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Nordic visitors get set for land ahoy

Viking ship heads to peninsula's docks despite losing its mast along a troubled journey

By **Emma Rigby**
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A VIKING longship is continuing on its maiden voyage to Wirral today despite losing a mast just three days into its journey.

Doubt was cast over the visit of the 115ft-long Draken Harald Harfagre – the world's largest reconstructed Viking longship – after it was hit by a large wave in high winds just three days after setting sail from Norway.

Although none of the international crew of volunteers were injured, the vessel's visit to West Float in Wallasey was feared ruined after the wave broke the ship's mast and sent it overboard.

It had been thought the ship would have to return to Norway for repairs but after being diverted to Lerwick Harbour in the Shetland Islands, the ship's captain Bjorn Ahlander decided to continue the planned voyage, opting to use the onboard engine that was installed in case of emergency.

Wirral Viking expert Professor Steve Harding, said: "This is wonderful news after we were almost at the point of despair and is a



A broken mast cast doubt over the visit to Wirral of the 115ft-long Draken Harald Harfagre – the world's largest reconstructed Viking longship

great credit to Skipper Bjorn Ahlander and his crew.

"It won't be quite as dignified an arrival as originally planned – coming in on its back-up motors – but it is tremendous that it is going to be in Wallasey Docks where it is going to be repaired.

"Wirral and Liverpool – like Norway – have a great tradition of boat-building and repair so it is very appropriate we will be helping with all the TLC necessary to

get it seaworthy again.

"The public will have to be patient with us as the original planned programme of visits will now have to be put on ice as the ship is repaired but it should create a great deal of interest – and let's not forget the Vikings on Merseyside will have had to have done similar sort of repairs to their vessels a millennium ago."

The longship is scheduled to arrive in Wirral this Friday.