

RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL REPORT TO PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Agenda Item No.

meeting date: 11TH MARCH 2010
title: RIBBLE VALLEY ECONOMIC STRATEGY 2009-2014 UPDATE
submitted by: DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT SERVICES
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1 PURPOSE

1.1 To receive information on the actions in the Ribble Valley Economic Strategy.

1.2 Relevance to the Council's ambitions and priorities

- Council Ambitions - In addition to Ribble Valley Borough Council striving to meet its three ambitions, it also recognises the importance of securing a diverse, sustainable economic base for the Borough. The work of the regeneration section seeks to promote this.
- Community Objectives – The issues highlighted in this report will contribute to objectives of a sustainable economy and thriving market towns.
- Corporate Priorities - Delivery of services to all
- Other Considerations - None

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 The Ribble Valley Economic Strategy is a means of providing clarity and detail on the Council's local economic aims and objectives as well as the actions to deliver on economic well being in Ribble Valley. It guides the council in setting its own service plans and resources, as well as providing a framework for partnership working, supporting and influencing the strategies, priorities and the resource allocation of others operating in the field of economic development across Ribble Valley and the wider region.

2.2 The Council formally adopted the Economic Strategy in 2009 following an extended consultation period, which generated much interest from across the Borough. The strategy sets out the economic aims and objectives for the areas economy over the next 5 years, and sets out desired aims around 5 thematic areas of activity.

2.3 In order to achieve the vision, Action Plans were created for each key work area, and detailed within the Strategy to provide a framework on which to develop a programme of activity that will be regularly reviewed in order to work towards our Strategic Objectives, and this report provides an update on the activities being progressed as part of this process. Section 3 of this report details the activities that are being carried forward to support each of the 5 thematic objectives within the Strategy.

3 INFORMATION

3.1 **Regeneration & Economic Development** - maximising the areas potential to generate initiatives, projects and attract resources in line with community needs. Encourage and engage both people and businesses for collective community action.

- **Economic Action Plans** - A key action within the Ribble Valley Economic Strategy identified the need to work in partnership and consult with the private sector to develop ideas and priorities for action in key service centres. From this action plans have now been prepared for both Longridge and Whalley. A separate economic action plan for Clitheroe is also being progressed that will run alongside the Clitheroe Town Centre Masterplan.

The Longridge Action Plan – the document sets out a number of activities to support the economy of the town of Longridge and the rural area that surrounds it. A group made up of representatives from Longridge Town Council, Longridge Business Group, Longridge Social Enterprise Company, Longridge Partnership, Lancashire County Council and Ribble Valley Borough Council has been formed to work in partnership for the specific purpose of monitoring, reviewing and developing the plan and to maintain a relevant long-term economic strategy for the area.

The Whalley Action Plan - Whalley Parish Council and Chamber of Trade were tasked with consulting with Whalley residents and businesses to determine the village's future needs. All suggestions were channelled and prioritised by the two lead groups back to the Regeneration Team. The Whalley Economic Action Plan document will act as a guidance paper to tackle the community derived economic priorities in Whalley and accords with strategic actions as specified in the Ribble Valley Economic Strategy 2009 – 2014.

- **Business Groups** - the Regeneration Team attends regular meetings of Clitheroe, Longridge and Whalley Chamber of Trades and provides support to the three business groups in Clitheroe, Longridge and Whalley. All of which have developed into much more robust groups over recent months, growing in numbers and increasing activities to support trade in each of the towns.

Clitheroe Chamber of Trade membership is now growing monthly. A dedicated Chamber of Trade website has been completed following financial support from RVBC. Chamber members are regularly updated and involved during the development of the Clitheroe Town Centre Masterplan.

The Longridge Business Group formed in 2008 and after much hard work and dedication from traders in the town. A dedicated website used to promote the businesses and Longridge Town Centre has now been created which was also made possible through an RVBC grant. The group are involved in the work of the Longridge Economic Action Plan, which will assist in the development of year round events that will encourage increased trading activity in the Town.

Whalley Chamber of Trade continues to be a strong group of businesses committed to the success of Whalley and the trading environment and the Regeneration Team attends the meetings of the Whalley Chamber of Trade to offer support wherever possible. Signage has been erected on the railway

station and on the industrial sites to encourage visitors into the town centre, which as been supported through an RVBC grant and the group are working closely with the Regeneration Team to deliver the Whalley Economic Action Plan.

- **Local Action Group Forum** - during the development of the Local Development Strategy to support the work of the Rural Development Programme (RDPE) a Local Action Group (LAG) Forum was established in order to strengthen and develop communication mechanisms for sharing regeneration information between Ribble Valley businesses and stakeholders. Over 100 forum members attended an official launch of the RDPE programme in September 2009. A further Forum event is being scheduled for April 2010.
- **Partner Engagement** - the Regeneration Team are regularly in contact with policy formers in the region to highlight the needs of Ribble Valley to ensure that sub-regional, regional, national and European policy recognises the issues facing rural areas and that information that has relevance to the economy of Ribble Valley feeds into economic strategies and plans within the region.

3.2 **Business Support & Development** – addressing issues that facilitate healthy business performance, encouraging business start-ups, business growth and inward investment.

- **Rural Business Support** - the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) in Pennine Lancashire is now the process of delivering £2.7 million in direct grant aid for businesses following the successful application for funding. A Local Action Group Executive (LAG) was formed to oversee delivery of the programme and a dedicated Pennine Lancashire LAG officer was appointed, employed by Lancashire Economic Partnership and based in the area working out of the Ribble Valley Borough Council offices. Grant packages are now available for businesses in Ribble Valley from £5000 up to a maximum of £100,000 depending on the scale and nature of the business project. The Regeneration Team are promoting this new package of funds to Ribble Valley businesses and a simple expression of interest form has been produced to encourage businesses to participate.
- **Economic Development Groups** - RVBC is represented on a number of economic groups that are working together on both a Lancashire wide and Pennine Lancashire basis. The Lancashire Partnership has an Economy Theme Group, which concentrates on the delivery of the Lancashire Local Area Agreement and its improvement targets across a number of national indicator themes such as increasing business starts and VAT registrations and reducing worklessness.
- **Business Link** - RVBC officers are in regular contact with Business Link to ensure that local businesses are accessing the regions business support initiatives during the economic climate. In Lancashire there has been a 43% increase in enquiries for business starts compared with 12 months ago across a range of sectors. Ribble Valley and other local authorities in the County have helped to stimulate start up enquiries and activity through strengthening their working processes, relationships and information sharing with Business Link. Also, in Pennine Lancashire additional support provision is being rolled out through funding under the Intensive Business Start Up Programme.

- **Business Start-up** - The Intensive Business Start-up Programme was launched in 2009 that centres on people who are starting their own business in Pennine Lancashire and is funded by the NWDA and local and the Pennine Lancashire Local Authorities Councils through the No Limits scheme. Business support is given from 6 months prior to the business start-up until 3 years after the business has been up and running. A range of workshops will be available throughout the coming year to support this activity.
- **Business Support** - information on all business support initiatives available to businesses within the Borough are distributed to Ribble Valley contacts customised to their needs via an internal database. The Regeneration Team also research and collate socio-economic data and business information on a weekly basis to establish the current economic status of the area, which enables a proactive approach to be taken in identifying priorities for future regeneration activities and to enable effective monitoring of regeneration activities.
- **Economic Downturn and Redundancy Support** - The Regeneration Team are continuing to monitor issues during the current economic climate across Ribble Valley, the wider region and the UK and its current and future implications for the Ribble Valley. The performance of national chains that have outlets on the high streets of the borough are also tracked during the economic climate. Economic Updates are regularly circulated to the Leader and Deputy Leader and the Senior Management Team. This is extremely important in ensuring that we remain aware of the issues that are currently affecting the economy of the Ribble Valley and the surrounding areas. This enables us to respond as quickly as possible to any issues that may arise.

3.2 **Infrastructure & Communications** - providing the necessary 'physical environment' in areas such as transport, affordable housing, ICT & 'broadband' access, appropriate business sites and premises.

Following the production of the Ribble Valley Retail and Employment Land Study, projects and initiatives are underway focussed on key sites to support the important needs in the Borough for future employment space: -

- **Barrow Brook & Business Village** - The main Barrow Brook site covers 10.53 hectares and contains 5 separate plots and has the potential to support Ribble Valley's economic growth, contributing to growth within the sub-region, by accommodating office accommodation, which could potentially create over 1,000 jobs. Also the Business Village is a 1.03 hectare plot within the Barrow Brook site which could potentially deliver a further 200 jobs within an office development of around 30,000 sq ft, and will act as a catalyst to create demand for office accommodation within the whole of the Barrow Brook site. This project proposal is also backed up by the Ribble Valley Employment Land & Retail Study, which identified that Barrow Brook was the most attractive location for developers and occupiers, as well as being best positioned strategically for transport, and generally least constrained for development. The site could be an important driver for the growth of Ribble Valley's and the sub-region's future economic development, growing high value knowledge based employment. Officers from Ribble Valley Borough Council and Lancashire County Developments Ltd (LCDL) are working together to drive the project forward and meetings have taken place with site owners to determine their future aspirations.

- **Clitheroe Town Centre Masterplan** - Ribble Valley Borough Council and Lancashire County Developments Ltd, the economic development arm of the County Council, invited tenders from suitably qualified and experienced consultants to carry out a Clitheroe Town Centre Masterplan and Manchester based Turley Associates were appointed to carry forward the project. The purpose of the study is to provide a clear Development Strategy and Implementation Plan to enable partners to support the promotion and revitalisation of the Town Centre, helping it to fulfil its potential as an attractive, vibrant and successful location. The Masterplan will provide the Council with practical and robust project plans with options to help create a new and thriving market place and provide retail units appropriate to modern retailer requirements. Following public consultation, a draft document is being finalised that provides the vision, concepts and implementation plan for the Market Square development parcel and site, Castle Street, Moor Lane and details for the wider management of the project. This, in turn, will support the aspirations of the Economic Strategy by improving the quality of towns and supporting greater investment throughout the District.

3.3 **Image, Marketing & Promotion** – maintaining and enhancing the perception and image of the area; inspiring and encouraging people to invest in and visit Ribble Valley whether for business or pleasure.

- **Marketing** - during 2009 a comprehensive assessment on current marketing activities was made in order to strengthen the profile of Ribble Valley as a business and visitor location. The outcome of this work includes providing commercial agents with an agents portal for the Make it Lancashire Website. Inward investment opportunities are being developed in line with project work being carried forward on key business development sites (i.e. Barrow Brook & Business Village and the Clitheroe Town Centre Masterplan).
- **Tourism** – the RVBC Tourism department undertake many initiatives that support the image, marketing and promotion of the area and work closely with organisations such as Lancashire & Blackpool Tourist Board and Ribble Valley Tourism Association to raise the profile of Ribble Valley, which supports the aims of the Economic Strategy to support businesses in the Borough. Initiatives such as the Ribble Valley Food Trail have gained national recognition, linking small rural businesses including butchers, restaurants, dairies and bakeries together showing that tourism and local food are an enterprising strength in Ribble Valley.

3.4 **Employment & Skills** - ensuring with partners in the public and private sectors that a diversity of training and educational opportunities are available to people and businesses to ensure a healthy labour market.

- **Training** - the number and range of business training opportunities in Lancashire has grown within the last year particularly in response to the economic downturn. Working in partnership with Business Link these are being promoted to businesses in Ribble Valley. The delivery of the innovative leadership development (LEAD) programme, is being delivered at the Rural Business Centre at Myerscough College in Lancashire, it is designed around the needs of owners and managers of small and medium sized enterprises to support them to develop strategies for business growth and success.

- **Business Needs** - businesses in Ribble Valley also have access to a free Training Needs Analysis (TNA) via a Business Link Skills Broker that provides a list of the skills the business needs to move forward, which may be industry-specific or more general administrative and IT skills. The TNA provides a number of options in order that the business and its staff can identify the best training available along with resources to help them.
- **Vocational Learning Centre** - land has been identified at the Barrow Brook site for the potential to develop a vocational learning centre to service the training needs of local people and will be key to the delivery of the specialist 14-19 diplomas in Ribble Valley. Currently young people have to travel outside the Borough to access vocational training – the centre will provide a dedicated, locally based vocational and further education learning facility. Local employers have expressed their support for the centre. It is intended that the facilities will be utilised by employers for training their existing staff and to invest in the potential future workforce. To date an Outline Business Case has been produced to define the concept and a draft five year Business Plan to whether the scheme is financially viable and sustainable. Preliminary drawings showing the design and layout of the Centre have been produced. The capital build cost is currently estimated at £4.05m based on a circa 18,000sqft development. Meetings have taken place involving the Learning and Skills Council for potential capital funding in partnership with schools. Outline planning permission has been granted for a proposed mixed use development on the site, which comprises the vocational learning centre.

DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

BACKGROUND PAPERS:

Draft Ribble Valley Economic Strategy 2009 - 2014

For further information please ask for Craig Matthews, extension 4531.