

WIRRAL COUNCIL

CABINET – 19TH MARCH 2009

REPORT OF THE DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE/DIRECTOR OF
CORPORATE SERVICES

MERSEYSIDE RURAL ECONOMY STRATEGY

1. Executive Summary

The Merseyside Rural Economy Steering Group has recently been established, bringing together the 6 Greater Merseyside Local Authorities, with St Helens as the lead. The aim of the group is to establish a clear evidence base of rural economic opportunities and challenges; to agree a common understanding of rural economic programmes and funding opportunities; and to understand the specific issues of each individual local authority.

This report asks members to approve a one-off contribution of £10,000 from Wirral towards developing the Merseyside Rural Economy evidence base, strategy and action plan implementation.

2. Background and Context

2.1. There are a number of rural economic funding programmes in place. These include:

- The Integrated Countryside and Environment Plan (ICEP), which aims to provide an umbrella project encompassing improvements to rural businesses and the environment in Merseyside. ICEP has been running for more than 8 years and has had a number of successes including The Mersey Forest which works to deliver ICEP through Community Forestry.
- Successful Wirral initiatives include Bidston Moss, where an ICEP Mersey Forest Grant has complemented investment by the Northwest Regional Development Agency (NWDA), the Forestry Commission, Groundwork Wirral, Merseyside Waste Disposal Authority and Wirral Council to transform an area of brownfield land six times the size of Wembley Stadium into community woodland.
- ICEP has now been succeeded by the Leader Programme, under which Merseyside has been awarded £2.2m for the period until 2013. This programme will have six key areas of work:
 - Support Merseyside
 - Equine Business Support
 - Sustainable Biomass
 - Recycling and Carbon Auditing

- Rural retail business improvement
 - Attractions and tourism
 - In addition, the Northwest Development Agency has allocated between £1.5 m and £2m for rural economic development in Merseyside over the coming 3 year period.
- 2.2. There are a number of additional funding opportunities and initiatives that need to be considered, including: -
- Natural England and the Forestry Commission
 - Business Link and the Business Support Simplification programme
 - ERDF
 - Green Infrastructure policy
- 2.3. There is clearly a complicated funding and initiative landscape and the Merseyside Rural Economy Steering Group aims to bring a strategic overview of this through the production of a Rural Economy Strategy and Action Plan.
- 2.4. Current estimations indicate that, in the North West, the rural economy generates around £21bn of GVA relative to the £70bn of urban areas¹. It is therefore important to consider the extent and impact of the rural economy within the context of wider economic development – particularly as part of Wirral’s Investment Strategy, to ensure alignment and consistency with Wirral’s agreed strategic economic priorities.

3. Project Proposal

- 3.1. It is therefore proposed to commission a major two-phased assignment relating to Merseyside’s rural economy including:

Phase 1 - the production of an over-arching Merseyside Rural Economy Strategy to be informed by economic baseline and SWOT analyses,

Phase 2 - the production of a detailed, intelligence-led, fully costed integrated Rural Economy Action Plan (REAP) and associated bids to draw down funding and deliver the defined strategy.

- 3.2. It is proposed that Merseyside partners jointly share the cost of commissioning this piece of work and Members are therefore asked to approve a one-off contribution from Wirral of £10,000 maximum.

4. Financial Implications

- 4.1. Wirral's contribution to the Rural Economy Study will be contained within the budget approved by Cabinet on 16 August 2007 for specialist consultancy services as part of the delivery of the Investment Strategy.

5. Staffing Implications

- 5.1. There are no direct implications arising as a result of this report.

¹ State of the Rural Northwest 2005, PION Economics

6. Equal Opportunities implications

6.1. There are no direct implications arising as a result of this report

7. Community Safety implications

7.1. There are no direct implications arising directly from this report

8. Local Agenda 21 implications

8.1. There are no direct implications arising directly from this report.

9. Planning implications

9.1. There are no direct implications arising directly from this report

10. Anti-poverty implications

10.1. There are no direct implications arising directly from this report

11. Human Rights implications

11.1. There are no direct implications arising directly from this report

12. Social Inclusion implications

12.1. There are no direct implications arising directly from this report

13. Local Member Support implications

13.1. None as a direct result of this report.

14. Background Papers

14.1. The tender brief for the Merseyside Rural Economy Strategy and Action Plan is available from Rose Boylan in the Economic Policy Team, who can be contacted on 691 8037.

15. RECOMMENDATION

That a one-off contribution of £10,000 from Wirral towards developing the Merseyside Rural Economy evidence base, Strategy and action plan implementation be approved.

J. WILKIE

Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Services

This report has been prepared by Rose Boylan in the Economic Policy Team who can be contacted on 691 8037.