

## RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL REPORT TO POLICY & FINANCE COMMITTEE

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Agenda Item No.

meeting date: 25<sup>TH</sup> MARCH 2014  
title: ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT UPDATE  
submitted by: CHIEF EXECUTIVE  
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### 1 PURPOSE

1.1 To receive an update on economic development and regeneration activities and issues and nominate representatives for economic groups established in Clitheroe, Longridge and Whalley.

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 This report follows previous updates from the Regeneration Team providing information on a number of economic development 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.

### 3 INFORMATION

#### 3.1 Economic Development Overview

The UK, as well as regionally and locally across Lancashire, continues to face difficult economic challenges. The Councils' Regeneration Team have been working in partnership with economic development staff within Lancashire County Council and other Lancashire Local Authorities in the coordination of economic development activities and ensuring business support services are maintained as much as possible.

In terms of the Ribble Valley economy generally, the Borough contains proportionally high levels economic activity and lower levels of unemployment in comparison to neighbouring districts, however, Ribble Valley's employment was initially impacted by the recent recessions, and whilst it has since seen a moderate recovery with economic forecasts suggesting future growth, future monitoring and economic

intelligence gathering, working in partnership with other districts and the county council, continues to help us to further understand and be responsive to the changing nature of the economy locally and across the UK.

### 3.2 Economic Development Working Group

The Council's Economic Development Working Group aims to further support and monitor delivery of the Councils' economic objectives, identify individual projects and address the issues in relation to the Ribble Valley economy. The Group, whilst recognising there is a broad number of areas in connection with the Boroughs' economic development, have identified initial priorities to provide the basis of key projects and activities upon which to concentrate. These four work areas will be developed, forming the basis of project activity going forward. These project areas are summarised below: -

1. Employment Land and Premises: Developing measures, which ensure that current employment land and premises provision in the area meet with business, economic and employment growth needs. Identify measures to bring these forward including options to deliver land and premises and maximising opportunities from empty properties in the Borough.
2. Clitheroe Market: To bring forward options for an appropriate scheme for the future of the market development area in line with the aims within the Clitheroe Town Centre Masterplan.
3. Tourism & Visitor Economy: To further develop measures, activities and events to support tourism and the visitor economy in Ribble Valley.
4. Transport & Infrastructure: Promoting improvements to services between Clitheroe and Manchester and Clitheroe and Preston, and working with the County Council and others providers to improve the local infrastructure. Extension of rail services from Clitheroe to Hellifield.

Further to the identified project areas above the group have addressing a number of other issues important to the Boroughs' business, economic and employment growth needs such as vacant business land and properties, key service centres, key business sectors and the wider rural economy.

### 3.3 Lancashire Enterprise Partnership

The Councils' Regeneration Team are involved in a number work areas and projects in order to support strategic economic initiatives being delivered through the Lancashire Enterprise Partnership (LEP) covering Ribble Valley as well as on a County wide scale.

A strategy to drive economic growth and employment through the investment of future European Structural and Investment (ESI) funds has been produced in partnership with Lancashire County Council and other Lancashire Local Authorities. This Strategy, now in its final draft form, sets out the ambitions for the Lancashire economy and indicates how the ESI Funds can support their achievement. The LEP has been notionally allocated £232m of ESI Funds for the programme period 2014-20. These funds will be invested as part of the Lancashire Growth Deal with a focus on their use to increase productivity levels for key economic sectors, promote

sustainable employment growth and tackle the barriers to employment for Lancashire's most disadvantaged communities.

The LEP is also continuing in its work on the Lancashire Enterprise Zone with BAE Systems, covering the two BAE Systems sites at Samlesbury in Ribble Valley and Warton in Fylde, where it is stated that for at least 25 years, all business rate growth within the Enterprise Zone will be retained and reinvested in the county, in support of the LEP's priorities.

The LEP is also overseeing delivery of the Regional Growth Fund (RGF) projects, which include the Accelerating Business Growth in Lancashire Programme to support companies with high growth potential, and the Growing Places capital fund aimed at infrastructure projects to unlock development and recycle the funding for new projects when developments are completed.

### 3.4 Business Support

We are currently going through a period of change with regard to the delivery of business support, employment and economic growth activities. Whilst a number of projects and programmes have continued their work, such as the current Rural Development Programme summarised later in this report, they are currently drawing to a close whilst work begins in preparing for new programmes coming on stream throughout 2014/15.

The Regeneration Team at Ribble Valley continues to work in partnership with other Economic Development Teams within the Lancashire Local Authorities, Lancashire County Council, including the cluster of East Lancashire authorities as well as Regenerate Pennine Lancashire to help both new and existing business access areas of support.

Boost Business Lancashire is the new £7.2m Lancashire Business Growth Hub project which will also provide a single gateway and 'umbrella' brand for several other business support programmes being delivered across the county. Boost aims to enable £20m, create at least 1,200 new jobs and safeguard 700 more by 2015. It offers a wide range of services, some 100% funded and some part-funded, including business mentoring by Community & Business Partners; providing high growth mentoring support, peer-to-peer networking and development programme, advice to pre-start and early start businesses, supporting advanced manufacturing and engineering companies develop new products and move into new markets, and additional support through a group of private sector advisory firms that specialise in helping growing businesses.

### 3.5 Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE)

Ribble Valley businesses have continued to receive support through the Rural Development Programme (RDPE) funded by the EU Commission and the current programme is due for completion by the end of March 2014.

Work has now begun for the next RDPE programme which will operate in Lancashire from 2015 and again focus 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

In the current programme locally, there have been 37 projects supported across the 6 Pennine Lancashire districts, of these 28 have been in Ribble Valley.

### 3.6 Service Centres & Business Groups

The Economic Development Working Group have stressed the need to maintain activities that will help support and maintain the vibrancy of all town and key service centres across the Borough (i.e. Clitheroe, Longridge and Whalley), and refreshing activities through coordinated work with local businesses and town / parish councils.

The issues nationally in relation to retail centres the high street retail economy in general has been the subject of continued business, political and media focus in recent months and years and ongoing experience and research highlights that the future context for retailing in centres is changing and discussions in recent months between businesses and council representatives have continued to help ensure that the Borough's service centres are economically successful and attractive places.

To address this, strengthening engagement, coordination and future work between local businesses, parish, borough and county councils has been seen as the best way forward, such as refreshing a 'Town Team' partnership style of approach and to continue improving the coordination and future work between local businesses, the Borough, Town and Parish Councils.

There are now three groups established in the Borough through this approach; Clitheroe Town Team, Longridge Town Team and Whalley Village Partnership, which are developing initiatives and working towards their individual priorities to support their local areas and the wider community in Ribble Valley.

Each of these groups will require input and representation from Ribble Valley Borough Council in order to support this partnership working and are therefore seeking nominations for member representatives from the Council as detailed in section 5 of this report.

In addition to this work, the Regeneration Team continue to provide individual support, information and guidance directly to the three business groups in Clitheroe, Longridge and Whalley to assist in partnership working on activities to support trade in each of their locations. Events, 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 in the success of Ribble Valley's key service centres.

### 3.7 Other Activities / Projects

The regeneration team support a number of project activities to further assist economic activity in the Borough such as support towards the delivery of the Clitheroe Food Festival including marketing, receiving exhibitor applications and co-ordinating activities to be delivered on the day. New this year also a continental style market has been planned to take place on the 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> April on the Clitheroe Market Site, working with Clitheroe Civic Society to produce a more up to date heritage trail leaflet for Clitheroe, working alongside Corporate Communications and Tourism to produce an APP for the Ribble Valley food trail in a joint project with the Forest of Bowland and Pendle Borough Council who are also producing trails for

their areas and support for a new Rambler Bus that runs from Clitheroe to Settle via Newton and Slaidburn, with good connections from East Lancashire and Manchester, providing access into the Forest of Bowland.

### 3.8 The Economic Climate

The most recent official data release (December 2013) shows the Job Seekers Allowance claimant rate for Ribble Valley at 1.0%. However, whilst the Borough consistently records one of the lowest unemployment rates in the region the effects of the economy are prevalent within the Borough and the Regeneration Team maintain contact with support agencies and Job Centre Plus. Also, vacant business premises in the Borough are marketed using the Evolutive property database and the Regeneration team are continuing to monitor issues during the current economic climate across Ribble Valley (empty business property & unemployment), as well as monitoring activities across the wider region and the UK to assess current and future implications for the Borough's economy.

## 4 RISK ASSESSMENT

### 4.1 The approval of this report may have the following implications

- Resources – None
- Technical, Environmental and Legal - None
- Political – None
- Reputation - The matters covered in this report link with the Council's objectives of a sustainable economy and thriving market towns and help demonstrate how the Council is seeking to take account of the local economy in its activities.

## 5 RECOMMENDED THAT COMMITTEE

### 5.1 Note the report, and;

### 5.2 Nominate representatives of Ribble Valley Borough Council for the following groups:

- 2 representatives for Clitheroe Town Team
- 2 representatives for Longridge Town Team
- 2 representatives for Whalley Village Partnership

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