

RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL REPORT TO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Agenda Item No. 6

meeting date: 20 SEPTEMBER 2018
title: RIBBLE VALLEY TOURISM DESTINATION MANAGEMENT PLAN
submitted by: JOHN HEAP, DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICES
principal author: TOM PRIDMORE, TOURISM AND EVENTS OFFICER

1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To approve the Ribble Valley Tourism Destination Management Plan (DMP) 2018/19
- 1.2 Relevance to the Council's ambitions and priorities:
 - Community Objectives – To encourage economic development throughout the borough with a specific focus on tourism, the delivery of sufficient land for business development, and supporting high growth business opportunities
 - Corporate Priorities – To sustain a strong and prosperous Ribble Valley
 - Other Considerations – To develop with relevant partners measures to support the visitor economy

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 One of the key objectives of the Council is to encourage economic development throughout the borough with a specific focus on tourism, which it achieves through a number of services but primarily through the employment of a dedicated officer with a budget for promotional activity.
- 2.2 The work of promoting tourism is achieved very much in partnership with the private sector, and delivered through a number of ways. Whilst there is currently no bespoke tourism strategy for Ribble Valley, current work is guided by key priorities, developed with partners, and delivered in line with other strategic plans.
- 2.3 At its meeting on 21 September 2017, this committee approved a draft plan for consultation purposes: the purpose of this report is to approve the final DMP.
- 2.4 Destination Management is a process of leading, influencing, and coordinating the management of all the aspects of a destination that contribute to a visitor's experience, taking account of the needs of visitors, local residents, businesses, and the environment.
- 2.5 A DMP is a shared statement of intent to manage a destination over a stated period of time, articulating the roles of the different stakeholders, and identifying clear actions that they will take, and the apportionment of resources. "Tourism is the act of travelling to, and staying in, places outside one's usual environment for leisure, business, and other purposes. Tourism includes day visits using the same criteria."
- 2.6 The draft plan has been the subject of consultation with private sector partners, from whom it received widespread approval. There are a few areas where the plan has been strengthened, namely:-
 - A greater appreciation of the value of the arts and, in particular, music performance

- A better representation of countryside recreation and associated activities
- A better description of the importance and value of digital marketing and social media
- To link better with Marketing Lancashire's Visitor Economy Strategy which has now been launched

3 GENERAL COMMENTS

- 3.1 Once approved, the plan becomes an effective management framework with regard to tourism, with the potential to report back to this committee periodically on progress.
- 3.2 Whilst the DMP provides a valuable framework for future working, the nature of tourism, particularly in relation to working with the private sector or reacting to new funding initiatives, means that we must also remain responsive to new opportunities as they arise. The plan therefore is not definitive.
- 3.3 There is no requirement for wider consultation beyond the private business sector in Ribble Valley and Marketing Lancashire, as the DMP is not a statutory document nor has it any influence beyond promoting tourism. Its purpose is to guide the way the Council works with partners in the promotion of tourism. It would be for a wider tourism strategy to incorporate such aspects as Development control, Strategic Planning etc.

4 RISK ASSESSMENT

The approval of this report may have the following implications

- Resources -The DMP will have no additional financial implications without further committee consideration
- Technical, Environmental and Legal – None
- Political – None
- Reputation – Having a DMP will enhance the Council's reputation to private sector operators, by providing clarity on priorities. It may also assist bids for funding, by demonstrating a joined up approach to service delivery.
- Equality & Diversity – None

5 IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT COMMITTEE

Approves the Destination Management Plan 2018/19 as submitted, and prepares a summary promotional version to share with consultees and partners.

TOM PRIDMORE
TOURISM AND EVENTS OFFICER

JOHN HEAP
DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICES

BACKGROUND PAPERS: Draft Destination Management Plan SEPTEMBER 2017

For further information please contact Tom Pridmore 01200 414496

Ref: Economic Development Committee 20.9.18/Tom Pridmore

Ribble Valley
Tourism Destination
Management Plan



Ribble Valley
Borough Council
www.ribblevalley.gov.uk

FINAL DOCUMENT

September 2018

Ribble Valley Tourism

Destination Management Plan

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A Destination Management Plan - Background

'Unique features. Multiple locations. Varied stakeholders. Destinations are the heart and soul of any visitor economy, but because each one is different, planning how to make the most of them can be a challenge.' (1)

Destination Management is a process of leading, influencing and coordinating the management of all the aspects of a destination that contribute to a visitor's experience, taking account of the needs of visitors, local residents, businesses and the environment.

A Destination Management Plan (DMP) is a shared statement of intent to manage a destination over a stated period of time, articulating the roles of the different stakeholders and identifying clear actions that they will take and the apportionment of resources.

"Tourism is the act of travelling to, and staying in, places outside one's usual environment for leisure, business and other purposes. Tourism includes day visits using the same criteria."

Tourism includes business tourism, visitors staying for events and day visitors i.e. anyone undertaking an activity that is not in their normal routine. These are important markets for Ribble Valley but not always recognised as tourism.

The visitor economy covers all aspects of the economy related directly or indirectly through the supply chain to the provision of services to visitors and benefitting from their spending.

The visitor economy is a more inclusive concept than tourism, involving a wider range of activities and embracing the total visitor experience including the 'sense of place'. It depends upon public bodies and voluntary groups as well as private sector businesses.

The visitor economy has an interdependent relationship with a range of sectors including transport, retailing, catering, culture, heritage and entertainment, amongst others. The importance of these definitions for Ribble Valley is the recognition that the visitor economy is large and diverse including not only hotels and traditional tourist attractions but a range of local services and providers from transport to toilets, from the local cafe serving a visitor to the florist supplying a wedding venue.

A Destination Plan for Ribble Valley - Overview

Ribble Valley - Description

Welcome to the official centre of the Kingdom, a landscape which inspired Tolkien's 'Lord of the Rings', and linked to the famous Pendle witches. Home to historic abbeys, a castle and miles of beautiful countryside. A place to shop, walk and cycle, and moreover to taste and to feast. Authentic to the core, this is Ribble Valley, quintessentially English and just waiting to be discovered.

The Borough of Ribble Valley lies in the North East of Lancashire and, with an area of 585 square kilometres, is the largest district in the County. Over seventy percent of the Borough is in a designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), a clear reflection of the landscape quality of the area.

There are two towns in Ribble Valley, Clitheroe, the main administrative centre which is located at the centre of the Borough and Longridge, the other main town, which lies in the west. The remainder of the area is mainly rural with a number of villages ranging in size from large villages such as Whalley, Sabden and Chatburn through to small hamlets such as Great Mitton and Paythorne.

Ribble Valley has excellent communications that open up the area to the rest of the country. The A59 is a main artery that dissects the Borough from the west through to the east, linking directly to the M6 and serving access routes to the M65 motorway. There are regular rail services from Clitheroe to Preston and Manchester. Airports at Manchester, Liverpool and Leeds are all well within 2 hours drive.

Ribble Valley is extremely well-placed to benefit from the visitor and leisure economy, with a large percentage of the population of the North West of England within 90 minutes' drive.

Tourism in Ribble Valley

The visitor economy in Ribble Valley is buoyant, but with a growing population and the continuing demand for employment opportunities, there is still scope for sensitive development. Brand awareness for the area has improved in recent years, but there is still much to do to have Ribble Valley recognised as a first class tourism destination, where the value of its heritage and culture are truly acknowledged and where people choose to visit, ahead of other major competitor regions in the north of England. There is potential to further grow the visitor economy.

The key attributes of Ribble Valley as a tourism destination

Strong brand identity which is growing

Unique experiences

Reasonable accessibility

Extraordinary private sector

Strong themes and reputations

The key characteristics of the tourism product

A buoyant and rapidly growing wedding sector

A creative, award winning food and hospitality sector

A vibrant and emerging Music, Arts and Culture scene

Some well-established, popular and economically viable events

Stunning scenery for countryside walking, cycling and outdoor pursuits

A feel-good factor, a nice place to live and visit

A rich retail sector, with varied, quality shopping experiences

A consistently high quality tourism offer

The people involved in tourism business locally

An array of astute entrepreneurs willing to invest and take risks

Outstanding levels of customer service

Many family businesses, some with long local pedigrees

Private sector operators loyal to the Ribble Valley brand

Ribble Valley Borough Council and Tourism

Whilst Tourism is not a statutory function, it is one which is integral to the economy of the Borough, and it is one which the Council is keen to pursue but in ways which retain and enhance, rather than despoil, the character of the area.

The role of the Council in terms of tourism

In producing this plan, it is important to specify the roles of the Council

Promoter – marketing the whole area

Coordinator - honest broker, creating partnerships

Facilitator - using public sector knowledge and resources

Advisor - to businesses, communities and events

Provider - of facilities such as the gallery and the castle

Protector- in terms of safety such as food standards

Guardian of the Environment – open spaces, streets and key buildings

It is important to note that tourists, during their visit, will also interface with a much wider range of council services, such as parking, toilets, parks, sport and leisure.

With limited resources it is impossible to support or promote everything, so, in terms of marketing and promotional spend, we target resources towards the following priorities:

- Areas of growth
- Areas of potential
- Areas where we can make a difference
- Areas where we can facilitate action
- Areas where we can work together

The Strategic Context - Understanding local issues

The development of sustainable tourism is an important priority in the Council's strategic plans, and is highlighted in two key strategic documents

The Corporate strategy makes it one of the priorities

Priority: To sustain a strong and prosperous Ribble Valley

Objective: To encourage economic development throughout the borough with a specific focus on tourism, the delivery of sufficient land for business development, and supporting high growth business opportunities

And it is highlighted in the **Local Development Framework (LDF)** - core strategy

KEY STATEMENT EC3: VISITOR ECONOMY

Proposals that contribute to and strengthen the visitor economy of Ribble Valley will be encouraged, including the creation of new accommodation and tourism facilities through the conversion of existing buildings or associated with existing attractions. Significant new attractions will be supported, in circumstances where they would deliver overall improvements to the environment and benefits to local communities and employment opportunities.

Context

Why the council takes this approach?

Visitor expectations are constantly rising and the tourism offer must meet demands for quality and service. This applies to the attractions, retail businesses and the restaurant or cafe (food and drink sector) offering locally sourced produce. In addition, the natural landscape is a valuable asset of Ribble Valley and a balance between promoting tourism and the protection and enhancement of the natural environment is essential.

Ribble Valley in the context of Lancashire

In terms of the sub-regional perspective, Marketing Lancashire, the Destination Management Organisation for the County has, in its Visitor Economy Strategy 2016-2020, articulated the importance of tourism and created a vision based on analysis of the county's product strengths, its existing visitor profile and future opportunities.

The vision for Lancashire as a visitor destination by 2020 is:

- To be recognised as one of the top five English counties for a refreshing and relaxing short break and an active family holiday.
- To be known nationally as a culinary 'must visit destination' because of the authenticity and quality of its food and drink, from field to table, locally sourced from the county's stunning valleys, plains, woodlands and coasts.
- For the county's cultural, countryside and heritage offer to be main reasons that visitors choose to visit Lancashire.
- To be recognised for its stunning 137-mile coastline that effortlessly combines seaside heritage and contemporary leisure experiences.
- To be a preferred location for corporate events and association conferences because of the choice and value for money of its venues and the breadth and depth of the business tourism infrastructure.
- A destination that offers outstanding customer service on a par with the best worldwide and is an example of best practice in offering accessible holidays.

Clearly, Ribble Valleys' Tourism offer is well placed to maximise some of these ambitions

The Value of Tourism (latest survey 2016)

The value of tourism in any tourism destination is notoriously hard to measure; not least as the definition of tourism itself is never easy to define. Just taking, for example, Ribble Valley's amazing food offer, just how far does someone need to travel to be classed a tourist

or visitor, and to what degree are local people enjoying different parts of Ribble Valley as leisure tourists?

The model for measuring tourism performance adopted in Lancashire is called STEAM and the latest figures, collected by Marketing Lancashire for 2016 are summarised below. They are considered to be an underestimate of the true picture, not least given recent leisure developments in the area, but they do nonetheless create a year on year benchmark, and even as an underestimate, they reveal that tourism is a very large and important sector of the Ribble Valley economy.

In 2016 Ribble Valley recorded

- **4.07 Million tourism visits**
- **£225,914 million tourism spend**
- **3,109 FTE jobs**
- **The economic impact of tourism rising 6.8% (2015 – 2016)**
- **6,763 Visitor bed spaces**
- **5 million day visitor days and nights**
- **£126,189 million generated by Day Visits**
- **Growth of 6.3%**

Overview of Tourism in Ribble Valley 2018

Accommodation

There has not been an accurate tourism bedspace survey for a number of years, nor has there been any formal occupancy survey, so the following summary is derived from anecdotal evidence and observations/conversations with operators. It clearly illustrates the lack of accurate data, and highlights the need for more research.

In terms of a position statement regarding accommodation in Ribble Valley:-

- The accommodation stock is generally very good quality
- There are many award winning and highly rated businesses
- Accommodation is dominated by larger hotels and self-catering units
- Self-catering units operate a flexible booking system (i.e. not insistent on weeklong bookings only)
- There is a good geographical spread but there are some gaps in provision

In terms of business

- There is currently high demand particularly at peak times e.g. summer weekends
- Hotels are generally recording very high occupancy levels
- There appears to be high demand for touring caravan/motorhome/camping pitches
- Businesses that operate flexible bookings are reaping the rewards of new business
- The local wedding industry is boosting bookings and creating repeat/return visits

In terms of type of accommodation, our local stock includes

- Serviced - Hotels, Guest houses, boutique hotels, Air BnB,
- Self-catering, mainly cottages
- Camping, caravanning, motorhome parks, holiday home parks, yurts, pods, glamping units
- Outward bound centres and Youth Hostels
- Note Air BnB and staying with family and friends are also valuable sectors.

Food and Drink Tourism

Ribble Valley has become one of the UK's premier food destinations, recently described 'the Dordogne of the UK', by the Times, while Clitheroe is the official food capital of Lancashire hosting an annual food festival that attracts thousands of food enthusiasts, but it hasn't always been so. Ribble Valley Borough Council spearheaded the borough's recovery from the foot and mouth epidemic by launching the Ribble Valley Food Trail in 2007 with partners in the food sector. The trail became one of the borough's most talked about initiatives and went on to win numerous tourism, regeneration and communications awards, as well as unearthing some fantastic success stories, including several businesses that had successfully diversified following foot-and-mouth to become market leaders.

The trail played a significant role in the reputation of Ribble Valley as a desirable place to visit, and its impact on Ribble Valley's profile as a visitor destination far exceeded expectations. Building on the trail's success, Ribble Valley Borough Council decided to host an annual food festival in Clitheroe. The first Clitheroe Food Festival in 2009 was a modest event attracting around 800 or so curious shoppers. Now, in its seventh year, the festival showcases the very best Lancashire food and drink, and attracts up to 20,000 people.

The other major factor in the area's success as a culinary hub has been an extraordinary range of innovative developments by the private sector, particularly in terms of gastro pubs, high quality hotels, and non-English restaurants. This, in addition to award winning delicatessens and niche cafes.

The popularity for food and drink in this area has grown at such a rate that it has had a major effect on local tourism and hospitality. Tourism is booming in Ribble Valley, which is in no small part the result of the development of the sophisticated food and drink offer that, now quite varied in nature, contains many national award-winning establishments in their own spheres. Fine and quality dining has enhanced Ribble Valley's reputation so much that it has boosted the accommodation and retail tourism sectors, as people come from afar to enjoy taste experiences and spend time in the area. This, in turn, has resulted in significant investment in tourism and hospitality generally, to meet growing demand for quality.

Business has been boosted by the wave of interest in food, largely stimulated by new TV and media coverage, and there is a notable growth of interest in tasting food, cooking food and understanding its provenance. In order to provide help to direct visitors staying here, where there is a density of quality food experiences, the Council has created a new website dedicated to Ribble Valley food. Here visitors can not only find restaurants and cafes but also learn about the chefs and find places to buy food for themselves.

www.ribbonvalleyfoodheaven.com is just the latest development in a continuing food journey. In terms of public demand, there is real demand for experiences that combine food and walking and this should be maximised as a priority.

Wedding Tourism

A more recent development has been the rapid growth in interest for quality wedding venues, an opportunity that the Council and its partners have seized. A unique partnership of licenced wedding venues has been created, believed to be the first of its kind in the UK, where venues work with the Council to develop a brand, based on a reputation of the perfect place to be married.

The success of the partnership is attributed to a number of factors. Firstly, the strong brand identity of Ribble Valley, a place with great landscapes and a reputation for quality. Next, a local authority committed to partnership working. Then, by working together, the group has recognised any wedding in Ribble Valley could potentially benefit any partner in the long run, whether through dining experiences or overflow accommodation, and that working collaboratively has great potential. Finally, every wedding venue in the partnership is quite different in character; therefore, the options available to customers are very wide from castles to abbeys and country house hotels to barns. Moreover, whilst each is unique they all share values of quality and outstanding customer service.

In the two years since its inception, the group has launched a website, hosted a visit by journalists, and attended national wedding fairs. It has organised the first valley wide wedding fair as well as hosting joint open evenings, called 'One Night in Heaven,' enabling prospective customers to visit several venues in one evening. To help with promotions, the group has produced a high quality publication, which is particularly useful to potential customers, as it offers a valued one stop shop guide to Ribble Valley venues.

Many venues are recording healthy increases in bookings, both throughout the year as well as on many days of the week, as opposed to the traditional events held on weekends. Also, the economic value of weddings in Ribble Valley spreads way beyond that of the actual wedding venue and into the wider economy, through shopping, wedding suppliers, accommodation, and local dining.

Weddings in Ribble Valley have become a powerful tool in stimulating tourism, by providing large numbers of first time staying visitors. Evidence suggests that many are converting to repeat visitors. Having enjoyed their time, they are returning for holidays the following year.

Benefits of wedding tourism

- Direct employment and income
- Indirect benefit to third party in accommodation and hospitality
- Economic benefit to specialist suppliers
- Repeat investments
- Return tourism visits by guests

Wedding Heaven provides a successful model for partnership working.

Countryside Recreation

One of the most endearing qualities of Ribble Valley is the scenery, making it a pleasant place to be. With the close proximity of urban populations, Ribble Valley is still a great 'drive out' not least when linked to the food offer. Pendle Hill and the Trough of Bowland are but two of the popular drives often quoted by the public, who still come in their numbers and invariably add lunch, tea or both to their excursion. Even with rising fuel prices, there are no signs that this market, often represented by an older profile of visitor, is diminishing, rather it is likely to grow. This is especially so in the short to medium term with the uncertainty of Brexit, exchange rates, and the potential for a boom in staycation holidays.

The Ribble Valley landscape also welcomes visitors involved in a multitude of sports and active pastimes, each with the ability to benefit the visitor economy. The following are just a selection of those with a significant impact on tourism and, more importantly, with potential to grow.

Cycling- Hosting the Tour of Britain revealed the potential interest in cycling and it has been heartening to note the investments made in local cafés and hotels to accommodate cyclists. Interest in cycling is growing at a phenomenal rate and Ribble Valley is well placed to maximise this market

Mountain biking - Gisburn forest now contains first class mountain biking facilities which are proving very popular, however in order to become a true mountain bike visitor destination, where people come and stay rather than just day trip, more infrastructure needs to be developed.

Walking - Ribble Valley contains first class countryside and a fantastic range of public paths to enjoy. Our own evidence shows that country walking remains enormously popular, and whilst there is scope for increasing visits by walking clubs, the main source of enquires without question comes from family groups seeking medium length, safe, self-guided circular walks but linked with a food offer. Such walks exist and are available in a plethora of media, from apps, leaflets, books and interpretive boards. Finding walks can be hard for the customer and there is a strong argument for pooling these into one generic series.

Heritage Tourism

Ribble Valley boasts an absolute wealth of heritage and historical places, and yet there is a sense that they do not get the appreciation, patronage and acknowledgement they deserve. This is seen as a major opportunity not least, as there are a number of new prospects on the horizon, including;

- Proposals to develop museum / visitor experience at Stonyhurst College
- Ongoing Roman excavations at Ribchester
- Developments arising from the Pendle Hill partnership heritage lottery fund initiative
- Widening access to some of the privately owned properties

- Growing interest in Heritage Open Days, experiencing places normally private/charged

This is set against a backdrop of growing consumer interest in heritage, local history and genealogy.

Ribble Valley has all the essential ingredients for a heritage destination of regional, if not national importance.

- Historic places
- Iconic locations
- Stories and legends
- People

There is work required for it to achieve the justifiable recognition it deserves.

There is clearly a wealth of opportunities here to develop, explore and discover and that the natural way to achieve this is through the development of a trail or trails.

The following is required

Undertake an audit of 'Heritage Gems'.

Identify which have potential for tourism growth

- Access – Ownership
- Access - Physical
- Potential
- Key dates and anniversaries
- Links to other tourism sectors, e.g. accommodation and food

Identify partnerships and funding

Identify and develop trails

Attractions

Compared to many tourism destinations of a similar profile, Ribble Valley has relatively few actual paid-entry tourist attractions. There are a couple of farm or animal parks plus a few heritage attractions, such as Clitheroe Museum, but the area is more dominated by non-paid entry destinations like garden centres, galleries, walks, picnic areas and retail based opportunities. There are also some attractions located within tourism complexes. This overall picture creates limitations for attracting families, not least the lack of all-weather facilities. All attractions, paid and non-paid entry, add to the vibrancy of the area for tourism and what is yet again evident is the quality of these experiences.

Rurality can be a challenge to our attractions, not only in driving distance but also in terms of signposting and location. Such attractions have to work hard to maintain business. There are also some extremely niche attractions, to which people will travel from across the country, and even the globe. These tend to be very specialist retail outlets or art galleries and they are significant because they regularly involve visitors staying overnight and enjoying local hospitality.

Event based Tourism

Events offer a unique opportunity to introduce a destination to new visitors and in Ribble Valley; there are some great examples, like Clitheroe Food Festival, Beatherder and the Jazz Festival. These and many more now bring people in for overnight stays and we believe repeat visits at other times of the year

The Council frequently acts in an enabling role to encourage and support new events, but also in providing advice on planning and marketing. The best and most sustainable events are those initiated locally, begin modestly and build up over time gathering interest and volunteer enthusiasts along the way. These are more grounded in communities and subsequently more sustainable.

Events also provide a valuable new offer for the itinerary of things to do for people staying in the area. Our big events are well attended but we perhaps underestimate the potential interest of smaller, often community events to visitors. It is often the small rural gatherings that offer the most authentic local experiences, and authenticity is one of the greatest tourism experiences. We need to ensure event information is readily accessible for customers businesses and event organisers.

The popularity of events is hard to predict generally and the Council could take the lead by initiating an event strategy that seeks to spread the visitor load across the year.

Music, Arts and Culture

Ribble Valley is experiencing a growth in interest in arts and culture, boosted by events like Create-Longridge and Clitheroe arts walk, as well as several new galleries opening. This relatively new and progressive market has enormous potential but will rely on the development of partnership working and further trails to be successful.

In addition, there is a rapidly growing music scene, involving a variety of genres. These vary from the now well-established Beatherder festival, to the annual Ribble Valley Jazz Festival, both of which now attract many staying visitors. These events have grown organically much due to the endeavours of hundreds of local volunteers. There are also a number of other music-based programmes that are rapidly growing and attracting major artists and performers. These include the Clitheroe Concert Society and the Ribble Valley Music

Festival. Music based events have the ability to attract new visitor markets as well as target off peak periods, when accommodation is more readily available.

Business Tourism

Ribble Valley is not particularly known for business tourism and yet it has a wealth of meeting and training facilities with opportunities big and small. Industry consultation suggests there is a resurgence of interest in 'office away days' and similarly breakaway activities for companies seeking 'clear blue skies'; to regenerate their teams. Ribble Valley has first class hotel conference facilities as well as the more outward-bound style opportunities, and is well placed to maximise this market.

Group Tourism

Ribble Valley features an interesting cluster of potential coach-stop attractions, including quaint market towns, heritage attractions, food experiences, accommodation and scenic tour routes. Yet group travel to Ribble Valley is not something that has ever been properly targeted, and yet in many ways the area is well placed to maximise this growth market, not least as the trend is for group travel to involve more affluent, high spend visitors.

Group travel is a tourism market where collaborative working is critical to success, as excursions invariably involve multi venue itineraries. In order to take this forward, a number of tourism businesses in Ribble Valley have recently joined together to create a plan to encourage more group visits into the area. The Council, in partnership with the Ribble Valley Tourism Association, contracted a leading group travel consultant, to deliver a workshop on how to develop group travel in this area.

It was attended by some of Ribble Valley's leading tourism businesses, including attractions and accommodation providers. It also attracted representatives from tour guiding and coach operators. The workshop discussed ways to attract more and better quality groups from identified target areas.

A partnership group, coordinated by the Council, has been created to take the initiative forward. The group is keen to ensure that group travel is developed in sensitive and sustainable ways, by making information about suitable opportunities more accessible, and by identifying routes and opportunities capable of welcoming, and coping with quality group visits. The partnership will be launching a campaign this autumn, their work includes -

- Collate trails and itineraries
- Raise Travel Trade media awareness
- Collective attendance at Group Travel events
- Hosting Group Travel familiarisation visits
- Target key regional operators
- Recommend infrastructure improvements

Our Places

Towns and villages in Ribble Valley attract visitors for numerous reasons but fundamentally, it is because they are attractive places with naturally welcoming experiences. Anecdotal evidence also suggests visitors can find our places hard to find both in terms of getting there but moreover, finding their way around them. They do not have the signposting regimes and public infrastructure normally associated with tourism destinations. Our town and village centres offer quality, and often quirky tourism experiences, places of discovery and exploration. What will be important for the future if they are to survive in an ever competitive market is to examine each as a tourism experience. Visitors have certain expectations about the feel of a place and anticipate it being both welcoming and easy to navigate. An audit of each place, involving local businesses, may reveal how we can improve and ensure we increase our market share of the visit economy into the future. The other important objective is to decide, in terms of tourism, how we pitch each destination, rather than trying to be all things to all people, which in marketing terms can be expensive and resource hungry.

Those strengths include:-

Clitheroe - Quality shopping, dining, heritage and market. There is also a growing music and arts scene.

Whalley - Quality shopping, dining and heritage

Longridge – Quality shopping, arts and gateway to walking in Bowland

If we concentrate on marketing the strengths of a place, other indirect businesses will benefit. It is very important to identify these strengths, as they can replace and reinforce branding and marketing, particularly through imagery.

Villages

With so many villages in the area, it impossible to describe each in terms of tourism in any meaningful detail, as each has its own charm and character, and each its own 'reasons to visit'. Each place is nonetheless important in terms of visitor economy, and what will be important in the future is to identify and highlight the strength and unique qualities of each. This is particularly important in terms of sustainability and minimising the impact of tourism on small communities. Promotion and marketing must be sensitive to the individual needs and capacity of each place.

In developing our places we will match each to the following -

Destination Management - the Physical Experience

- A pleasant place to be (live)
- An easy place to visit

- Outstanding street scene/country scene environment
- Excellent visitor direction
- Excellent visitor information
- Excellent visitor interpretation
- Excellent visitor welcome and service
- One continuous experience
- Ensuring places are not overtly commercial

And in terms of the personal or customer experience -

Destination Management - the Emotional Experience

- A place that knows what it is and what its strengths and USP's are
- A place that delivers expectations
- A continuous marketing journey (from decision to visit to leaving afterwards)
- A distinctive experience
- A place which leaves good memories

Tourism employment and skills

The tourism employment figures discussed earlier are considered the tip of a very large iceberg in terms of employment in the visitor economy, with significant numbers of people now employed directly or indirectly with tourism, leisure and hospitality. It is believed there is considerable value of secondary spend in addition to the published figures.

Local tourism businesses employ many skilled staff and there is a record of outstanding customer service, often recognised by a plethora of accreditations and awards.

There is however, early evidence within the tourism industry of shortages of staff in certain localities and specific skill sets. In any strategy, where we are working towards enhancing the product and performance, it must be important to tease these issues out, quantify them and endeavour to work in partnership to address them, as they may yet pose a threat to business sustainability and quality standards. This is a distinct piece of work but which would be important to destination management.

Visitor Information and Marketing

Annual Visitor Guide

Tourism is promoted through a variety of channels but unlike many destinations, there is still strong consumer and advertiser demand for a printed visitor guide. It fits the relaxed, quality nature of tourism in Ribble Valley. The guide takes the format of an informative magazine, printed to a high specification, something that used not only as a promotional tool to attract people here, but to guide them whilst staying in the area. This dual-purpose offer makes the guide more appealing to advertisers.

For 2018 the guide offer was successfully linked to the content of two websites. This means the editorial content of the guide is replicated on our primary tourism website. www.visitribblevalley.co.uk. Advertisers in the guide will now enjoy priority exposure on the website. So for example, if you are looking for accommodation, your search on the website will automatically offer guide advertisers first.

Similarly, the new www.ribblevalleyfoodheaven.com site which promotes local food suppliers and providers will feature guide advertisers first, with space dependent on advertising space bought in the printed publication. Every business in the guide is featured, with the extent to which they are featured varying dependent on space taken up in the guide.

This new approach not only responds to the growing demand for electronic information but also provides a better deal for guide advertisers. It also gives the Council a justification for the way in which tourism information about individual businesses is presented electronically.

The printed guide has a 25,000 print run, many are distributed through a national service, with a policy of minimal wastage, i.e. guides are supplied to outlets, such as tourist information centres on demand rather than in bulk. The guide is also distributed locally and is used by most local accommodation providers as a bedroom browser. The contract to produce the guide is subject to a competitive process, involving the submission cost including sales, design and print.

- Quantity 25,000 guides with online and downloadable versions

Distribution

- Via a national distribution centre (minimum waste)
- Tourist Information Centres nationally
- Direct mailing lists and campaigns
- Direct response to customer enquiries
- Advertisers in the Visitor Guide and local outlets
- Tourism promotional shows, local events and festivals

Tourist information

There is one visitor information centre located within the Platform Gallery and operated by the Council. It serves a dual role, visitor information centre and a progressive art centre, highlighting local artistic talent. The centre stocks a range of visitor information and is well located near the interchange and car parks, which makes it the first port of call for many visitors.

There is also a small visitor centre operated by volunteers at Longridge in the heritage centre, again well located, this centre is an excellent first port of call, as well as a popular exhibition space.

Many of Lancashire's Tourist information centres have closed in recent years, or been amalgamated into other facilities. This is partly cost saving but also a result of trends towards visitors using technology to source information. Ribble Valley's centres are still popular venues for visitors and provide a welcome sense of arrival.

Visitor Information facilities.

There are two bespoke visitor information facilities, one at Downham and one in Bolton-by-Bowland. At Downham there is an attractive, converted barn development established some years ago which contains public conveniences and a separate room devoted to visitor information, on fixed boards. The interpretation is due for a refresh and fortunately funding has been secured for a physical and interpretative refurbishment as part of the Pendle Hill Heritage lottery bid. At Bolton-by-Bowland the arrangement is similar but the building does not have the same historic appeal. A more modern building includes another room devoted to visitor information but there is an urgent need to enhance this facility. A plan is being prepared by the Council, the River Ribble Trust and the Forest of Bowland AONB. The interpretation will link directly to the new village trail. Both facilities provide valuable outlets for information and good starting points for visitors to the area, especially those setting off on local walks.

Visitor Information Points

Mindful of the large geographical scale of the Borough, the Council in partnership with the Ribble Valley Tourism Association have established a network of visitor information points around the area. These points are located either in areas of high footfall, or in remote rural locations. They are in hotels, cafes and even churches, and help to make visitors feel welcome, and remind them they are in the distinct Ribble Valley area.

On line and digital Marketing

Whilst we continue to have, a strong following for the more traditional forms of marketing there is a growing dependency on and trend toward marketing and digital information provided through the various on line and digital media. A selection of websites and social media accounts have been established to provide general visitor information and to target specific markets. Statistical information and performance is monitored. This is clearly a growth area and later in the action plan, some of the priorities have been identified. Here is a summary of what is currently provided –

Website and Social media platforms.

Websites

www.visitribblevalley.co.uk	Primary tourism website for Ribble Valley Linked to Visit Lancashire database Large traffic volumes and linked to other sites
www.ribblevalleyweddingheaven.com	Main website to learn about venues / suppliers Populated mainly by partners
www.rvta.co.uk	Website about the association for members / dissemination of business information
www.clitheroefoodfestival.com	Official site for the Food Festival
www.ribblevalleyfoodheaven.com	Site devoted to Ribble Valley food Places to eat and buy food

Social Media

Facebook

Love Ribble Valley	Main account for visitors and locals 3,000+ Followers good customer interaction Now driving actual business sales
Ribble Valley Wedding Heaven	Facebook site for RV wedding events/features
Ribble Valley Tourism Association	Membership site - advisory
Clitheroe Food Festival	Interactive Food Festival site

Twitter

@goribblevalley	Fed by Love Ribble Valley FB above
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Instagram

Visit Ribble Valley

Partnerships

There are a number of organisations which the Council regularly interfaces; here is an introductory description of each;

Ribble Valley Tourism Association - (RVTA) is a partnership of businesses covering all sectors of the visitor economy, including hospitality, accommodation, retail, and visitor attractions. The association works with Ribble Valley Borough Council and other agencies, to encourage the development of quality tourism in this area, whilst making sure visitors benefit the locality, and are sensitive to all who live here. Their purpose is to act as the voice for the local tourism industry and actively promote visitors to come and visit the Ribble Valley.

The association is the Council's main formal link with the private sector, and as a healthy representative organisation that is of great value, the Council provides them with administrative and secretarial support. The annual tourism awards are run in partnership with the association and their training and networking events help increase standards and business.

Marketing Lancashire - Formerly Lancashire and Blackpool Tourist Board, Marketing Lancashire is the destination management organisation (DMO) for Lancashire. It works closely with VisitEngland and a wide range of public and private sector agencies. Their activities in marketing and communications are designed to grow the visitor economy and develop the destination as a great place to visit, work and invest. As mentioned earlier Marketing Lancashire has developed a strategy for the visitor economy and Ribble Valley is well placed to lock in to most of these key priorities.

Other Lancashire Districts – There are specific opportunities which lend themselves to collaborative working with other Lancashire Districts, for example Pendle BC and Lancaster CC on the Pendle Witches Trail and Fylde BC on group travel.

Thematic groups

There is no question that the most productive partnerships are those with either private sector around specific topics of interest as this has led to effective collaboration, idea sharing and joint funding. This has been proven by the wedding partnership and is anticipated from the new group travel partnership mentioned earlier. These provide excellent models for delivery of other areas of activity and themes.

Other organisations

There are many more organisations which interface with the Council's tourism activities, especially the chambers of trade and specific town and parish councils. More specific groups are mentioned in the action plan.

Educational Establishments

The Tourism and Events officer has already forged strong working relationships with a number of educational establishments, including Leeds Metropolitan University, the University of Central Lancashire and the International Business Academy in Kolding Denmark. Working with these establishments and, more specifically, with their students, provides valuable work experience opportunities. In fact in some instances, as a result of working voluntary in the tourism section, students have secured direct employment. Voluntary placement work not only creates useful work experience for students, but provides the Council with a valuable resource of new ideas and capacity. This resource, whilst unpredictable in timescale, does offer the opportunity to deliver and possibly accelerate some of the actions described later in this plan.

Setting the direction– Summarising evidence (SWOT)

Based on the evidence gathering analysis undertaken earlier the plan, the following SWOT analysis considers the key issues raised, and particularly focuses on opportunities which can be capitalised on, or where threats can be addressed. The SWOT analysis informs an action plan which will be used to address the aims and objectives for developing the value of the visitor spending in the destination which are described later.

Key Area	Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
Accommodation	Wide variety and good geographical spread. Occupancy levels above average	An under provision in certain types of accommodation, (notably budget type)and not always meeting demand	Maximising off peak and off season times New facilities	Loss of business due to over demand at peak times
Food and Drink	Consistently high quality and value for money	Visitor access to obtain information about venues	Encouraging more food tourists from further afield	Competition from other areas, down turn in the economy
Wedding Tourism	Well-developed first class venues and suppliers Growth market with high value and wide benefits	Limited accommodation at peak times	New facilities anticipated New market interest from further afield Strong partnership	Competition from neighbouring areas Growth in DIY weddings
Countryside Recreation	High quality visitor views and experiences	Lack of infrastructure and parking	New trails and routes	Further increase in fuel prices and reduced public transport
Heritage	Stunning array of heritage resources	Mixed quality interpretation Lack of infrastructure and orientation	Opportunities in pipeline and appetite for collaborative working	Lack of funding to develop products
Attractions	Good quality experiences	Limited range of family attractions, especially all weather	Create more opportunities in other themes for families	Competition and lack of funding

Key Area	Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
Event based Tourism	Natural surroundings and great venues/locations /facilities Good quality experiences and facilities	Timetabling not always controllable and can clash,and create peaks and troughs	Potential to bring new markets Good for targeting off peak More businesses investing in facilities	Competition from other areas
Music, Arts and Culture	Vibrant growing arts scene with new outlets and good partnerships forming	Still developing, fragile infrastructure	New events attract new customer markets	Lack of partnership support to make events sustainable
Business Tourism	Fantastic facilities Rural locations (Retreat/escape)	Rural locations (travel)	Better prices than the city	Competition from more accessible locations/venues
Group Tourism	Great range of suitable products	Road infrastructure and parking in certain areas Poor brand knowledge	New markets, sustainable travel, manageable activity New partnership formed	Competition Lack of guides

Key Area	Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
Places- Clitheroe Longridge Whalley Villages	Vibrant welcoming places Good opening hours and parking	Lack of public realm Poor sign posting to some remote locations Limited customer information/direction	All markets in DMP	Limited parking Potential congestion
Tourism employment and skills	Outstanding businesses and opportunities to learn	Dated perceptions of the hospitality industry	Promote tourism as a valuable career path	Increased pressure on businesses to recruit and find staff
Tourism Signs	There are some very well signposted facilities	Businesses continuing to fail to obtain tourism signposting	Continue dialogue with Lancashire County Council to address issues	Continued delays and refusals. Inappropriate signage despoiling the area
Marketing and promotion	Range of targeted media in place Good performance management/monitoring in place	Failure by some partners to engage	More private sector partnerships to tackle specific projects and themes	Loss of Funding Ability to keep up with technology
Visitor Information	Good network of outlets and methods of conveying information	Gaps in provision in some localities	Further partnerships and arrangements for supply	Loss of funding

The Tourism Vision - Where we are now going

The tourism vision has been informed and developed from this over-arching analysis, whilst recognising key strengths and opportunities identified in the SWOT analysis.

‘Ribble Valley is a visitor destination with distinctive and welcoming qualities, which helps the local economy to thrive and remains respectful of its impact on communities and environment’

The key principles associated with this vision are explained in more detail below. They will form the basis of all future activity.

‘Distinctive and welcoming qualities’ – acknowledging the many and varied, high quality and customer focussed tourism products within the area, including strong heritage, family friendly attractions, arts and culture, shops and markets and beautiful countryside. It also reflects the warmth of welcome to be experienced here.

Local economy to thrive – refers to being a quality, prosperous place to live, work and visit.

‘Respectful of its impact on communities and Environment’ – acknowledges that tourism should not impact negatively on the lives of local people, and moreover that tourism should add value to their lives by providing wealth, employment and sustained rural services. Environment means that tourism should not be at all harmful or despoil the landscape, much of which is an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Destination Management Plan - Aims

Having evaluated tourism and its performance, we are now able to specify the overall aims of the Destination Management Plan

Aims

1. To work in partnership to ensure that Ribble Valley as a destination, and its tourism experiences, are promoted as effectively as possible, through clear branding and marketing
2. To maximise resources by clearly targeting those markets that will provide the best return and the greatest likelihood of repeat visits
3. To broaden the geographical and seasonal spread of visitors by encouraging new visitors, increasing the duration of stays, and capitalising on niche markets
4. To work in partnership to support the development of skills and training in the tourism and hospitality industry
5. To support sustainable tourism development and business growth

Destination Management Plan - Objectives

In order to reach an action plan the overall aims are now translated into these objectives;

1. To work in partnership to ensure that Ribble Valley as a destination, and its tourism experiences, are promoted as effectively as possible, through clear branding and marketing

Branding the destination

Develop Ribble Valley as a strong brand reflective of its key tourism products

Develop sub brands for individual places in order that they will become recognised for their key strengths

2. To maximise resources by clearly targeting those markets that will provide the best return and the greatest likelihood of repeat visits

Targeted marketing activity

Encourage visitors to spend more per head, by promoting higher yield activities

Work with relevant partners to target key activities and markets for which the area has a strong identity

3. To broaden the geographical and seasonal spread of visitors by encouraging new visitors, increasing the duration of stays, and capitalising on niche markets

Attracting more staying visitors and repeat visits

Attract more staying visitors by targeting specific consumer groups, increasing awareness about products, events and itineraries.

Increasing length of stay

Encourage the duration of visitor stays by promoting awareness of the full range of services available and by encouraging partnership working around products

Promoting off peak tourism

The objective is to identify opportunities which can be maximised at off peak times of the week and also seasonally

Developing products

Identify areas where investment into new products and partnership working will develop an event, activity or location to make a significant difference to the tourism appeal

5. To work in partnership to support the development of skills and training in the tourism and hospitality industry

Celebrating success

Highlight the importance of tourism and tourism employment and to celebrate the achievements of people working in the industry

Developing skills

Maintain a dialogue with the private sector to help ensure that the local skills-needs are identified and addressed

Valuing the industry

Champion tourism as an industry and recognise its importance to the local economy

6. To support sustainable tourism development and business growth

Sustainable development

Support those new developments which are sustainable in terms of community and environmental integration, as well as business modelling

Help businesses grow by providing direct advice and signposting to relevant support

Tourism Insights

Strive to achieve a better understanding of the local tourism industry, its value and performance

Action plan

1. To work in partnership to ensure that Ribble Valley as a destination, and its tourism experiences, are promoted as effectively as possible, through clear branding and marketing

Branding the destination

Action	Partner (s)	Implementation
a) Reinforce the Ribble Valley brand at points of arrival and visitor interface	RVTA	Ongoing programme as opportunities arise
b) Develop a toolkit of facts, and images which reinforce the key attributes and the brand personality of Ribble Valley	RVTA FOB ML	Complete in line with new Guide April 2019
c) Work with local communities, especially the business sectors to develop brands and tool kits for each of the major place destinations	COT	Roll out during 2019
d) Develop brands and toolkits around each of the major campaign themes below	RVTA RVWH, GRV and other groups to be determined	Ongoing programme as initiatives develop

2. To maximise resources by clearly targeting those markets that will provide the best return and the greatest likelihood of repeat visits.

Targeted marketing activity

Action	Partner (s)	Implementation.
Produce an annual visitor guide to promote Ribble valley for day visits and holidays, along with electronic versions and parallel website profiles	Design company Advertisers	Commence Sept 18 Publish Jan 19
Produce an annual marketing plan to promote activities events and attractions via various forms of social media and press, this will include introduction of video and more interactivity	RVTA	Plan Jan 19
Raise the profile of Ribble Valley in joint marketing campaigns with Marketing Lancashire	ML	Annual Subvention
Maintain Ribble Valley's position in relevant marketing campaigns	Various	Ongoing opportunities
Develop an action plan for a Ribble Valley food campaign including a new trails focusing on food but linked to other experiences and places to buy local food	RVTA, Food Members	Launch June 19
Continue to support the Wedding Heaven initiative, growing its membership and extending its promotional campaigns and influence	RVWH partnership	Ongoing, separate action plan
Create a better What's On promotional campaign awareness, including a collection of any events with potential for tourism	RVTA, ML	Launch for Easter 19
Participate in wider geographical campaigns when they relate to key target groups and niche markets	ML Lancashire districts	Ongoing opportunities

3. To broaden the geographical and seasonal spread of visitors by encouraging new visitors, increasing the duration of stays, and capitalising on niche markets.

Attracting more staying visitors and repeat visits

Action	Partner (s)	Implementation
Develop an action plan to encourage more, and higher spend group visits, under the 'Go Ribble Valley' campaign	GRV	re launch partnership October 18
Attend local and regional events to raise the profile of Ribble Valley	RVTA	See annual marketing plan
Create a Heritage trail involving partners and products across Ribble Valley and launch a plan of action to enhance the heritage products available	PHP RVTA	Launch Spring 19

Increasing length of stay

Action	Partner (s)	Implementation
Promote awareness of the Ribble Valley tourism products through bedroom browsers, Visitor Information Points and other visitor services.	RVTA	Ongoing
Revamp the visitor information points at Downham and Bolton-By-Bowland	PHP FOB RRT	Launch March 19

Promoting off peak tourism

Action	Partner (s)	Implementation
Initiate a campaign to promote business tourism, creating a database of facilities and opportunities and by engaging in targeted promotional activities with partners	RVTA	Launch by September 19

To broaden the geographical and seasonal spread of visitors by encouraging new visitors, increasing the duration of stays, and capitalising on niche markets.(continued)

Developing products

Action	Partner (s)	Implementation
Encourage more private sector establishment to invest in cycle facilities and to welcome cyclists	RVTA	Ongoing
Identify and promote a series of circular cycling routes and new locations for mountain biking	RVTA	Ongoing
Launch a series of circular country walks linked to local hospitality venues under the banner 'Walks with Taste', and encourage businesses to participate in welcome walkers initiatives	RVTA	Launch November 18
Create a series of circular 'drive' trails or itineraries, suitable for individuals, families and groups	RVTA	Launch July 19
Participate in the Pendle Hill heritage partnership	PHP, FOB	Separate plan
Support Music, Arts and Culture programmes, particularly Artwalk Clitheroe / Create Longridge	RVA, CL	Ongoing
Promote Ribble Valley settings as locations for film and media by creating an image library and by responding positively to location searches	CENW	Launch October 19
Research garden tourism, linking events and attractions to other themes (e.g. groups and events)	RVTA	Incorporate into DRV Guide 19
Support the development of new and sustainable events, and help existing event organisers to grow and develop wider tourism appeal.	Event organisers	As opportunities arise
Promote links with local universities and colleges to encourage academic and social visits, particularly by international visitors.	Educational establishments	Ongoing

4. To work in partnership to support the development of skills and training in the tourism and hospitality sector and to work generally to improve the reputation of the industry

Celebrating success

Action	Partner (s)	Implementation
Support the annual Ribble Valley Tourism awards and encourage participation in regional and national awards schemes and quality accreditations.	RVTA, ML	Awards March 2019
Promote the achievements of the local tourism industry through press and media	RVTA, ML	Ongoing, and bi-annual newsletter

Developing skills

Implementation		
Action	Partner (s)	Implementation
Maintain dialogue with the private sector around skills-needs	RVTA	Ongoing with event in 2019
Support the RVTA programme of networking and continuing professional development	RVTA	Ongoing – minimum four events p.a.
Encourage the number of local tourist guides operating in the area	LBBG	Ongoing
Promote Lancashire wide/regional business advisory services and training opportunities.	RVTA	Ongoing via RVTA

Valuing the industry

Action	Partner (s)	Implementation
Promote the value and importance of tourism to the economy	RVTA	Promote STEAM statement March 2019
Use employee case studies to demonstrate best practice in hospitality and career development	RVTA	Plan September 19
Ensure all Ribble Valley tourism businesses are recognised on various databases and websites	RVTA, ML	Integrate into DRV Guide December 18

5. To support sustainable tourism development and business growth.

Sustainable development

Action	Partner (s)	Implementation
Provide advice to new and existing operators as and when it arises		Ongoing

Tourism Insights

Action	Partner (s)	Implementation
Participate in STEAM economic model and help to encourage more representative results	ML	Subvention
Initiate an annual a tourism bedspace and product survey	RVTA	new bedspace review during 2019
Survey and maintain a database of specific tourism specialisms of local businesses	RVTA	Ongoing

Key to abbreviations			
BCC	Burnley Creative Council	ML	Marketing Lancashire
CENW	Creative England North West	LBBG	Lancashire Blue Badge Guides
COT	Chambers of Trade/community or business groups	PHP	Pendle Heritage Partnership
CL	Create Longridge	RRT	Ribble Rivers Trust
FOB	Forest of Bowland service	RVA	Ribble Valley Arts
GRV	Go Ribble Valley Group Travel partnership	RVWH	Ribble Valley Wedding Heaven Partnership
RVTA	Ribble Valley Tourism Association		
(in the above table this reference is used where there is any potential for working with private sector partners)			