
SUPPORTING WIRRAL'S TOURISM BUSINESSES DURING THE NATIONAL ECONOMIC DOWNTURN

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

To help local tourism businesses sustain and increase trade, immediate action was necessary, during the current national economic downturn. With this in mind, the Council's Destination Marketing Office (DMO) has been working closely with The Mersey Partnership (TMP) and the other Merseyside boroughs, over past six months to develop a joint three-year "Partners for Tourism Growth" bid (ie July 2009 to June 2012) for European funding. This funding has now been secured, from the Northwest Development Agency's (NWDA) operational programme, and the Wirral element will directly help local tourism businesses market their products and services more efficiently and effectively.

This report highlights the total cost of the Wirral element of the 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). Members are asked to note that Cabinet approval was agreed on the 28 May 2009 for £300,000 of existing Council resources to match and access £300,000 of European funding.

The Mersey Partnership which has co-ordinated the bid will act as the accountable body for this three year project and accountable body would be responsible for any claw back as a result of under performance on any of the projected outcomes on the part of any of the partners. Accordingly TMP has asked that the Council agrees to underwrite any claw back that it would be subject to as a result of any under performance on the predicted Wirral outcomes. TMP has asked the other participating authorities to do the same with regard to their predicted outcomes. Cabinet is therefore requested to underwrite this £300,000 ERDF grant from the Council's matched funding budget and reserve.

1. Background

- 1.1 Members are asked to note that 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 active Partnerships, (ie Accommodation, Attractions, Coast, Food, Golf and, History and Heritage).
- 1.2 It supports the objectives of the Council's Destination Marketing annual Implementation Plan; the Strategic Development's Investment Strategy; TMP's annual Destination 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).

2. Wirral Element of the “Partners for Tourism Growth” Project (July 2009 to June 2012)

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, trade journals and 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 will be informed by VisitBritain’s national research, which currently 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. Particular 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 (eg Hillbark Hotel in Royden Park, recently awarded the Gold Standard by VisitBritain; five star Mere Brook House in Thornton Hough, etc), and articles press will be cultivated in the press where possible. It will also highlight specific Wirral offers dependent on the publication (eg Walk and Cycle Trail, Gourmet Food Guide, Nature Trail, etc).

2.2 Events

Two new events will be developed:

2.2.1 *Wirral Golf Classic*

Two years funding has been secured for an all-new Wirral Golf Classic, which will be developed and delivered by a golf event expert, currently being procured. The Classic will be steered by the new Wirral Golf Partnership, and supported by the Council’s DMO and England’s Golf Coast Development Manager. It will highlight and package Wirral’s quality golf offer together with quality accommodation and restaurants, tearooms, etc. This package will then be marketed regionally and nationally, to potential golfers via target specific media, and the Partnership’s own extended network.

2.2.2 *Wirral Christmas Gourmet Fair in Port Sunlight*

Two years funding has also been secured, for an all-new Wirral Christmas Gourmet Fair in Port Sunlight, which will be launched as the finale of the Wirral Year of Food, “Taste of Wirral 2010”. The Year will incorporate the now established Food and Drink Festival, as well as Chef Shine, various demonstrations, tastings and workshops, all developed and delivered by tourism stakeholders. The Fair will be developed and delivered by the Port Sunlight Village Trust, Wirral Farmers' Market, and Food and Drink Festival organisers, and the Council’s DMO will provide event 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 and evaluate the campaigns mentioned, as part of 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) has already been approved by Cabinet on the 28 May 2009, and committed from the Council’s existing Destination Marketing budget (ie staff time and marketing budget). This enabled the other 50% ERDF grant, from the NWDA’s operational programme, to be secured.
- 3.2 The Mersey Partnership which has co-ordinated the bid will act as the accountable body for this three year project and accountable body would be responsible for any claw back as a result of under performance on any of the projected outcomes on the part of any of the partners. Accordingly TMP has asked that the Council agrees to underwrite any claw back that it would be subject to as a result of any under performance on the predicted Wirral outcomes. TMP has asked the other participating authorities to do the same with regard to their predicted outcomes. Cabinet is therefore requested to underwrite this £300,000 ERDF grant from the Council’s matched funding budget and reserve.

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, of the Corporate Services Department.

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.

RECOMMENDATION

Cabinet is requested to approve the underwriting of £300,000 of Regional Development Funding from the Council's matched funding budget and reserve.

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.