



HEAVE HO, OFF TO NORWAY WE ROW

SHIP AHOY: The Draken Harald Hafagre in Norway; and, inset, top, the volunteers get in some practice

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Volunteers get practice as 'Viking Navy'

A MINI Merseyside Viking Navy went to Norway to row the biggest-ever reconstruction of a Viking longship.

More than 50 volunteers visited Karmøy to practise on board the Draken Harald Hafagre – Harald the Fairhair, in English.

The rowers have been trained by Liverpool Victoria Rowing Club in Wallasey and were joined by volunteers from the Midlands.

The group will row the 114ft longship when it arrives in Wirral next year as part of its maiden voyage.

The voyage will follow the path of the Vikings from Scandinavia via the British Isles to Istanbul – with Wirral one of the first stops.

Professor Stephen Harding, of Nottingham University, the north west England represent-

ative for the project, said: "This has been a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity too good to miss. I think it's fair to say that everybody thoroughly enjoyed the trip.

"It has given the volunteers a taste of what it might have been like in the Viking Age, when young people looked forward to a journey of adventure, an excitement captured in the old Sagas.

"Our Norwegian hosts have been absolutely fantastic and covered most of our expenses while we were over there.

"We look forward now to the prospect of this magnificent vessel coming to us, which if all goes to plan will be next year.

"When it does come, the experience our volunteers have picked up here will have been invaluable."

The rowing of the Viking ship was part of the annual Viking Festival at Karmøy on the west coast of Norway – where many of the Norse Vikings, including those who settled in the Wirral, are thought to have originated from.

The trip finished with a traditional reading from the Norse Sagas by Viking novelist Giles Kristian, who presented each volunteer with a copy of one of his latest books.

The ship was due to sail to Wirral this year but the voyage was delayed for more testing.

The project team, based in Haugesund, Norway, decided the Darken should stay within Scandinavian waters during the 2013

sailing season for further testing, before setting sail for the UK next year.

When the boat does arrive in Wirral, the volunteers will row it into the West Float in Wallasey, across the River Mersey to the Albert Dock in Liverpool and out of the estuary again.

Professor Harding said: "It's very different from rowing in a normal rowing boat – which takes a maximum of eight persons, whereas the Draken takes 100.

"Once we got used to its size, the rowing was very smooth and I think we even impressed our hosts!"

Organisers picked Wirral as a stop because of the borough's Viking links, including a genetic survey which showed a Norwegian influence in the DNA of some of the borough's oldest families.

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WIRRAL Briefing

FIREFIIGHTERS DEAL WITH TWO BLAZES

TWO fire engines were called out to a report of a shed on fire in the garden of a property on Clayhill Green, in Ellesmere Port, at around 11.30pm on Monday. The police were also called to the incident. Earlier in the evening, at 7.37pm, firefighters had been called to a skip fire at Raby Court, Stanney, Ellesmere Port.

OBJECTION TO CAR PARK SALE

WIRRAL council will consider an objection from a disabled resident to plans to sell off its 12-space Manor Road car park.

Tomorrow, the highways and traffic representations panel will consider an objection from a Blue Badge holder who says the car park is the nearest to her home.

FREE CHIPS HELP FOR CYCLISTS

CYCLISTS will be able to get their bikes micro-chipped for free during a special event at Asda in Ellesmere Port on Saturday June 22.

The council's itravel-smart team will be there from 10am to 4pm with colleagues from Cheshire Police and a local bike supplier in an event funded by The Local Sustainable Travel Fund.

Big Bill's Bikes will also be on hand to service bikes and provide tips and advice on basic bike maintenance, and fresh fruit smoothies will be created by pedal power.

Everyone who visits the promotion and signs up to the itravel-smart newsletter to find out more about the itravel-smart team and future events, will be entered into a free prize draw.

FIRM CLINCHES CHARITY MEDAL

BIRKENHEAD-BASED affordable housing developer Lovell has received a Gold Medal from national charity RoSPA – the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents – for its safety performance.

The RoSPA Gold Medal is for the company's achievement of consecutive Gold RoSPA Occupational Health and Safety awards over the past five years for its accident record and overall health and safety management systems.



VOLUNTEER DAY AT LIBRARY

BIRKENHEAD Central Library is to host a fair for residents interested in becoming volunteers with local charities on June 20 from 2.30pm- 5.30pm.

Cllr Chris Meaden, above, cabinet member for health and wellbeing, said: "Wirral libraries service does a huge amount of work with the voluntary sector, raising awareness of charities and driving engagement with the local community."

The library will also sell cakes, tea and coffee to support the Pink Ribbon Organisation.

SPORTS VILLAGE DROP-IN EVENT

CHESHIRE West and Chester council is hosting a pre-planning "drop-in" session over Ellesmere Port's £15m Sport and Leisure Village on June 19, at the Civic Hall, from 4pm to 8pm.

FATHER'S DAY TREAT FOR DADS

DADS can make a real splash with their children by taking advantage of a special offer from Wirral's Invigor8 leisure centres.

To celebrate Father's Day on June 16, dads can claim a free swim with their kids at any of Wirral's pools.

The offer is open over the weekend and to claim the free swim, each dad must be accompanied by one or two of their own children who in turn must be under 16 years of age.

They also have to download and print a voucher available on the Wirral council website and take it along to their leisure centre of choice when they want to swim.

The voucher entitles the dad to swim for free – children over the age of five will have to pay as usual. Visit the council's website at www.wirral.gov.uk

Lottery boost for charity

THE future of a charity dedicated to helping women on the verge of a life of crime has been secured after it won funding from the National Lottery.

Tomorrow's Women Wirral was set up to help women who had committed offences get back on the straight and narrow.

The Birkenhead-based charity, which also offers help to women experiencing issues from depression to relationship or care problems was set up last year. Within months of starting

out, it was awarded charitable status and its reputation has continued to grow.

The centre allows women to refer themselves voluntarily or as part of probation supervision. They can work through their problems at the centre, which is based at the former St Laurence's School site, on Beckwith Street East, and ultimately volunteer to help others at the centre.

The National Lottery has now given Tomorrow's Women Wirral funding for

the next two years. Delighted with the news, project manager Angela Murphy said: "We have over 1,000 women attending monthly and are clearly a much-needed resource.

"Although it is early days, data from Merseyside Probation Trust show an improvement in compliance rates. More women are now successfully completing their orders and addressing their issues."

● Visit their website at: www.tomorrowwomen.wirral.co.uk

PROTESTERS TO VOICE FEARS OVER CROSSING

OBJECTIONS to plans for a new Toucan crossing in West Kirby will be considered by councillors tomorrow.

Wirral council says the proposed crossing, on Bridge Road, near the Orrysdale Road junction, will make it safer for pedestrians, assist cyclists and benefit the

whole community. But Merseyside Cycling Campaign believes a change in junction priority is preferable to the scheme being proposed.

The group is also concerned about potential obstructions to visibility that may lie outside the bounds of the adopted highway.