

**MARKETING SUPPORT FOR WIRRAL'S TOURISM BUSINESSES DURING THE NATIONAL ECONOMIC DOWNTURN (1 APRIL 2009 TO 31 MARCH 2010)**

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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Members will be aware of the current national economic downturn and the more strategic approach needed to support Wirral's tourism businesses in the immediate future. This approach is to market Wirral Peninsula's tourism offer more effectively and help local businesses increase trade through partnership. With this in mind, the Destination Marketing Office (DMO) has been working closely with The Mersey Partnership (TMP) for the past year, as well as the other district councils, to develop a joint three year "Partners for Tourism Growth" project for European funds. The bid, for funds from the Northwest Development Agency's (NWDA) operational programme, will directly help local tourism businesses market their services more effectively and efficiently.

This report highlights the delay to release funds from the NWDA's programme, at a time of greatest need for Wirral's tourism businesses, and the immediate interim measure recommended to support them through the economic crisis.

**1. Background**

- 1.1 The Wirral element of the three year "Partners for Tourism Growth" project (April 2009 to March 2012) builds on the tourism sector development work that has already taken place. It supports the objectives of both TMP's Destination Management Plan and Wirral's own Destination Marketing annual Implementation Plan. The project also builds on the work delivered as a result of the previous successful bid for Merseyside Objective 1 ERDF funding (ie Marketing Wirral for Tourism - 2006 to 2008).
- 1.2 The Marketing Wirral for Tourism grant helped achieve a number of successes including the delivery of a detailed Visitor Research study with Ipsos MORI; the development of the Wirral Peninsula brand and delivery of a related marketing campaign for Wirral's tourism businesses, and the establishment of the nationally acclaimed and now annual Wirral Food and Drink Festival (ie attracting over 28,000 visitors in 2008).
- 1.3 The Visitor Research, informs the delivery of the DMO Implementation Plan, and highlights Coast, Countryside and Quality Food as Wirral's key attractions to potential visitors. The recent award of a Michelin Star to Fraiche in Oxtun, and the Taste of England's Northwest award to Roses Tea Rooms, reinforces this Plan, with ideas for a Wirral Year of Food in 2010 currently being discussed.
- 1.4 Wirral has also benefited, over the past 12 months, from the opening of the Mere Brook House five star bed and breakfast in Thornton Hough, Herons Well five star self-catering cottage in West Kirby, the Leverhulme Hotel and Spa in Port Sunlight, and agreed plans to expand Kings Gap Court Hotel in Hoylake.

## **2. Rational**

- 2.1 VisitBritain (British Tourist Authority) conducted an Economic Downturn and Domestic Tourism research study (December 2008), to evaluate the effects on the behaviour and attitudes of the public, to day trips and short breaks.
- 2.2 The study highlighted that, although nine out of ten of the population claim to be cutting down spend, holidays are seen as a high priority (ie a necessity rather than a luxury). People will spend more time planning a break to get the best experience for their money.
- 2.3 As the downturn develops, consumers will research their short breaks and day trips more, and look for offers and promotions in particular. Almost a third of potential visitors also prefer advertising as their source of tourism information and over 25% research relevant websites.

## **3. Wirral element of the Partners for Tourism Growth bid**

- 3.1 As mentioned already, the DMO are currently working with TMP on the joint “Partners for Tourism Growth” bid, for Northwest Operational Programme funds, from the NWDA. The first and second stages, (ie Expression of Interest and Concept Form respectively), have already been submitted, and both have been approved by the NWDA, with encouragement to submit a full bid.
- 3.2 Unfortunately, the process has been delayed by the NWDA due to the recent procurement of an appraiser. A Merseyside-wide meeting has been arranged to meet with them on the 20 March 2009, to urgently progress matters, however Members will appreciate a fully bid approval is unlikely before the summer. With this in mind, Cabinet is requested to approve an allocation of £60,000, from the Council’s Match Funding Budget and Reserve, to deliver a spring marketing campaign to support Wirral’s tourism businesses during the current national economic downturn. This is on the understanding that the funds will be reimbursed, from the Wirral element of the three year “Partners for Tourism Growth” ERDF bid, if approved. Members must be aware that there is a risk that the funds would not be reimbursed if the bid were, for any reason, not to be approved.
- 3.3 The Wirral element of a successful ERDF project application would support a Northwest-wide marketing campaign to “play, eat and stay in Wirral”. This will highlight Wirral’s quality coast, countryside, restaurants, tea rooms and accommodation as already mentioned (see 1.2, 1.3 and 1.4), and drive potential visitors to a high end competition on the newly designed [www.visitwirral.com](http://www.visitwirral.com). The campaign will include advertising in quality northwest publications and newspapers, supported by a select number of outdoor northwest rail and tube station poster sites, to take advantage of the high commuter passenger footfall.
- 3.4 In addition, a web-based Visitor Research study to monitor and evaluate the campaign will be conducted to inform future marketing activities.

## **4. Financial implications**

The Wirral element of the “Partners for Tourism Growth” bid for ERDF is for £100,000 per year for three years. Of this, £60,000 per year will be used for specific marketing campaign activity and related visitor research, to support Wirral’s tourism stakeholders. The remaining funds will support a number of Destination Marketing Strategy themes (eg Wirral Year of Food in 2010).

## **5. Staffing implications**

There are no additional staffing implications arising out of this report. Staff support for the initiative will be provided from the existing Destination Marketing Office within the Tourism and Marketing Division.

## **6. Equal Opportunities implications**

There are no equal opportunities implications arising out of this report.

## **7. Community Safety implications**

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

## **8. Local Agenda 21 implications**

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

## **9. Planning implications**

There are no planning implications arising out of this report.

## **10. Anti-poverty implications**

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

## **11. Human Rights implications**

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

## **12. Social Inclusion implications**

There are no social inclusion implications arising out of this report.

## **13. Local Member Support implications**

This report will have a positive impact on the Borough, through the promotion of the Wirral Peninsula and its tourism assets, and seeks the support of all Ward Councillors.

## **14. Background Papers**

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

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

That an allocation of £60,000, from the Council's Match Funding Budget and Reserve be approved, to deliver a 2009 spring marketing campaign to support Wirral's tourism businesses during the current national economic downturn. This is on the understanding that the funds will be re-imbursed, from the Wirral element of the three year "Partners for Tourism Growth" ERDF bid, if approved.