

<b>Irish Open 2017</b>	<b>8<sup>th</sup> November 2016</b>
<b>To: The Leisure and Development Committee For Information</b>	

<b>Linkage to Council Strategy (2015-19)</b>	
<b>Strategic Theme</b>	Accelerating our Economy and Contributing to Prosperity
<b>Outcome</b>	
<b>Lead Officer</b>	Director of Leisure and Development
<b>Cost: (If applicable)</b>	N/A

**The purpose of this report is to provide Members with information on the initial planning of the 2017 Irish Open.**

### **Golf Tourism**

The following is an extract from *Developing and Harnessing Golf Tourism and Film Tourism as Economic Drivers* by Dr Peter Bolan, Dr Karise Hutchinson, Mr Matthew Kearney.

Golf tourism has been valued at some US\$20 billion with over 50 million golf tourists travelling the world to play on some of the estimated 32,000 courses (Hudson & Hudson, 2010). Northern Ireland is in a prime position to capture a larger slice of this lucrative market due to an excellent golf product in terms of courses and venues, the extremely high profile of the country's top golfers (Rory McIlroy, Graeme McDowell and Darren Clarke) and an ever increasing portfolio of events (particularly the return of the Open in 2019).

Golf tourists typically spend 2 - 3 times as much as many other forms of tourist and can be more frequent travellers than many other forms of tourist (Gelan 2003, Harris & Lepp, 2011). Northern Ireland's media profile in relation to golf is huge right now and there is tremendous momentum (Bolan & Cotter, 2014).

### **The Irish Open 2012**

The Irish Open 2012 was a significant success. First Minister Arlene Foster said: *"Portrush has certainly lived up to its billing as being golf's 'major capital of the world' and the 2012 Irish Open will go down in the history as being the first sell-out for a regular tour event."*

More than 100,000 spectators attended the event, it was televised into 350m households worldwide, generated a sharp rise in golf tourism in Northern Ireland (estimated at £14m annually prior to 2012) and proved that Portrush was ready to host the Open.

Despite some hugely significant positives, there were a number of negatives that need to be addressed for 2017. Specifically local businesses were not fully prepared to capitalise on the opportunity or understood the characteristics of golf tourists. Opening hours were not aligned to the event play-time. Spectators not being allowed off course once they had entered did create a negative perception and the park and ride scheme taking people away straight after play was over was also seen to as a missed opportunity for local businesses.

## **The Irish Open 2017**

Portstewart Golf Club will host the 2017 Irish Open. It is the second time in recent years that the competition has been hosted in the Council area after it came to Royal Portrush Golf Club in 2012.

The European Tour has confirmed that tournament will take place from 6<sup>th</sup> to the 9<sup>th</sup> July 2017.

By staging the tournament on the seaside links course, two weeks ahead of the 2017 Open Championship, the European Tour hope to attract the world's golf stars keen to experience conditions similar to those they will encounter at the Open venue Royal Birkdale.

The event is sponsored by Dubai Duty Free in conjunction with Rory McIlroy's charity, the Rory Foundation.

Rory McIlroy defending his 2016 Irish Open title will no doubt raise the profile of the event further attracting greater numbers of visitors and increasing the media coverage.

### **Event Organisation**

Within the context of the Executive Contract with the European Tour, Council is required to support the event through the provision of lands and event management / delivery support.

Costs for physical resources will be recovered from the European Tour.

Consequently, the following organisational structure has been devised:

#### **Gold Group:**

- Executive Director European Tour.
- CEO Tourism NI.
- CE Causeway Coast and Glens District Council.
- PSNI Chief Supt.

#### **Silver Group:**

- On Course – Event Director, European Tour.
- Off Course – Director Leisure and Development, Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council.
- Media and Communications – Communications Director, Tourism NI.

#### **Bronze Off-Course Working Groups.**

- Traffic / Transport / Parking.
- Host Town Regeneration and Animation.
- Business Engagement.
- Waste Management and Post Event Activities.
- Safety / Security and Emergency Planning.

The opportunity to benefit Portstewart and the locality cannot be understated. Based upon the lessons learnt from 2012, the working groups responsible for the regeneration / animation of the town and business engagement is essential and priority work.

Report Item 14 - Event Team Staffing Requirements (the need for an additional Events Team Officer to focus on Major Event Development) reflects the need to optimise the the Irish Open 2017 opportunity, which, if leveraged properly, this high - spend form of tourism can bring job creation, new business development, urban and coastal regeneration, improved quality of hotel / restaurant provision and improved image as a tourist destination.

### **Work to date**

The focus of Council's work to date has been to establish the working arrangements outlined above, but also to focus on the Traffic / Transport / Parking Plan.

The general principles of the plan are outlined below:

1. Maximising the use of Public Transport - Train / Coach Service.
2. Park and Ride Infrastructure and Service.
  - Requirement for estimated 7000 vehicle parking spaces in designated park and ride sites.
  - Ideally the fewer number of sites amounting to 7000 spaces will provide a more manageable / efficient system.
  - Confirm site management.
  - Provision of buses / coaches from / to park and ride sites to / from the course.
3. Traffic Management to Park and Ride Sites.
  - Based upon predicted traffic flows - Belfast (A26) 65%, Londonderry (A2) / Mid Ulster (A29) 35%.
  - Local traffic plan including road restrictions - Including emergency service routes - 'white routes', course access and local access.
4. Commercial considerations - Incentivising the public to adopt the Transport / Traffic / Parking Plan.
5. Cost recovery - Estimates for physical resource provision (assuming central govt / local govt staff time and land provision is at no cost - excluding Ulster University).
6. Communications / Media Plan.

### **Next Steps**

The first meeting of the Gold Group occurs on the 8<sup>th</sup> November, following which the organizational structure will be populated allowing detailed planning to proceed.