

Developing a brand for Wyre Forest District Council -

Building a reputation to be proud of

DRAFT BRAND STRATEGY 2006 -2008

Wyre Forest District Council
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1. About Wyre Forest

Wyre Forest is situated in the North West of Worcestershire with the three towns of Bewdley, Kidderminster and Stourport-on-Severn forming a triangle within the district surrounded by a number of outlying villages and hamlets.

98,500 people live in the district covering an area of seventy five square miles (19,425 hectares). Wyre Forest district is a very diverse mix of urban and rural environments including areas of natural beauty, outstanding architecture, river and canal side amenities and numerous retail, commercial, tourist and leisure businesses.

The district takes its name from the Forest of Wyre, once a medieval hunting forest and now a popular visitor attraction.

As part of the re-organisation of Local Government in 1974, the ancient Borough of Bewdley, Stourport-on-Severn Urban District Council, Kidderminster District Council and the Rural District of Kidderminster were joined together to form Wyre Forest District Council.



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2. Background

In May 2005 an Officer Customer Service and Branding Working Group was set up to develop a Customer Service and Branding Strategy. The Group comprised of Officers from each Division in order to establish a corporate approach towards this issue across the whole authority.

In October 2005, the Working Group commissioned a one day workshop by consultants Solace Enterprises who facilitated the development of a strategic framework and discussion paper for supporting the preparation of a Customer Services and Branding Strategy.

Following further work and having reviewed best practice across the country, the Group decided to develop two mutually exclusive strategies in order to demonstrate the wider realms of both branding and customer service. This approach was endorsed by Audit Commission Inspectors when they recently undertook an inspection on the authority's environment and communication services.

Customer service is intrinsically linked to brand, therefore these two strategies have been developed alongside each other.

3. Why build a brand?

There is a great deal of change in Local Government at the present time, not only centrally driven, but at local level, and clarity of vision and mission for local authorities is extremely important, particularly in view of the Government White Paper "Strong and Prosperous Communities" published October 2006.

Nationally, research shows that many people see their Council as remote, low profile, bureaucratic and inefficient. Our research in Wyre Forest reflects this general perception although, the Council is perceived as being "accessible and helpful". (New MORI conducted Customer Satisfaction Survey results for Wyre Forest will be available March 2007)

Building a brand for a local authority - aligned to its key priorities - is key to developing a sustainable and measurable reputation which will over time reinforce the Council's position as a valued and respected community leader. It is an accepted fact that people engage and co-operate with organisations they trust and respect.

In Wyre Forest, we need to further develop our relationship with the media and treat them as key strategic partners. This means holding media briefings, and being swift to respond in an open and honest way when we need to defend or assert our reputation.

Developing a brand is often seen as simply being about visual identity yet it is so much more. A brand is built every time the customer has contact with us, face to face, by phone or email, on a poster or via our website. Brand values

are powerfully present in the manner in which we deliver our services, and in the stories that are told about us on the street, in the media or over a coffee.

The purpose of developing a Brand Strategy is so that we can establish clarity of who we are and what we are about in the hearts and minds of our audiences, both internally and externally and to ensure these values are aligned to our vision and key priorities as detailed in the corporate plan for Building a Better Future 2003 – 2008.

Our Vision

We want Wyre Forest to be a District with healthy, safe and flourishing communities that are supported by a strong and diverse economy. The local environment will be clean, inspiring and valued, where people are proud to live and work and are attracted to visit and invest.

The brand of the Council is intrinsically linked to that of the area because the services it delivers are aligned to meet the needs of local people within the place they live and work. We have developed this strategy to serve both the Council and Wyre Forest as a place.

It is important to state at the outset that 'place branding' is an enormous area of work both in terms of time and resources which could not be covered in this strategy. We have therefore approached place branding in the context of 'the halo effect' – the behaviours and actions of the custodians of the Wyre Forest District Council brand will filter into the district and, hopefully lead by example. We have however, suggested some practical activities to promote the generic Wyre Forest brand which are deliverable and sustainable as part of this strategy.

4 Contexts for developing a Council brand

National

The Government's recently launched White Paper "Strong and Prosperous Communities" talks about de-centralising control and empowering local authorities to run their own show.

Whitehall is indicating the new direction in which Councils are expected to move. In his address at the Local Government Communications annual conference, the Minister for Local Government Phil Woolas spoke of the increasingly important role Councils had in shaping our local areas - "If we are to meet this local leadership challenge we will need to raise the game on our powers of persuasion".

County

We have recently launched the Worcestershire Hub in Kidderminster – the new customer service centre for Council services. The Hub is a countywide brand aimed at encouraging customers to use a central point of contact to resolve all Council enquiries.

The Worcestershire Hub has a distinctive stand alone visual identity which does not include the WFDC. This approach is consistent with the branding of the other Hub centres in Worcestershire. Whilst at a service delivery level, the message is clear – “where you see this sign Council Services are available” – we need to ensure that the relationship between the Hub and the Council is seen as symbiotic.

Also, partnership working can pose a challenge to maintaining brand identity. In some instances identity has been lost due to the development of partnership logos, whilst in other cases confusion has been caused through the use of a multitude of logos. We need to be clear about the use of logos and the appropriateness of use in context.

Regional

Whist inward investment into the three towns of Kidderminster, Stourport-on-Severn and Bewdley has been relatively low over the past few decades, the trend is now moving in more positive direction. A ‘feel good’ factor is gradually growing – particularly in the light of projects such as Stourport Pride, an initiative designed to engage local people in the development of future plans for the town.

Kidderminster has recently attracted fifteen new retailers across a range of sectors including food and drink, DIY and clothing. Brands include Comet, Staples, MFI, PC World, The Range, Carpet World, Frankie and Bennies, Pizza Hut, De Bradelei Mills, T K Max, Julian Greaves, Sony, Cafe Nero, Greggs, and Shizans. Established retailers have expanded into larger premises in the locality. These include Marks and Spencer, MacDonalds, Currys, New Look, Halfords, Co op Travel, and Ackers Jewellers.

Established businesses are also expanding such as Lawrence’s Skip Hire on the former Flokes Forging site Kidderminster, and Easter Group is planning to start industrial development work opposite Hoo Farm Estate, Kidderminster.

There are new business premises being developed on the Stourport Road, (the main highway that connects Kidderminster and Stourport-on-Severn) at Foley Business Park and Finepoint.

Stourport-on-Severn is undergoing a major £3 million redevelopment of the canal basins and will businesses will benefit from £600,000 investment in infrastructure at Sandy Lane Industrial Estate on the edge of the town.

A new housing site has been approved in former Mart Lane Basin and a recent agreement by Councillors for a new riverside theatre on the site of the existing Civic Centre will provide further cultural investment for the town.

Current plans for Bewdley include proposals for the redevelopment of part of Load St car park for new housing, a medical centre and multi use leisure centre.

The Environment Agency has improved the lives of many residents and visitors to Bewdley with its multi-million pound investment in riverside flood defences.

Local

The White Paper "Strong and Prosperous Communities states clearly that Councils will have an increasing responsibility to communicate, consult and collaborate with local communities and with local partners and agencies. This includes managing working practices to ensure that duplication is avoided, cultural differences are embraced, and that roles and responsibilities are clearly communicated and understood.

Over the years there has been inconsistent use of the Council's logo which causes confusion of 'ownership' of services and initiatives. A variety of hybrid Council logos can be seen throughout the district. This needs to be addressed and managed so that new and existing partnerships are developed in a context of clarity of mission for all concerned.

As the centralised office accommodation project advances, there is a need to establish unified values, and create a sense of place and identity for Members and employees.

5. Strategic Brand Objectives

- Position the Council as the community leader on Wyre Forest brand ownership/management
- Raise awareness of where the Wyre Forest district is regionally and nationally
- Communicate clearly what we do as a Council and what our values are
- Be pro-active about joined-up communications with strategic partners
- Develop and communicate the 'personality' and distinctiveness of the Wyre Forest district
- Ensure residents are consulted and involved `so we deliver improved services
- Be visible in the Community – at events as well as in driving policies and delivering services

6. Current Perceptions

In order to develop a strategy for developing a brand it is important to test the temperature on current perceptions. During July, August and September 2006, the Council conducted a programme of research to discover perceptions of both the Council and the Wyre Forest district in general.

We also considered existing research available from a Wyre Forest Visitor Guide Survey (2004).

Consultation Overview July – September 2006

Audience	Consultee numbers	Responses
Residents (Citizens Panel)	300	125
Local Business (sourced from 'warm' business list, Economic Development section)	109	20
Elected Members	42	6
Employees	500	82

Research Methodology

We used questionnaires as a main consultation method as this is a tried and tested method used to good effect previously by the Council. Versions of the questionnaire were developed for locals businesses, Elected Members and Council employees.

We developed the questionnaire based on the Anholt-GMI City Brands Index Model which examines perceptions of a place using the following areas as barometers for competence:

- THE PRESENCE – regional status/standing – what is our contribution to the world?
- THE PLACE - environment, cleanliness, physical appeal
- THE PREREQUISITES – affordable accommodation, public amenities - schools, hospitals, transport
- THE PEOPLE – warm and friendly, community and culture – do you fit in, do you feel safe?
- THE PULSE – how exciting or interesting for a visitor or long term resident
- THE POTENTIAL – business, students, immigrants - how easy to find a job or grow a business, higher education

Using the IDeA-knowledge.gov.uk website toolkit on 'defining the Council brand and involving members and officers' we gathered information on perception of:

- WFDC – our overall purpose: what are we here to do?
- The values that underpin our actions: what drives it to do the things we do?
- The key messages: what are we saying about what we can offer?
- Delivery of services: do we make people promises, and do we deliver?
- The behaviour of our staff: how do we treat customers, and our own people?
- The 'look and feel' of the way WFDC goes about it's business

Perceptions of Wyre Forest (place)

This overview gives a flavour of perceptions of residents, businesses, Elected Members and visitors. Interestingly the view expressed did not significantly vary across audiences.

25% of respondents see themselves as both a Wyre Forest resident/business and a town resident

45% of respondents rated Wyre Forest 3 out of 5 for cleanliness

59% of respondents rated house prices in Wyre Forest as being moderately priced

38% of respondents rated Wyre Forest 3 out of 5 for friendliness

34% of respondents rated Wyre Forest 4 out of 5 for interesting things to do and see

59% of respondents feel safe most of the time

Question	Top 3 responses
Wyre Forest is best known for?	Safari Park, Severn Valley Railway, Carpets
How could the District be improved physically?	More flowers Clean up the islands and ring roads Reduce boarded up shops and buildings
What are the hidden gems in the Wyre Forest?	Riverside and canal side walks Nature reserves Bewdley Museum
What do you think of public amenities?	Poor public transport Hospital poor no A&E Lack of public toilets in towns
How could Wyre Forest be more appealing for visitors?	Easier and cheaper parking Less boarded up shops More evening entertainment
What do you think of the culture of Wyre Forest?	Friendly Generally an OK place to live Not as friendly as years ago
Where would you go to find out about Wyre Forest?	Internet Library Local paper
What are your perceptions of Wyre Forest as a resident?	Generally a good place to live Too much traffic Not enough car parks

Questions specific to local business	Top 3 responses
Do you think business premises are expensive in Wyre Forest?	Moderate to high cost High in Bewdley
Would you consider the Wyre Forest to be a good place to start up a business?	Overall yes Yes although public transport is poor Sourcing skilled staff very difficult

Perceptions of Wyre Forest District Council

	Most people said
How well does the Council communicate with you?	Little communication
How well do we deliver our services?	3/5
Do you get value for money from your Council Tax?	Poor value for money
Do we deliver on our promises?	Sometimes
How do we conduct ourselves?	Adequately
Is the WFDC logo visible with services?	Most of the time
What are the key services delivered by the Council?	Refuse collections
How do we manage abandoned vehicles?	Well
How could we help local businesses	By having a 'grants' department
How do we manage refuse and recycling?	Well – we need a weekly collection
How do we manage parks?	Well
Do you read Newsywe the Council's weekly newspaper?	Yes
What words do you associate with the Council's logo?	Trees Refuse collection Council

Questions specific to local business	Top 3 responses
Do you get good value for money for your business rates?	Poor value for money Adequate value for money Don't know
What could the Council do to further support local business?	Address local road congestion Integrate business and community to reduce vandalism Keep business rates low
What words would you associate with the Council logo?	Refuse Collections Recycling Green

Consultation feedback from employees and Members is available on the Council's Intranet using the links below. Feedback from businesses and residents is currently only available in the form hard copies of the completed questionnaires which are retained by Jane Doyle, Media and Marketing Officer.

Employees: http://intranet/corporate/applications/quest/results.php3?questionnaire_name=emp

Members: http://intranet/corporate/applications/quest/results.php3?questionnaire_name=mem

7. Key brand related Issues emerging from consultation

Wyre Forest – where's that?

We have an identity crisis! Unless you are familiar with the area, it's difficult to locate Wyre Forest on the UK map. Equally, Wyre Forest residents are challenged at defining the area with any detail. We need to reinforce messages about where we are – perhaps including Worcestershire in any key communication messages - and our proximity to other places such as Birmingham (including airports), motorway networks and railway links.

Wyre Forest vs. the three towns

Wyre Forest needs to create an identity in its own right – 'enjoying the differences' of the three towns and surrounding rural areas, and combining their strengths. The three towns of Wyre Forest have distinct images and residents relate to their own locality rather than Wyre Forest in general. We need to create opportunities for residents, businesses and visitors to think 'Wyre Forest' as well as Kidderminster, Stourport-on-Severn or Bewdley. It's important to recognise that we are not aiming to dilute the importance of people's allegiance to their neighbourhood or town – but to develop - in tandem - a holistic view of Wyre Forest.

Cleaner Streets = Satisfied Residents!

Perception is reality! For example, the perception is that Kidderminster would benefit from cleaner streets and more civic floral displays. We need to communicate our vision (and achievements to date) for cleaner neighbourhoods as well as plans for town development and refurbishment clearly and visually.

Accentuate the positives!

The things that the area is known for are tourist attractions in their own right such as the Safari Park and the Severn Valley Railway. We need to make more of the 'hidden gems', the heritage such as carpet manufacturing and the inherent environmental attractions such as the waterways, forests and the countryside. We need to promote our points of difference – to residents and businesses. We need to position Wyre Forest as a 'lifestyle' choice place to live and work.

8. How do we achieve our strategic brand objectives?

Brand Development Programme

A range of proposals for delivering our strategic brand objectives have been developed. They can be selected as discrete projects, and can run in tandem. Each proposal relates back to one or more strategic objectives, and therefore reflects the vision of the Council.

Important note: By the nature of the work involved, brand issues often overlap with communication, consultation, tourism, and customer service issues. These action points have been developed to compliment and enhance existing strategies – but not repeat and duplicate on-going activity in these areas.

‘We are Wyre Forest!’

Appoint brand champions throughout the Council starting at the top! Key officers and elected Members would take ownership of the brand, communicating an understanding of what it means, living the brand through their behaviour and leadership, guarding the corporate reputation, making decisions on values and messages and defining corporate identity and physical appearance. Everyone needs to be an ambassador for the Wyre Forest brand.

Wyre Forest District Council Visual Identity

The Council logo was first introduced in 1974 when the Borough of Bewdley, Stourport-on-Severn Urban District Council, Kidderminster District Council and the Rural District of Kidderminster were joined together to form Wyre Forest District Council. It was refreshed in the mid 1980s and has remained intact since then however, variations have crept in.

The recent branding consultation process showed that the logo is well recognised and is synonymous with Council services. The logo in its current format has limitations when applied to some types of media, and can be illegible when reduced in size. We now have an opportunity to “freshen” the logo and bring it up to date, and to ensure it is translatable onto all media for example from a pen to a refuse vehicle. We also need to consider embracing the identity of our three towns within any revised visual identity.

We need to impose stricter guidelines for use, ruthlessly retire additional logos and sub-brands, and make sure all our services are clearly linked to one brand which people can recognise and understand. One Council, One Brand!

An audit of current branded materials has confirmed inconsistent use of the logo, and random colours, shapes and sizes. We need to produce comprehensive brand guidelines, which includes; our brand, our colours, our typography, our stationery, our printed literature, our electronic media, our visual image. The brand guidelines should also reinforce good communications including how to answer the phone, and a unified email sign off.

Communications Training

To support this Brand Development Programme we plan to further develop communications training for employees of the Council through our generic Competence framework and Employee Development Review process. Topics would include 'How to be an advocate of the Council', 'Plain English' and 'Writing for the Web/intranet'.

LGA Reputation Campaign

There is a strong link between provision of information and customer satisfaction. In 2005, the LGA and I&DeA launched a major national project aimed at helping local authorities improve the reputation of local government. It was based on research conducted by MORI, which suggested that if Councils focus on doing certain things well, it would improve overall public satisfaction and impact on reputation. There are 10 strands to the campaign:

- Adopt a highly visible strongly branded Council cleaning operation
- Ensure no gaps or overlap in Council cleaning and maintenance contacts
- Set up one phone number for the public to report local environmental problems
- Deal with 'grot spots'
- Remove abandoned vehicles within 24 hours
- With a Green Flag award for at least one park
- Educate and enforce to protect the environment
- Manage the media effectively to promote and defend the Council
- Provide an A-Z guide to Council services
- Publish a regular Council magazine or newspaper to inform residents
- Ensure the Council brand is consistently linked to services
- Communicate well with staff so they become advocates for the Council

Each participating Council self audits its progress in achieving the above benchmarks and this information is collected, measured and publicised by the LGA.

At present, over 100 Councils have signed up nationally. The Council should sign up and be loud and proud to communicate this to our residents!

Regional Marketing Campaign

Working in partnership with the County Council and Wyre Forest Matters we could, design and develop a simple yet bold generic Wyre Forest regional marketing campaign to include:

- Advertising on bill boards at railway stations that feed Kidderminster, and bills boards at the accessible regional airports such as Coventry and East Midlands.
- Developing our website to provide a wider signpost facility for residents, visitors and businesses. We need to ensure that the power of internet is harnessed to benefit Wyre Forest residents, visitors and businesses.
- Commission the creation and production of a high quality, colour, glossy Wyre Forest coffee table book. Copies of the book would be sold in local shops, tourist information centres and visitor attractions. The book would be self funding.
- Commission a Wyre Forest calendar. Launch a competition inviting local photographers to submit photographs of hidden gems of the area for inclusion in the calendar which would focus on 'impressions of Wyre Forest'. This could be run in association with local media.
- The three towns have existing twin town relationships in place. Explore how the existing twin town arrangements for Wyre Forest can be developed to attract and retain business in the area, and to attract attention to international businesses.
- Develop a promotional campaign to attract and retain businesses in the Wyre Forest area – this to include leaflets, publicity items, competitions etc.

Important note - website development

In branding terms the website is the shop window for the Council, so everything about it needs to express our role in the community and how we go about our business.

Feedback from our research says the Internet is the most common reference tool. If you 'google' Wyre Forest, you get:

1. Wyre Forest District Council website
2. Wyre Forest Visitor Information (created by a Bewdley High School student as part of a work placement at Midland Internet in 2001) This site has very limited and dated information
3. A range of websites owned and managed by Worcestershire County Council and Wyre Forest organisations such as The Community Housing Group

We need to continue to develop the website to ensure information is current, relevant and informative, and meets the needs of the diverse local community. This is currently being undertaken as part of the communication strategy.

The Wyre Forest Personality

We need to develop a series of key communication messages which could be used in marketing and publicity material. These would be very helpful as a quickly recognisable one liner to instantly locate the place and to capture the spirit of the area. We could engage the community in this exercise by headlining it as a campaign/competition in the Kidderminster Shuttle Newspaper. This would give us a platform to feedback the results of our recent perception research, and give local people the opportunity to contribute to the development of the Wyre Forest Brand. Whist these key messages are focused on the area, they could also be incorporated into Council corporate literature, where appropriate.

Celebrate Local Heroes

Create and orchestrate the annual 'Wyre Forest Red Carpet Awards'. This event, to be run in association with the local media should highlight and reward local people who have done something to benefit the community. Nominations could be for categories such as 'good neighbour' and 'outstanding volunteer'. The evening awards event, hosted by the Council, would include presentations to winners who walk the red carpet (made in Kidderminster of course). To reinforce the link between the event and Kidderminster's carpet heritage we would encourage carpet industry related sponsors for this event. We would aim to secure local, regional and national media coverage for this project.

Harness Local Celebrities

Research who our local celebrities are and enlist their help in marketing the area!

9. **Next Steps**

If this strategy is adopted, the action points as outlined above will be taken forward in association with the relevant stakeholders and timetable of activities will be developed to roll out over the next two years. There will be resource, time and risk implications which will be highlighted as each activity is timetabled.

Progress will be reported both internally and externally in order to develop a corporate approach, understanding and ownership of the Council's brand.

10. **For further information**

Further information on this strategy can be obtained from Jane Doyle, Media and Marketing Officer.