

WIRRAL COUNCIL

CABINET

28 MAY 2009

REPORT OF THE DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE / DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE SERVICES

SECURE AND USE OF EUROPEAN FUNDS TO SUPPORT WIRRAL'S TOURISM BUSINESSES DURING THE NATIONAL ECONOMIC DOWNTURN (1 JULY 2009 TO 30 JUNE 2012)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Members will be aware of the more strategic approach that has been taken, to help local tourism businesses sustain and increase trade, during the current national economic downturn. Immediate action is necessary, so the Council's Destination Marketing Office (DMO) has been working closely with The Mersey Partnership (TMP) and the other Merseyside boroughs, to develop a joint three-year "Partners for Tourism Growth" project for European funds. The Wirral element of the bid, from the Northwest Development Agency's (NWDA) operational programme, will directly help local tourism businesses market their products and services to potential and existing visitors, more effectively and efficiently.

This report highlights the total cost of the Wirral element of the three year project to be £600,000, of which £300,000 is a European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) grant, matched against £300,000 from the Council's existing budget (ie DMO staff time and marketing budget).

1. Background

- 1.1 The Wirral element of the three-year "Partners for Tourism Growth" initiative (July 2009 to June 2012), builds on the tourism sector development work that has already taken place over the past year. This includes the activities of the Wirral Tourism Business Network and six Partnerships, (ie Accommodation, Attractions, Coast, Food, Golf and, History and Heritage).
- 1.2 It supports the objectives of Council's Destination Marketing annual Implementation Plan, Strategic Development, Investment Strategy, TMP's annual Management Plan, and the NWDA's Strategic Marketing Action 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 – April 2006 to March 2008).
- 1.3 The Marketing Wirral for Tourism grant helped achieve a number of key successes including the delivery of a detailed Visitor Research study with Ipsos MORI; the development of the Wirral Peninsula brand and marketing campaign to support Wirral's tourism businesses, and the establishment of the nationally acclaimed and now annual Wirral Food and Drink Festival (ie attracting over 26,000 visitors in 2008). The Visitor Research highlighted Coast, Countryside and Quality Food as Wirral's key attractors to potential visitors, and the study now informs the delivery of the DMO Implementation Plan.

2. Wirral Element of the “Partners for Tourism Growth” Project

There are three strategic components of the three-year project:

2.1 Marketing

Each year a spring campaign to “Play, Eat and Stay in Wirral” will be advertised in the quality, northwest press eg Guardian, Independent, and Telegraph travel supplements as well as Cheshire, Cumbria and Lancashire Life magazines. Also, a select number of outdoor northwest city centre bus and rail station sites will be utilised to take advantage of the high commuter passenger footfall. The campaign is informed by VisitBritain’s national research, which highlights the increase in domestic holidaying, while reflecting the current economic downturn. The advertising will drive potential visitors to a high-end competition for a free weekend in Wirral on www.visitwirral.com and the campaign will be monitored and evaluated via the website. The campaign will be repeated over the three-year duration of the project to directly support Wirral’s tourism businesses. It will also highlight specific offers dependent on the publication (eg Walk and Cycle Trail, Gourmet Trail, etc). Reference will be made to Wirral’s increasing quality food (eg Michelin star rated Fraiche, Taste of England’s Northwest award winner, Roses Tea Room, etc); quality accommodation offer (eg national award-winning Hillbark Hotel, five star awarded Mere Brook House, etc), and editorial will be cultivated where possible.

2.2 Events

Two new events will be developed:

2.2.1 Wirral Golf Classic

The Wirral Golf Classic, will be developed and delivered by the new Wirral Golf Partnership, and supported by the Council’s DMO and England’s Golf Coast Development Manager (i.e. funded by The Mersey Partnership). Details are yet to be confirmed. However, the concept is to market an amateur four day knock-out competition to golfers in England’s North West, with the Final taking place at the prestigious Royal Liverpool Golf Club. The event will promote Wirral’s excellent golf offer, together with quality accommodation and restaurants, to golfers, their friends and family. This package will be marketed via target specific media, and the Golf Partnership’s own extended network, to help regenerate the local tourism economy during the current financial difficulties.

2.2.2 Wirral Christmas Gourmet Fair in Port Sunlight

The Wirral Christmas Gourmet Fair in Port Sunlight will be launched during Wirral’s planned “Year of Food” in 2010, and will incorporate the now established Food and Drink Festival, as well as Chef Shine, various demonstrations, tastings and workshops, all developed and delivered by key tourism stakeholders. The Fair will be steered and delivered by members of the Food Partnership, including the national award-winning organisers of the Wirral Farmers' Market, Food and Drink Festival organisers, and Port Sunlight Village Trust. The Council’s DMO will support the event with marketing expertise and administration.

2.3 Visitor Research

In the final full year of the project, a detailed visitor research study will be undertaken, which will provide in-depth, visitor profile information. This research follows the study, conducted by Ipsos MORI in 2006, and will drive future Destination Marketing action plans. The information gathered

will also help monitor the Wirral element of the “Partners for Tourism Growth” project, and be shared with all project partners and tourism stakeholders.

3. Financial implications

- 3.1 The total cost of the Wirral element of the three-year “Partners for Tourism Growth” project is £600,000, of which 50% (ie £300,000) is ERDF, from the NWDA’s operational programme, 50% matched against £300,000 from the Council’s existing budget (ie DMO staff time and marketing budget).
- 3.2 Cabinet is requested to agree the allocation of £300,000, as 50% matched funding from the Council’s existing resources, (ie DMO staff time and marketing budget), in order to draw down the 50% ERDF grant of £300,000.

4. 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.

5. Equal Opportunities implications

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

6. Community Safety implications

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

7. Local Agenda 21 implications

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

8. Planning implications

There are no planning implications arising out of this report.

9. Anti-poverty implications

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

10. Human Rights implications

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

11. Social Inclusion implications

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

12. Local Member Support implications

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

13. Background Papers

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

RECOMMENDATIONS

To enable the Wirral element of the “Partners for Tourism Growth” project to be successfully delivered, Cabinet is requested to agree the allocation of £300,000, from the Council’s existing resources, (ie Destination Marketing Office staff time and marketing budget), over the three-year period stated. This will enable an application for £300,000, of European Regional Development Funds, to be secured from the Northwest Development Agency’s operational programme.

J. WILKIE

Deputy Chief Executive/Director of Corporate Services

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