

RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL REPORT TO POLICY & FINANCE COMMITTEE

Agenda Item No.

meeting date: 22ND NOVEMBER 2011
title: REGENERATION & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT UPDATE
submitted by: MARSHAL SCOTT – CHIEF EXECUTIVE
principal author: CRAIG MATTHEWS – RURAL REGENERATION OFFICER

1 PURPOSE

1.1 To receive an update an update from the Regeneration Team on a number of economic development and regeneration initiatives locally, regionally and nationally.

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

Following changes in Government policy regarding the delivery of economic development, regeneration and business support, this report provides an update on a number of important issues in relation to local delivery as well as their significance to the Borough on the implementation of these changes on a local, regional and national level.

The Emergency Budget in June 2010 confirmed the Government's intention to replace Regional Development Agencies (RDAs), and to encourage the development of Local Enterprise Partnerships by April 2012.

In the short term, these issues are being addressed against a background of an economy, which both locally and nationally, is slowly improving but with a significant reduction in public investment taking effect. Lancashire is also in transition to the new Local Enterprise Partnership, which will in future help drive forward economic development in partnership with the Lancashire Local Authorities.

3 INFORMATION

3.1 Ribble Valley Economic Strategy 2009 - 2014

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 area.

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 a 5-year period, and sets out desired aims around 5 thematic areas of activity.

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.

The Strategy and it's actions contain a significant number of references to various structures and programmes which either are in the process of transition or will no longer exist in the future. It will therefore be necessary to conduct a full review of the document; it's content and various strands of activity in order that it can bind together these new structures and approach to economic development in the Borough, as well as in Lancashire and nationally to reflect these important changes and a newly updated Strategy will be released early in 2012.

3.2 Regional Economic Development

Following the Government's announcements that all Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) will be closed and new arrangements put in place for economic development, the Northwest Development Agency (NWDA) is now in its final year of activity. Also, the statutory basis for Regional Economic Strategies is no longer required.

The primary focus for the Agency therefore during this last year has been to close down its business effectively and transfer of those functions, which are to be handed to successor bodies. The NWDA's land and property assets, for example, have now been handed over to the government's Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) and the winding down of activity has resulted in phased redundancies within the agency as well as in partner and delivery organisations; including Regenerate Pennine Lancashire.

The NWDA headquarters in Warrington finally close in March 2012 with some remaining staff transferring to the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and other centralised departments, such as inward investment staff moving to UK Trade & Industry. The team managing the European Regional Development Fund, for instance, will transfer to government North West ERDF programme (within DCLG), which continues until the end of 2013.

3.3 Local Enterprise Partnerships

After a number issues regarding the geographical coverage in the county it was finally agreed that a new Lancashire-wide Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) will be established in Spring 2011. Following on from this the newly appointed LEP Board have asked for a review of economic priorities across Lancashire, which was discussed at it's last meeting in October 2011.

The Government has now given its approval to 38 Local Enterprise Partnerships in England and is currently working with the Lancashire LEP along with local authority representatives on plans for an enterprise zone on land at BAE Systems' sites at Sablesbury and Warton after the defence firm announced it will be making around 1,400 of its employees redundant across both sites. Enterprise zones can offer incoming businesses incentives including discounted business rates, relaxed planning rules, and priority connection to the superfast broadband network, for example. This follows an earlier unsuccessful application. The new enterprise zone proposal is currently being developed with a view to enabling the zones to be up and running by April 2012.

Last month, it has also been confirmed several Regional Growth Fund (RGF) bids in Lancashire have also been successful. Most prominent is the announcement that the Todmorden Curve rail link between Burnley and Manchester is to re-open. A joint bid for nearly £9million from Lancashire County Council, Burnley Council, Barnfield Construction and Network Rail will reinstate 500m of track and also regenerate the Weavers Triangle area. £7.5million has also been awarded through Regenerate Pennine Lancashire to support high-growth business in the county, and the North West Aerospace Alliance had a successful bid for nearly £5m to develop new technologies, which is expected to create 250 jobs. Before funding is finalised however, the department for business Innovation and Skills (BIS) will conduct a process of due diligence.

Most recently this month also, Communities Secretary Eric Pickles announced that £12.87 million is being awarded to the Lancashire LEP through the Growing Places Fund, which would cover up-front capital costs to get projects off the ground, this will be in the form of loans up front that are paid back after developments are eventually sold off. This figure is an indicative amount, and the Lancashire LEP must now submit proposals on how they would spend it.

3.4 Regenerate Pennine Lancashire

As part of the NWDA closure arrangements stated earlier in this report, operational and capacity funding for many partner organisations across the region, including Regenerate Pennine Lancashire ended in March 2011. The Regeneration Team at Ribble Valley have continued to work within existing partnership structures (i.e. Pennine Lancashire) whilst these range of important transitions take place as well as establishing new ones such as developing working relationships with mid and wider Lancashire authorities.

The Accelerating Business Growth in Lancashire (ABG) scheme is designed to meet the needs of local advanced manufacturing businesses by offering them capital investment for expansion projects, including premises, plant and machinery. Participating companies are also expected to offer graduate internships, apprenticeships or adopt carbon and energy saving targets. Regenerate Pennine Lancashire wrote the successful Regional Growth Fund bid in partnership with the Pennine Lancashire Local Authorities and also brokered partnerships between Lancashire County Council, the University of Central Lancashire, Lancaster University and the Lancashire Chambers of Commerce, who will help to deliver the programme. ABG is endorsed by the Lancashire LEP and will combine with its wider initiatives to promote manufacturing as a career choice. It will be delivered across the whole county, focussing on areas with a high concentration of manufacturers and public sector dependency.

3.5 Business Support

Across the areas of enterprise, employment and business support, a number of programmes have continued their work despite budget reductions in a reduced or modified form and until the emerging LEPs begin to take shape. The Regeneration Team is continuing its partnership working in these areas along with its involvement with the Pennine Lancashire Business Support and Enterprise Group.

Business Link Northwest (BLNW) has been the primary agency for business support within the region and as the main gateway for access to information on the various business support programmes and organisations the Regeneration Team has continued working with the organisations telephone and face-to-face advisers to ensure that access to support in Ribble Valley for local businesses and those considering starting a business remains through this transitional period.

A new national Business Link service has now been established and the BLNW regional business support service will cease activities from the its in Preston by November 25th 2011.

This new Business Link service includes: -

- An updated national Business Link website www.businesslink.gov.uk
- A new National Contact Centre due to come online during October 2011.
- Business Coaching for Growth designed to accelerate business growth due to commence January 2012.
- A national mentoring network.
- DWP funded support for unemployed individuals looking to start a business.

3.6 Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE)

Ribble Valley businesses continue to receive support through the Rural Development Programme (RDPE) funded by the EU Commission. Ribble Valley Borough Council took the lead role in the production of the Local Development Strategy on behalf of Pennine Lancashire partners and following the successful application for funding to oversee delivery of a £3.2 million programme, which includes £2.7 million in direct grant aid with the balance to cover other elements of the programme to include such things as staffing, research and project development costs. RDPE will run until 2013. The programme is focussed on the following three themes, or axis, these are: -

- Axis 1 – improving the competitiveness of the farming and forestry sectors
- Axis 2 – improving the environment and the countryside
- Axis 3 – rural quality of life and diversification of the rural economy
- Axis 4 – management, administration and the LEADER approach

Delivery of the programme, which is a bottom-up, community, led delivery method undertaken by Local Action Groups (LAGs) who will ensure that supported activities are within the context of the Sub-Regional Implementation Plans. In Lancashire 3 LAGs have been set up to manage the RDPE programme of activity under Axis 1, 3 & 4 whilst Axis 2 is being delivered by Natural England and the Forestry Commission.

The Pennine Lancashire LAG has a dedicated Development Officer who works frequently from the Ribble Valley council offices and acts as a point of contact and support. In addition to this RDPE Programme and Monitoring staff are based at the

Lancashire County Council offices in Preston. To date 19 projects and proposals have so far been successful across the 6 Pennine Lancashire Local Authority districts (12 projects in Ribble Valley) along with a number of additional projects in development and pending approval. Further detail regarding RDPE will be provided in a separate Committee report at this meeting.

3.7 Town Centres & Business Groups

The Regeneration Team also attends regular meetings 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 their locations. Events also, such as the Clitheroe Food Festival, Pickwick Night and Longridge Big Weekend, are examples where joint working between the Council, business groups and the community assist greatly in the success of Ribble Valley's key town and service centres.

Clitheroe Chamber of Trade membership has grown steadily to around 130 from less than 60 in the last 2 years. The continuing growth of the Chamber has also led to stronger partnership working with RVBC in activities to promote visitors. A new website www.visitclitheroe.co.uk has been launched through a successful funding bid to Lancashire County Council's Revitalising Town Centres project. Following on from its successful launch in 2010, the Clitheroe Food Festival proved yet again to be a success this year, held on Saturday 13th August 2011 with the 2012 event further being developed into an annual showcase event in the Lancashire calendar. Other plans are to launch a shop local loyalty card scheme in 2012.

Currently the Clitheroe Shop Front project is underway, which is helping to create a fresh look around the shop fronts in the town by having creative window displays. All participating traders have received expert advice on how to improve and develop their appeal through Mary Portas Retail Master Class sessions and there will be additional support from local artists to unleash the potential of their window displays. Creativity Works, a Pennine Lancashire Arts Partnership is providing funding for the project (£3,000) with additional support through Clitheroe Chamber of Trade and RVBC Arts (£3,600), Regeneration (£1,300) and Tourism (£1,000) departments. There will be a Clitheroe Best Window competition for the public to get involved in over six months with prizes being awarded to the public and the businesses.

Longridge: Longridge Town Team and Longridge Business Group are progressing a number of initiatives. Key objectives of the Longridge Town Team include; reinforcing Longridge's identity as an independent thriving market town for services; reducing the need for residents to travel elsewhere; and improving the look and feel of the town. The Longridge Old Station Buildings are now fully operational following its extensive refurbishment, which was supported with an RVBC grant towards the total costs of the works. A new website has been created at www.longridgestation.co.uk and the facility now also acts as a vibrant community hub including a heritage themed cafe, a town archive, meeting rooms, exhibition space and tourist information. Longridge Business Group is working to support and strengthen activities and events in Longridge (i.e. Big Weekend, Christmas Extravaganza) and the group are also considering whether Longridge town centre could become a Business Improvement District (BID) – some of the financing issues such as the business group and local events and promotions could be assisted through the development of a BID for Longridge. Many other towns in the UK,

following their own budget reductions, are now considering the BID concept as a way forward to promote and enhance their town centres.

Whalley: 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 attend meetings of the group to offer support wherever possible. A grant from RVBC has previously supported new signage to direct visitors to the retail area and to create the website www.visitwhalley.co.uk. The group are working closely with the Regeneration Team to deliver the Whalley Economic Action Plan, which sets out a number of actions following coordinated work between the RVBC Regeneration Team, Whalley Parish Council and Whalley Chamber of Trade. To promote the village, one current project is Whalley in Bloom and entering the Britain in Bloom competition for 2012. Another project was the first ever Whalley Live Festival held in June 2011 featuring live bands, hog roast and cider festival with plans now being made for 2012.

All the trade groups are now busy finalising their Christmas campaigns and the Regeneration Team will be providing support to help encourage a successful Christmas trading period.

3.8 The Future Economic Climate

The Regeneration Team are continuing to monitor issues during the current economic climate across Ribble Valley (empty business property & unemployment), the wider region and the UK and its current and future implications for the Borough's economy. Vacant business premises are marketed using the Evolutive property database. Most recently has been the announcement of significant job losses across the two BAE Systems sites in Samlesbury and Warton. Whilst the number of people claiming Job Seekers Allowance in Ribble Valley remains consistently one of the lowest in the region, however, mechanisms are in place to act where necessary and the Regeneration team are in regular contact with Job Centre Plus redundancy teams to assist and coordinate any support should this be required.

CHIEF EXECUTIVE

BACKGROUND PAPERS: -

Ribble Valley Economic Strategy 2009 – 2014
Clitheroe Town Centre Masterplan & Vision
Longridge Economic Action Plan
Whalley Economic Action Plan
Pennine Lancashire Local Development Strategy (RDPE)

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