

REPORT OF MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER

SUBJECT: WALES COAST PATH MARKETING

Purpose of report

To provide Members with an update on the Authority's contract to support the marketing of the Wales Coast Path.

Background

Since 2007 the Welsh Government has invested in improving public access to the Welsh coast through its Coastal Access Improvement Programme (CAIP). The Wales Coast Path has been developed by the Welsh Government (WG) in partnership with Natural Resources Wales (formerly Countryside Council for Wales), sixteen local authorities and two National Parks.

The idea was developed out of a desire to build on the economic success of the Pembrokeshire Coast Path National Trail and the Isle of Anglesey Coastal Path – both of which are major contributors to the visitor economy of Wales. While the Coast Path is important for the Welsh economy, it is also seen as an important initiative in encouraging both locals and visitors to discover and enjoy Wales' outdoor spaces and the health and welfare benefits it can provide.

Welsh Government Minister, John Griffiths AM, officially launched the Path in May 2012 as part of a series of launch events held across Wales, generating UK national and international media coverage.

The creation of the Path was a Welsh Government priority and continues to be a high-profile initiative delivering significant economic benefits as, arguably, Wales' leading tourist attraction¹.

The Path is a world-first, as the only continuous path running right around the Welsh coast. It covers 870 miles, from Chepstow in the south to Queensferry in the north. When linked with Offa's Dyke Path National Trail, the route provides a 1,030 mile continuous walking route around the whole of Wales.

Marketing the Wales Coast Path

In March 2011 the Authority was awarded a two-year contract to market the Wales Coast Path on behalf of WG, following a successful competitive tendering process administered at the time by the Countryside Council for Wales.¹

The Authority's experience and background in developing and marketing the Pembrokeshire Coast Path was a key factor in securing the marketing contract and has proved invaluable in delivering all elements of the marketing programme.

¹ The Wales Coast Path was voted as the 'best region on Earth' to visit by the Lonely Planet travel Guide 2012 and topped a recent *Western Mail* reader poll as the nation's favourite tourist attraction.

The contract enabled the Authority to appoint a Marketing Officer to deliver both the Wales Coast Path marketing work and to develop the Authority's marketing programme.

Since the original contract was awarded, Natural Resources Wales (NRW) has extended both the scope and duration of the contract, which is now due to end in July 2013. A further temporary extension of three months is currently being explored by NRW.

The current contract value stands at £72k, with the funding being used to support the Marketing Officer post and invest in various marketing initiatives, including the Authority's successful 60th anniversary retro poster campaign, shortlisted this year for a prestigious Chartered Institute of Marketing Award and recognised in the Pembrokeshire Tourism Awards.

Headline achievements (March 2011 – June 2013)

The Authority was contracted to deliver five key elements of an ambitious marketing programme. Authority officers have worked closely with WG, NRW, Visit Wales, local authorities and partner organisations across Wales to deliver the marketing programme. Key achievements in the five key contract elements include:

1. Website

Led the procurement for the contract to secure a specialist agency to develop the Wales Coast Path website; created the site structure and produced all site content. Officers also have on-going responsibility for monitoring and updating site content.

The website averages over 13,000 unique visitors per month, with over 145,000 visitors to the site since its launch in May 2012.

2. Social networking

Direct responsibility for promoting the Path and engaging with users via social networking sites including Facebook, Twitter, Flickr and Youtube. Current user figures (below) demonstrate an active following and interest in Wales Coast Path 'news', with figures growing on average 10% each month.

❖ 2,215 Facebook 'likes'

❖ 4,433 Twitter followers

❖ 7,060 'views' of the official Wales Coast Path video on Youtube

3. PR

Led the procurement to secure an external agency to create an official Wales Coast Path 'Media Pack', and procured an agency to deliver Welsh local, national and UK regional PR. We are also contracted to handle on-going management of the PR agency to deliver high-profile campaigns that have secured an advertising value equivalent of £1 million with 'Opportunities to See' at 200 million.

4. Publications

Created content for a suite of eight Wales Coast Path leaflets and procured design print and distribution services to support the production and distribution of an initial run of 100,000 leaflets, distributed across Wales.

5. Events

Key involvement in procuring and managing a PR agency to develop a series of official launch events across Wales, including the official opening of the Path by Welsh Government Minister John Griffiths AM at the Cardiff Bay event.

Over 10,000 people attended the three events, which secured national and international print, broadcast and online coverage.

Key outcomes

After the first two years of delivering a dedicated marketing programme, the Wales Coast Path is viewed as Wales' leading visitor attraction, with 2.89 million visits on the Path in 2012². The Path has delivered significant economic benefits to the Welsh economy, with a total visitor spend in excess of £33 million.

The brand is internationally recognised and the Path is viewed as a unique Welsh tourism 'product' generating quality media and world-class recognition.

The Path provides a major new opportunity to encourage physical activity in communities around the Welsh coast and it offers free access to the outdoors for everyone, supporting improved physical and mental health.

Financial considerations

By securing the Wales Coast Path marketing contract, the Authority has generated £72k over two years to deliver the national marketing programme. This significant contract has also allowed the Authority to progress its own marketing work.

Risk considerations

The Wales Coast Path marketing contract places few financial risks on the Authority as the contract is funded by the Welsh Government.

Compliance

The Wales Coast Path marketing contract has an indirect benefit in assisting the Authority in achieving a range of priority outcomes including:

- The Authority's second purpose as detailed in the Environment Act 1995
- Improvement outcomes 2, 3 and 4 as detailed in the 2013-14 Corporate Strategy

Human Rights/Equality impact issues

The Path is a resource for people of all ages, abilities and backgrounds to access, whether visiting or as a resident of Wales. The associated marketing of the Path offers opportunities to target specific communities and groups along the Welsh coast to promote the Path as a fun, free and healthy way to enjoy the outdoors.

² *The Economic Impact of Wales Coast Path Visitor Spending on Wales 2012*

Biodiversity implications/Sustainability appraisal

The creation of the Path and the associated marketing of it provides an opportunity to engage with national and international audiences on the issues of environmental protection.

Welsh Language statement

All marketing of the Path meets the Welsh Language statement requirements of Natural Resources Wales.

Conclusion

Delivering the Wales Coast Path marketing programme has provided numerous benefits to the Authority. Working at a national level on a government priority project has not only enhanced the Authority's reputation and political profile at an all-Wales level, but has also presented an opportunity to directly shape and influence the marketing of Wales' leading visitor attraction.

Securing the contract, and subsequent extensions, demonstrates a national confidence in the Authority's ability and commitment to deliver on this important area of work. It has also provided a significant opportunity to showcase the work and skills of the Communications Team at a national level, and demonstrate a new and innovative approach to generating income as a way of supporting service delivery.

Recommendation

Members are asked to note the update report.

Background documents

1. *The Economic Impact of Wales Coast Path Visitor Spending on Wales 2012*
2. *Marketing the Wales Coast Path – All-Wales Marketing Plan 2010*

Author: Marie Edwards – Marketing & Communications Manager