

# RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL REPORT TO COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE

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Agenda Item No.

meeting date: 27 May 2014  
title: UPDATE ON TOURISM AND EVENTS  
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## 1 PURPOSE

1.1 To update Committee on Tourism activities.

1.2 Relevance to the Council's ambitions and priorities

- **Council Ambitions** - to sustain a strong and prosperous Ribble Valley
- **Community Objectives** - To encourage economic development throughout the borough, with specific focus on tourism, the delivery of sufficient land for business development, and supporting high growth business opportunities
- **Corporate Priorities** - To develop, with relevant partners, measures to support the visitor economy

## 2 BACKGROUND

The Council is keen to maximise the potential contribution of Tourism and Events to the local economy, and, in order to best achieve this, it undertakes promotional activity, and provides support for tourism-related businesses. This report is an update on the Council's activities in relation to the visitor economy, and the measures it takes to promote tourism growth.

## 3 ISSUES

### 3.1 **Headline Data**

Tourism continues to be an important economic driver in Lancashire, and, here in Ribble Valley, the visitor economy is buoyant, driven by a strong and entrepreneurial private sector, supported by the Council. Members are reminded that within the Ribble Valley, visitor numbers rose 3%, from 3.50m in 2011 to 3.61m in 2012, with a corresponding increase of 7% in tourism spend (from £159.16m to £169.61m). Direct jobs supported rose 3% from 2,541 to 2,618.

This is the latest data available, with new figures out shortly, but there is nothing to suggest that the value of tourism has not experienced further growth during 2013. Moreover, there continues to be sustained investment, both in existing facilities as well as new developments. Also, it is recognised that, given the influence of tourism and hospitality in this area, these figures are likely to be an understatement of the true impact, both in spend and employment.

### 3.2 **Marketing and Promotion**

Ribble Valley has a very strong brand that is maximised in all promotional activities. The brand is one of quality, and this is reflected in the range of quality experiences

on offer at local tourism establishments. In planning marketing activity, the Ribble Valley brand is maximised because of its unique appeal in the region, as a quality destination.

However, with limited resources and strong domestic competition not to mention overseas markets, it is necessary to target resources on these areas that will provide the best return. Therefore underneath the 'Ribble Valley brand', and for promotional purposes, tourism spend targets a number of key themes. These either represent what the area has a strong reputation for already, or alternatively, where there is new potential. Ultimately, the authority does not have the resources to promote everything available, and must therefore target budgets where the best return will be achieved,

The Key themes are:-

- Heritage
- Weddings
- Events
- Food and Hospitality
- Group Travel

These are also where partnerships can be forged to share costs and ideas.

#### Visitor Guide

Tourism is promoted through a variety of channels, and contrary to national trends, there is still strong demand, both from customers and advertisers, for the traditional printed visitor guide. Following a thorough review of the guide including how it was promoted and distributed, significant changes were made for the 2013 edition, and again for 2014 resulting in a more modern, appealing, and cost effective publication.

The 'coffee table' style magazine has proved extremely popular, as it makes the guide something to be valued and used, not only as a promotional tool to attract people here, but to guide them whilst staying in the area.

The content continues to become more informative and specific to niche markets, for example, country walking. This makes the guide more appealing to advertisers, as the publication has wide distribution, with many local businesses requesting it as a bedroom browser.

Once again, the guide has been produced using a company with the capability to not only design and print the guide, but also play a major role in selling the advertising, and, moreover, manage sales administration, thereby reducing the pressure on the Council. The contract was awarded to JCB design of Southport following a competitive process. The contract is a profit share, splitting income over and above printing and design costs. This means it is in the interests of both parties to work collaboratively to sell the guide.

The essential ingredients of the guide are

- Meaningful contents
- Distinctive images
- Real-time experiences
- People-focussed stories

It is already clear that the 2014 guide, launched at the Emporium, Clitheroe, is a notable success, increasing in size again from the previous edition. In two years, the guide has moved from being a cost to the Council to becoming project with a profit, not to mention less demanding in officer time.

The Guide is distributed as follows:-

#### 25,000 Produced

- 10,000 Local Hotels, Caravan Parks, Visitor Outlets
- 7,000 Tourist Information Centres Nationally
- 5,000 Tourism Promotions and Exhibitions
- 3,000 National Advertising Campaigns

The Guide is now sent out by an external company whose response rates, following an enquiry, are not only quicker but much cheaper than the council is able to offer, as the company have negotiated better postage rates.

#### Social Media and website

The different forms of social media and associated technology continue to be important for tourism marketing, and the Council has begun to invest time into developing the key media available.

Whilst the website and other social media are regularly updated, a more fundamental review has recently been undertaken by the student consultancy support from Leeds Metropolitan University. Their findings and recommendations have only just been received, but it is already clear that they will result in a range of improvements to the website and other media.

#### Visit Ribble Valley Website

Much of the content of the site is linked to the Marketing Lancashire website, including accommodation and events, but we are keen to try and make these areas easier for visitors to access, and will need to make changes to ensure things like the event search, are easier to navigate.

#### Social Media

Members have previously expressed their enthusiasm to improve the use of social media. Since that meeting, various developments have been initiated.

**Twitter-** 'Go Ribble Valley' Twitter is now primarily for trade contacts and people with a professional interest in Ribble Valley Tourism. Tweets are linked to Facebook.

**Face book** 'Love Ribble Valley' has a rapidly growing number of followers, with an increase of 100% in just six months. Facebook is primary a consumer page for the public, featuring events and activities, and generally stimulating interest in the area.

In addition to the above, a regular '**E-Blast**' is produced. This contains newsworthy information for private sector businesses and professionals involved in tourism, such as journalists, travel writers, bloggers and tour operators. The E-Blast, called 'Tourism Matters', celebrates awards, achievements and highlights new attractions, events etc., all of which helps to portray the Ribble Valley as a fresh, vibrant, quality destination.

### 3.3 Press and PR

Regular contact is maintained with key media contacts, resulting in very positive media about the area, including features in national publications. One journalist who came on a familiarisation trip wrote a large feature for Country Living magazine published in April 2014, and she has also supplied other features for food magazines following her visit. Other features include 'Countryfile' magazine, and 'Discover Britain' for groups.

### 3.4 Ribble Valley Tourism Association

The Tourism and Events Officer has been proactive in helping to reshape and re-structure the Ribble Valley Tourism Association. By reducing running costs and streamlining administration, the association has restored its reputation. More than fifty local businesses are now in membership, and this is growing steadily. Their achievements over the past year include

- Launching the Ribble Valley Tourism awards which recognised excellence and achievement locally
- Their administration has been streamlined, and more efficient
- They maximise the use of technology in communications with members.
- The RVTA website, [www.rvta.co.uk](http://www.rvta.co.uk) has been launched and is now regularly maintained.
- A membership drive has increased membership by 42%
- Training courses in social media and photography have been organised.

The Association is an effective and representative group for consultation, networking, and collaboration with the Council. Beyond the basic fee, individual members can then 'buy into' further joint promotional activity, as appropriate to their individual business. The association and its members are now partnering many of the council's activities.

### 3.5 Group Travel

Whilst group travel is a fairly specialist area of activity, and not one historically exploited to any great extent, there continues to be growing interest expressed by tour and coach operators, who recognise that the profile of the Ribble Valley is being raised. To this end, the Tourism and Events Officer has been developing bespoke itineraries with those businesses keen to encourage group visits. This collaboration is also product development, and the Council has been helped in this respect by the support of a student placement from the University of Central Lancashire. It is anticipated that two themed itineraries will be developed, one for heritage, and the other for food.

Two private sector businesses joined with the Council to promote the area at the premier travel exhibition, 'Great Days Out' in Manchester. This proved very successful, with many leads being developed. In addition, the regional Groups Travel Organisers event in Leeds was attended, where similar enthusiasm for Ribble Valley was experienced.

Group travel organisers are looking for new products, along with truly authentic experiences which place Ribble Valley in a strong position to develop this market.

Familiarisation trips for journalists and group travel organisers have also been organised and, early in 2014, the national conference of Group Travel organisers, visited Ribble Valley for the first organised event to the area.

### 3.6 **Celebration**

Working with local business to improve the quality of the visitor experience is an important part of the work of Council Officers. Celebrating success, such as awards and accreditation, is a big part of this. It is not insignificant that no fewer than fifteen local businesses were in the finals of the Lancashire Tourism Awards. The Tourism and Events Officer works with all these businesses, along with other award winning facilities, and develops their products.

### 3.7 **Tourism Developments**

In terms of Tourism development, there is no recent tourism strategy, and this will be addressed soon. This could include the concept of Tourism Action Plans to help coordinate tourism activity between different organisations, in places such as Longridge, and Clitheroe.

### 3.8 **Visitor Information**

A variety of printed literature is available to visitors, and a review is currently underway to determine what the Council should support, reprint and distribute. Some material is produced directly by the Council, but much more is published by other organisations, ranging from Chambers of Trade to Parish Councils, and voluntary groups. With resources limited, it will be important to ensure that, whatever is promoted, meets quality standards and customer needs.

In order to reinforce the Ribble Valley brand, and provide visitors a sense of arrival into the area, the Council is working with the Ribble Valley Tourism Association to develop a network of local information points. One good example will be Hurst Green Church which is due to open its doors to visitors every day and have a bespoke Visitor Information Point together with somewhere for walkers to meet. A network of Visitor Information Points at strategic locations around the borough is being developed. These will supplement the existing facilities at the Platform Gallery, Longridge Heritage Centre Information rooms at Bolton by Bowland, and Downham.

As a supplement to the existing range of tourist information available, work has been undertaken to produce information in foreign languages. Working with a local student studying foreign languages, parts of the website already contain content in four languages and this is set to expand further.

### 3.9 **Events**

Support for events across the borough continues, and with the reputation and influence of certain key events, such as Beat herders and the Food and Jazz Festivals, their impact on overnight stays and tourism spend grows.

#### **Wedding Partnership**

Using weddings as a key theme for development, the Tourism and Events Officer has forged a new partnership with all the main wedding venues in the area. With the aim of promoting the Ribble Valley as 'the place to get married' the operators are working collaboratively with the Council to establish a new website highlighting the range of venues available in the area. The launch of this exciting initiative will take place in September.

### 3.10 **Support**

The Tourism and Events Officer has been fortunate enough to obtain the support of a three month student placement from the International Business Academy in Denmark. Also a team from Leeds Metropolitan University has been looking at the potential of technology. Also a link with the University of Central Lancashire has been forged resulting with a number of student placements working on live projects

to benefit the council whilst also giving them valuable experience in the workplace. The contribution of these placements, along with numerous work placements from local schools, helps stimulate new ideas, and challenges existing practice.

#### 4 RISK ASSESSMENT

The approval of this report may have the following implications:

- **Resources** – There are no specific financial implications to this report, but issues may emerge with the development of initiatives contained within.
- **Technical, Environmental and Legal** - None
- **Political** – Tourism is highlighted in the corporate strategy as a key contributor to support economic growth in the Ribble Valley.
- **Reputation** – Tourism is an important part of the local economy, and the role of the Council in leading the visitor economy enhances its reputation.

#### 5 CONCLUSION

Committee will be notified of relevant further developments.

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