty and empathy whilst recognising and celebrating the social, economic, and cultural contribution of Britain's black communities. *A Complex Triangle* by Jioni Warner at the Priory is part of a trail of globes sited across the Liverpool City Region, accompanied by a broader learning and engagement programme in which local schools and community groups have taken part.

A new collections management system has been commissioned for the Williamson which will enhance the gallery's online offer. As well as programming re-hangs and new interpretations of the permanent collection, plans for 2023 include hosting a photographic exhibition of the Apollo space expeditions following this being shown at the Albert Hall and Glasgow Science Museum. Work is progressing to develop an online shop and to increase commercial use of the gallery for catered weddings. Capital works following the pandemic are ongoing, including the refurbishment of

offices and storerooms to bring them back into use, roof repairs, refurbishment of the front doors and installation of air handling systems to address the ventilation challenges.

As previously highlighted to the Committee, there are also particular opportunities for Wirral Transport Museum and Heritage Tramway as a result of the Town Deal and Levelling Up infrastructure funding for Woodside and its environs. Options for community asset transfer are being proactively explored within this context.

Creative Sector Development

Local creative sector organisations are continuing to develop their collaborative approach as part of and in response to the opportunities presented by the regeneration programme in Birkenhead. For example, the recently established Wirral Immersive Tech Collective will provide a forum for collaboration and cross-fertilisation of ideas and innovation with the aspiration making Wirral a destination for creative technology companies, talent, business, and investment.

The 'Left Bank Collective' organisations in and around the Argyle Street area have hosted and enabled a number of events, including the recent *The Future is...* event held at Future Yard, Birkenhead in July. The event was devised to explore themes around the regeneration of Birkenhead and built environment projects and was convened by the Common Good network who promoted it as part of their series of events across the North of England. The 'Left Bank Collective' will also be a key partner in a communications project, supported by the Council, which will provide new mechanisms for telling stories about life on Wirral's Left Bank and the borough more broadly, aimed at increasing the numbers of people choosing Left Bank as the place to be, a place to settle down or a place to start up.

Birkenhead Park 175th Anniversary

Events specifically linked to the anniversary of the park this year have included a civic reception on 5th April, marking 175 years to the day of the park's opening in 1847. The civic event on the 5th of April was followed by a (larger) public event on Sunday 10th April which included vintage buses from the Wirral's Transport Museum, a funfair, the launch of the Birkenhead Sings '175' Choir, and activities for young people.

The 'Birkenhead Park through the ages' photography exhibition – showing archive pictures and contemporary photographs of the park – was on display at Birkenhead Park's Visitor Centre for 6 weeks in April/May and then became a travelling exhibition being displayed at Birkenhead Central Library in August and at the Williamson this Autumn together with an immersive sound installation about the park. The Convenience Gallery organised a call for artists for a community art exhibition called the 'Not a Cloud in the Sky' that was on display at Birkenhead Park's Visitor Centre for 2 weeks during summer holidays (seen by more than 500 visitors) and the park also hosted an outdoor drawing event to celebrate both the 175th anniversary and the 150th anniversary of Liverpool Sketching Club. A further exhibition is being developed in partnership with Wirral Met focused on people's memories of the park.

During July, Birkenhead Park's Grand Arch was the setting for the visit of the Knife Angel, the National Monument Against Violence and Aggression which has been on tour in towns and cities across the UK since 2018. This provided a catalyst for discussion and engagement with local communities, with Merseyside Police reporting a reduction of 54% in the number of offences involving a knife in July compared to the previous month. In addition, 350 knives were surrendered and taken off the streets of Merseyside during July as part of a weapons amnesty launched on the back of the Knife Angel's visit.

The international symposium on the 'Development of the Green Infrastructure' is currently ongoing with 3 online live sessions which have been recorded (available on YouTube), one last online session to go, and an in-person event planned in October. It brought together speakers from the UK, Central Europe, and the US.

Significant work has been undertaken on Birkenhead Park's application for the UK's 'Tentative List' for potential future nomination to UNESCO as a World Heritage Site which was submitted in July. An application was also submitted by Port Sunlight Village Trust, with support from the Council. If successful in being included on the list, further work will commence in early 2023 with Historic England, ICOMOS UK, and other national / international advisors to develop nominations to UNESCO.

- 3.3 Initiating planning for Wirral Borough of Culture 2024 was identified as an action in the plan endorsed by the Committee in March 2022. Key to a successful programme will be the ability of the Council to work with local, regional and national partners to enable events and activities which form part of the 2024 programme using the resources available (see 4.3 below). This requires careful forward planning and joint working to maximise opportunities along with early and inclusive engagement with Wirral's communities.

Members of the Committee are therefore asked to endorse the following arrangements pertaining to governance, programme planning and communications and engagement.

Governance

Wirral's Culture Partnership and Wirral's Visitor Economy Board, involving both Council and external stakeholders, met regularly pre-pandemic with a focus on Wirral's Culture Strategy 2020 and associated activities. Subsequent changes to the Council's culture and visitor economy team and the integration of culture, heritage and visitor economy into the regeneration programme has resulted in the need to review these governance arrangements. This was identified in the strategy and action plan agreed by the Committee in March 2022.

In light of the need for a collaborative approach to developing Wirral's Borough of Culture programme along with delivering the wider strategy aims relating to visitor economy, culture and heritage, it is proposed to establish a reinvigorated partnership in Autumn 2022 with representation from the Council along with external partners, influencers and stakeholders. It is further proposed that the terms of reference for this partnership should focus on ensuring the Borough of Culture programme is an effective enabler for promoting Wirral's heritage and other visitor assets and building

creative communities. The terms of reference will be developed but it is anticipated that the group will:

- Ensure that the Borough of Culture programme maximises opportunities for culture, heritage and visitor economy and drives place shaping
- Ensure the programme meets the Liverpool City Region objectives for the programme and securing mutual support and contributions from LCR partners (e.g. encouraging organisations based in the city to bring activity to Wirral)
- Identify opportunities to work collaboratively to develop Borough of Culture projects, and sharing and identifying resources to deliver these
- Provide curatorial and creative input to the development of the programme
- Act as champions and advocates for Wirral's culture, heritage and visitor offer
- Encourage and facilitate further place based partnership working to secure long-lasting legacy outcomes for organisations and communities and harness the impact of culture and heritage on wellbeing

Programme Development

A number of strands are in development in respect of the content of the 2024 programme:

(a) **Identifying key anniversaries which can be celebrated or commemorated throughout the year.** This may include specially commissioned events highlighting the birth of the metropolitan borough in 1974 when the county boroughs of Birkenhead and Wallasey were merged with the municipal borough of Bebington and the urban districts of Hoylake and Wirral. Discussions are also underway for example as to commemorating Birkenhead residents Mallory and Irvine who were lost on Mount Everest during the first expedition attempting to climb it in 1924.

(b) **Mapping planned and regular events which can be promoted as part of the programme,** e.g., the opening of new attractions, annual community-led and sports events. This strand also includes ensuring that planned creative initiatives by Council services (e.g., libraries) are promoted as part of Borough of Culture.

(c) **Producing a 'wish list' with key stakeholders and organisations to inform their plans and funding applications to Arts Council England and other funding bodies.** This will include working with Left Bank organisations to explore the development of a Left Bank Festival and supporting key Wirral community arts and heritage stakeholders to develop their existing and new local initiatives, organisations and partnerships which are largely volunteer-led and bring people together, for example Wirral Festival of Firsts, Birkenhead Sings, MAKEFest Wirral and Wirral Archaeology. It will also include negotiations with regional, national and international partners about possible collaborations.

Engagement

It is proposed that two key strands of engagement activity should be prioritised to complement the partnership working and programme development set out above.

(a) A small grant scheme with clear and defined criteria using the revenue budget assigned to culture to stimulate creative activity across the borough. This small grant scheme will culminate in an event in Autumn 2023 bring together funded groups to input to planning for 2024 and develop their activities further.

(b) Focused work to map existing initiatives and potential projects with a range of organisations and young people themselves to ensure that young people are at the heart of Borough of Culture. Young people and increasing their access to arts, culture and heritage is a critical element of the Borough of Culture framework. There is also integral to the Culture and Heritage Strategy alongside a priority to develop skills pathways and link local talent to employment opportunities. This work can be accelerated through Borough of Culture and place based partnership working.

4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 As part of the budget setting process for 2021/22 to enable the Council to set a balanced budget Wirral Museums Service's budget was reduced by £90,000 to be achieved through a staff restructure (now complete) and increased income generation. The work being undertaken as set out Section 3 includes action to meet income generation targets.
- 4.2 In respect of the resources available for delivering the Culture and Heritage Strategy for Birkenhead, it has previously been noted by the Committee that, in setting the budget for 2021/22, £620k budget was permanently removed as a saving. An annual budget of £50,000 was retained to support development and engagement activities. For the current financial year, this budget will be utilised to support the small grants programme set out in this report and pump-priming activities by local community-led organisations to develop content and increase involvement in creative activities and Borough of Culture as part of programme development. A further budget of £15,000 is available specifically for heritage activities. Funding for the Destination Marketing programme referenced in the report has been subject to a separate report to Committee and is comprised of Strategic Investment Fund monies from the Liverpool City Region along with previously agreed Council match.
- 4.3 A financial contribution for Borough of Culture is again expected from the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority which will be added to any local authority revenue budget identified for 2024-25. This will be used to lever additional support from key funders such as Arts Council England for artist commissions and events as part of the programme.

5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There are no direct legal implications associated with this report. The proposals within this report are consistent with the Council's powers under Section 12 of the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 to provide and maintain museums and art galleries within its administrative area and do all such things as may be necessary or expedient for or in connection with the provision or maintenance thereof

- 5.2 Any expenditure relating to the proposals in this report will be undertaken in line with Council procedures. The commissioning process for any contracts awarded in relation to the activities described in this report will comply with the Public Contract Regulations 2015 and Wirral Council Contract Procedure Rules.

6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS

- 6.1 The culture and heritage work programme and the mobilisation of the Culture and Heritage Strategy for Birkenhead are currently being delivered within existing staffing resources, supplemented by collaborative working and additional resources enabled through the grant funded Destination Marketing project.
- 6.2 The Museums Service strategy can be delivered within existing resources, enhanced by external funding. A Documentation Officer is now in place on a part-time fixed term contract as an interim measure funded through the capital programme money for the documentation project referenced in 3.2.

7.0 RELEVANT RISKS

- 7.1 As indicated in 2.1, the risks identified in relation to this report are in respect of not progressing the actions and planning outlined. This would be likely to result in reputational risks for the Council as well as undermining the economic and social outcomes of the regeneration programme and associated opportunities.
- 7.2 Risks in respect of events and activities taking place as part of Borough of Culture, and for community events more broadly, will be managed via the Wirral Event Safety Advisory Group.

8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

- 8.1 Extensive consultation was undertaken with key stakeholders and partners to produce the draft Culture and Heritage Strategy for Birkenhead. Key stakeholders, including funders, were consulted for the Museums Service Strategy.
- 8.2 The proposed approach set out in this report in respect of Borough of Culture planning is predicated on the need to engage communities as widely as possible in the development and delivery of the programme to ensure its success.

9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Equality Impact Assessments have been produced alongside the action plan for the Culture and Heritage Strategy for Birkenhead and the Museums Service Strategy. Associated actions may require their own Equality Impact Assessment, these will be completed as appropriate.

10.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 The Culture and Heritage Strategy contains specific actions for promoting creative and innovative approaches to sustainable design and practice in the delivery of culture and heritage infrastructure projects.
- 10.2 The Borough of Culture programme will be underpinned by sustainable practice and planning wherever possible, for example in respect of highlighting creative practice which uses recycled materials and in terms of ensuring that any events build in best practice in relation to working towards net zero.
- 10.3 The Museums Service Strategy delivery will be in line with Wirral Council's Environment and Climate Emergency Policy and also Wirral's Environment and Climate Emergency Action Plan which has a culture and events workstream (Workstream 7).

11.0 COMMUNITY WEALTH IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 Both strategies have specific actions to promote local employment and training opportunities in culture and heritage and support community development and resilience through culture and heritage activities.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 - Action Plan Update October 2022

BACKGROUND PAPERS

[Birkenhead Culture and Heritage Strategy](#)
[Arts Council England Let's Create Strategy](#)

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
Tourism, Communities, Leisure and Culture Committee Culture and Heritage Update	21st January 2021
Tourism, Communities, Leisure and Culture Committee Wirral Museums Service Strategic Plan	3rd March 2021

Tourism, Communities, Leisure and Culture Committee Birkenhead Culture and Heritage Strategy and Museums Service Strategy	8th March 2022