RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL
REPORT TO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Agenda Item No.

meeting date: THURSDAY, 19 SEPTEMBER 2019
title: THE ECONOMIC PLAN 2019-2022
submitted by: DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND PLANNING
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1   PURPOSE

1.1   To consider the publication version of the Economic Plan 2019-2022

1.2   Relevance to the Council's ambitions and priorities

- Community Objectives – To deliver a sustainable local economy.

- Corporate Priorities – To undertake relevant economic activities to ensure economic growth and to sustain a healthy local economy.

- Other Considerations – The Economic Plan will support a range of Council activities and assist in financial planning for the local authority.

2   BACKGROUND

2.1   Following the formation of the Ribble Valley Economic Partnership work commenced on the Council's Economic Plan. The plan is initially intended to cover a 3 year period from 2019-2022 as this will ensure it can remain flexible to changing circumstances and priorities, whilst providing a reasonable timeframe for the Council to plan investment and delivery against the identified key activities.

2.2   In June 2019 Members approved the publication of a discussion draft version of the plan to be subject to a 4 week public consultation period. Before public consultation was undertaken the draft plan was tabled at the Economic Partnership meeting on 26th June. Feedback from that meeting is attached at Appendix 1.

2.3   Following the Economic Partnership meeting a 4 week public consultation on the draft plan was undertaken. A summary of the feedback received from the consultation exercise is attached at Appendix 2.

3   THE ECONOMIC PLAN

3.1   A copy of the final Economic Plan is attached at Appendix 3. Members will not that the Plan is a very concise document which will be produced as an A5 sized 'French fold' leaflet which clearly sets out the Council's proposed actions.

3.2   Whilst the Council has previously had economic strategies in place, this new plan is more business friendly and contains a concise series of actions that the Council can take.

3.3   It is considered that the actions within the plan will support the local economy and can be implemented in a timely fashion. It is not written to reiterate the background research and information that exist, rather it is intended to provide a vehicle to focus the delivery against the key themes identified as important in conjunction with the Economic Partnership.

3.4   To reflect the Council's Corporate Strategy the overarching objective for businesses within the Borough is to be sustainable and to continue to develop in the area. The plan seeks to meet this objective via five priority action areas:

People
Focuses on those actions and projects that will be a catalyst for business growth, more local employment opportunities and the skills to support aspirational growth.

Places
Focuses on those actions and projects that will ensure the right land and premises are available along with opportunities to place the attractive environment at the heart of key sectors.

Business Support and Growth
Focuses on those actions and projects that will equip residents and businesses with the right information to support new and existing businesses along with enabling experience and knowledge sharing opportunities.

Connectivity
Focuses on those actions and projects that will act as the catalyst for job creation and growth.

Tourism
Focused on those actions and projects that will promote the development of accommodation, improve hospitality and support events building on the attraction of the local area.

3.5   Following feedback from the Ribble Valley Partnership meeting and the public consultation exercise on the draft Economic Plan the following actions/ projects have been identified for each of the five priority action areas:

3.6   ***Action Area 1: People***

3.6.1   <u>Develop a jobs/ careers fair:</u> A number of the businesses who attend the partnership meetings raised the fact that recruiting the right new staff is challenging. Some of the businesses offer apprenticeships for example or are seeking more experienced members of staff.

3.6.2   A number of the high schools in the Borough have run a successful careers fairs for their pupils for a number of years now. This gives year 11 pupils the opportunity to obtain impartial careers information whether in further education or employment.

3.6.3   To expand upon this concept it is intended to develop a Council lead jobs and careers fair which will not only be aimed at students but also the general public who may be seeking opportunities for new careers/ re-training/ employment. A varied mix of businesses attend the Partnership meetings and these businesses, along with any business within the Borough, will be invited to attend and speak directly to the attendees about what the business does and discuss any potential opportunities.

3.6.4   Linkages with the schools will also be an essential part of this event to ensure that a wide number of the Borough's school children have the opportunity to attend the event, which it is intended will be held annually, to explore all options including further education opportunities.

3.6.5 <u>Undertake a Housing and Economic Needs Assessment (HENA)</u>: A number of comments received during the consultation exercises cite the inability of people to find suitable accommodation as a challenge to recruiting the right staff. This ranges from the lower paid workforce being unable to purchase a property to the higher earners looking for larger properties set within the countryside of the Valley.

3.6.6 Whilst the Borough has seen significant housing development over the last few years businesses are concerned that this development is not providing the right type of accommodation to attract and retain staff.

3.6.7 As part of the Local Plan Review a HENA will be undertaken which will identify the type and tenure of accommodation which is needed within the Borough (affordable housing, over 55s accommodation, under 35s accommodation etc.). This evidence will be used to formulate the housing and economic policies as part of the Local Plan Review to support the right type of housing and economic growth within the Borough.

3.6.8 <u>Explore the options for developing a work placement plan</u>: reflecting on the concerns about securing the right new staff concerns were also raised about young people leaving full-time/ further education being 'ready' to enter the world of full time employment as a number do not possess the necessary skills.

3.6.9 Working with the members of the Ribble Valley Economic Partnership, local schools and partners the potential for establishing a work placement scheme will be explored. The intention will be to give people who are nearly ready for employment the opportunity to work with a local business. This will equip young people with the skills necessary to enter full time work. This will also establish a greater understanding of the local businesses workforce planning needs.

3.7 *Action Area 2: Places*

3.7.1 <u>Develop Key Service Centre Action Plans</u> for Clitheroe, Longridge and Whalley. A masterplan for Clitheroe was published in 2010 which set out the vision for the Town and included improvement projects for the town centre. This document is however nine years old now and needs revisiting. Similar improvement action plans will also be developed for Longridge and Whalley as the key service centres within the Borough.

3.7.2 Engaging with the community has been raised as essential to securing any development within the Borough and there is an opportunity to identify and deliver improvements within the Borough's key service centres. The production of action plans for the key service centres will be done in conjunction with trader group representatives, councillors from the different political parties and voluntary organisations.

3.7.3 <u>Deliver more choice for more modern working arrangements:</u> the 2011 census data noted that a higher than average percentage of Ribble Valley residents work from home. The changing trend in the way we work, ever-improving technology and a shift in workplace culture are just some of the key drivers in changing trends with a rise in demand for flexibility for a business and its physical operating arrangements.

3.7.4 The need for start-up units and flexible working spaces was identified as part of the consultation exercise. The 'serviced office' model offers lower costs,

collaborative working areas and the flexibility of being able to book on a monthly basis. Virtual offices are aimed at start-ups who benefit from an official address, phone number and meeting rooms when interacting with clients, have become increasingly popular and serviced offices, where tenants purchase desk space plus any additional services they require such as wifi, reception services, access to meeting rooms and print facilities have risen in popularity.

3.7.5   Options for providing the type of accommodation tenants are seeking will be developed and taken forward where appropriate.

3.7.6   Undertake place branding: What the Council's overarching strategy for economic development within the Borough is was queried at the most recent partnership meeting. The overarching ambition is to establish the Ribble Valley as an area where businesses can be sustainable and have opportunities to develop which is considered to be essential for the economic well-being of the Borough.

3.7.7   The Council have successfully put the Ribble Valley on the map in respect of being a destination for both food and weddings. A similar exercise will be undertaken by creating a clear brand for the Valley as an economic destination.

3.7.8   There is a growing awareness by businesses of the health and happiness of employees and it is considered that the Ribble Valley's exceptional landscape and beautiful environment is a unique selling point in respect of exposure to the natural settings which the Ribble Valley can offer having positive health advantages and creating a pleasant working environment.

3.7.9   Implement a property search function: the Council already pays for access to Evolutive which is an on line database of commercial property available on the market. This enables members of the public/ businesses to search for land and property which is currently available in the Borough. Hosting such a search function on the Council's web-site was identified as a possible improvement as part of the consultation exercise.

3.7.10 Currently Evolutive is not utilised to its full potential however this will be incorporated as part of the Economic webpage/ site to direct existing businesses looking to expand and potential businesses looking to locate in the Borough within the right direction. Once functional the relationships with commercial property agents will be developed further to ensure the database of properties is up to date.

3.7.11 Develop an on-line business directory: to enable Ribble Valley businesses to connect with local customers and keep trade inside the local economy an on-line business directory will be developed. This will be an interactive service with direct links to company websites, including social media links.

3.8   *Action Area 3: Business Support and Growth*

3.8.1   'Work Ribble Valley': Following on from the place branding exercise develop a dedicated web-page/ site to act as a single point of information for business advice and support within the Borough. Members of the partnership have identified that it is difficult for businesses, particularly new businesses, to find all of the necessary information and available support essential for enabling businesses to survive and flourish. A single point of information would assist in this regard.

3.8.2 <u>Create a 'one stop shop' business support package:</u> which will draw together all the relevant sections of the Council to provide businesses with the support they need (business rates, planning permission etc.). Existing and potential businesses will be able to discuss their business needs and identify the best way forward based on support available from partners and the Council.

3.8.3 <u>Utilise the Ribble Valley Economic Partnership</u> as a forum for Ribble Valley businesses to connect on a quarterly basis and investigate the possibilities of how they might work together. This will promote and enhance links between businesses.

3.9 Action Area 4: Connectivity

3.9.1 <u>Rail Improvements</u>: Improving transport linkages into Clitheroe, including by rail, has been identified as essential as part of the consultation exercises. This relates to improved freight travel, improved commuting options and improved linkages to the West Coast Mainland. Such improvements would also have increased tourism benefits of attracting people into the Valley by public transport.

3.9.2 Work with the Community Rail Lancashire Team, Lancashire County Council and Network Rail has commenced to consider the options and to identify feasible rail improvements to Manchester and Preston. Potential options at this stage include increasing the Clitheroe to Manchester route to a ½ hourly service and/ or providing a direct train (removing the need to change at Blackburn) into Preston and/ or reducing the journey lengths. Any/ all of these options and/ or further improvements will be explored in greater detail by undertaking the necessary business cases to support the improvements.

3.9.3 <u>Develop a digital strategy:</u> This will give a clear direction of where the Council, working alongside all of our partners, wants to be in the next five years, whilst continually adapting and evolving to keep up-to-date with the latest advances in digital technologies. This will consider possible funding opportunities including the Local Digital Fund.

3.9.4 With an aging population within the Valley and reduced financial resources within the Authority a new way of working and connecting with our residents is essential.

3.9.5 <u>Sustainable Transport:</u> As part of the Core Strategy Review develop robust planning policies in respect of sustainable modes of transport to ensure necessary services are retained and supported within the Borough. Young people within the Borough have difficulty securing work placements/ employment where they have to rely on public transport, as identified as part of the consultation exercise. As the Local Planning Authority Ribble Valley Council can seek to maintain and enhance services as part of new developments within the Borough along with working with partners, such as the Highway Authority, to look at other options.

3.10 Action Area 5: Tourism

3.10.1 <u>Develop a cultural strategy for the Borough.</u> Numerous cultural events already occur within the Borough and the Council provides grants which directly support art and culture within the Borough. Expanding upon the work being undertaken by the Arts Council the Economic and Community Development Officer will work with the Council's Cultural and Leisure Services to bring

together and develop the existing and potential cultural activities within the Borough.

3.10.2 Develop planning policies as part of the Local Plan Update to enable visitors to stay longer in the Borough and generate an increasing per capita spend. Extending visitor stays was identified as a suggestion within the consultation exercise. Whilst the Borough has a number of high quality hotels these are regularly occupied by wedding guests reducing the options for other visitors to the Borough to stay overnight. The provision of a mix of visitor accommodation would widen opportunities within the Borough for overnight stays.

3.10.3 Develop a strategy for the future of the castle and its grounds Clitheroe Castle and its grounds are a superb asset which is a well-recognised tourist attraction. A strategy will be developed working with the Council's Cultural and Leisure Services team to develop a Strategy to develop projects and activities at the castle to maintain and increase visitor numbers to the castle and the Town as a whole.

3.10.4 Develop a Borough wide heritage strategy The Ribble Valley is a Borough infused with history with a rich heritage. As an area of outstanding natural beauty the 'quality' of the place, as recognised within the comments received as part of the consultation, needs to be promoted and enhanced. A strategy will be developed, working with the Council's Conservation Officer, setting out ways in which the value of the Borough's heritage can be maximised and how it can directly shape the environment, economic and social future of the district.

3.10.5 Develop a one-stop events directory which would enable all of the events which occur in the Borough to be visible in one place. Numerous events already happen across the Valley, including the Clitheroe Food Festival, Ribble Valley Jazz and Blues Festival, Ribble Valley Scooter Rally and the Great British Food Festival at Stonyhurst College, the directory will enable organisers of these events to incorporate all the events in one directory. This will ensure visitors and residents are aware of all the events which are occurring and assist with promoting the events within the Valley. This one-stop solution will seek to increase attendance at the events and visitor numbers to the Valley. This will also encourage more such similar events within the Valley.

4   RISK ASSESSMENT

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

• Resources – Members will note that the plan sets out a number of actions that will have budget implications, all of which will be the subject of individual reports to the relevant Council Committees in due course as part of the Council's budgetary process. The plan will also provide a vehicle to inform bidding rounds for external funding where relevant, which will also be subject to future reports as projects come forward.

There is approximately £10,000 remaining within the budget (excluding money to fund the partnership meetings and money for Town Centres) which will be utilised to fund some of the actions listed above with the more detailed schemes included as part of the Councils budget setting process later this year.

- Technical, Environmental and Legal – The Council is expected to monitor the local economy and identify any actions required. A number of related areas of legislation will provide the basis for delivery on differing aspects of the plan where there will be cross over with statutory duties and functions under housing and planning legislation for example using appropriate powers.

- Political – The Council has identified economic development as a key political priority.

- Reputation – This report will assist the Council in demonstrating it is a well-run Council that seeks to identify local economic aspirations.

- Equality & Diversity – The work in relation to this report supports the Council's aim in delivering a sustainable local economy to the benefit of all its community.

5.   **CONCLUSION**

5.1   Approve the publication version of the Economic Plan.

NICOLA HOPKINS
DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND PLANNING

APPENDIX 1

FEEDBACK FROM ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP MEETING (JUNE 2019)

Feedback received at the RVEP meeting on 26th June 2019

People	Places	Business Growth & Support	Connectivity	Tourism	Other
Desire for stronger links between schools and business community. Schools keen to know what businesses want/need.	Identified need for start-up units - reasonably priced, flexible spaces i.e. no contract, co-working space etc.	How can the Council make it easier for people to do business? Many businesses need support from various departments. Could there be a One Stop Shop?	Look into Digital Health as a priority for working with older people.	Promote the existence of/increasing number of parking spaces at Clitheroe Train Station.	Produce a 'You Said, We Did' document to track progress against actions
Need to strengthen links with Universities so they know what businesses need in order to shape/tailor courses appropriately.	RV has highest number of people who work from home in Lancashire - can we encourage them to make a step up to next level with start-up offices?	Council website to host a commercial premises search function.	Discussed economic case for extending the railway to Hellifield - economic impact for passenger transport, opportunities for freight, tourism opportunities etc.	There is significant funded support for B2B but little for B2C, which tourism falls under.	As a Council, what is our overarching strategy for Economic Development? Do we want inward investment? Do we want to deliver employment land?
Mention of Gatsby benchmarks - EP could include action to support schools to achieve benchmarks through partnership working.	Too many houses and a shortage of jobs - leading to people having to travel out of area for work - resulting in CO emissions	Criticism of the Council website. Suggestion made to use Socitm to analyse its effectiveness.	Difficult for young people (16-25) to get to work experience/work placements using public transport.	Parking was reported as a significant issue across the Borough - could we think about a park and ride scheme or coach park to get people in?	RVBC to improve communications with all regarding what we are planning to do.
Encourage representative from each High School in Borough to join RVEP.	Lots of business units in town centres that could be renovated for start-up offices but business rates are too high.	Small businesses could benefit from start-up advice - what do they need to know/do, who to contact etc.	Internet connectivity reported as a significant problem across the Borough, especially in rural areas.	If there was a coach park, we could attract coach companies to use RV as a destination.	
Hard for young people to gain basic skills needed for employment i.e. social skills, manners, time keeping etc.	Some businesses (i.e. solicitors) no longer need a town centre location. Do we need to consider who the high street is for?	RVBC should implement a CRM system for contact with businesses for improved communication.	DCMS grant for small businesses for rural connectivity - Rural Gigabit? Could this be explored?		
Could RVBC create jobs/experience portal for young people to link them up to opportunities with local businesses for part time work/placements.	Lots of farmland in the Borough with redundant buildings. Could they be diversified to attract start-up businesses?	Provide links to all business support organisations, projects, events on RVBC website i.e. BOOST, Growth Lancs, FSB etc.			

SUMMARY OF PUBLIC CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Feedback received via email in the period up to the 31st July 2019

People	Places	Business Growth & Support	Connectivity	Tourism
Develop closer links between businesses and education providers.	Clitheroe Town Centre Masterplan - can we do an assessment of why so little was achieved from the last plan to avoid the same thing happening again?	Could RVBC provide commercial recycling service?	Broadband speeds need to be improved - to allow for more flexible working, reduce the need for travelling and to increase opportunities to start and grow a business.	Erect new signs directing visitors to all tourist attractions - The Grand, Castle, Byrnes wines etc.
Encourage enterprise skills in young people.	Keep streets and main roads clear of rubbish.	RVBC could implement a CRM system to improve communication with businesses.	Develop a Digital Strategy? 100% target for 3G and fibre and skills needed for use/access.	Parking - inadequate and should be free for first hour to encourage shoppers.
	Update Clitheroe Market.	Be adaptable to changing business needs.	Improve transport and logistics links.	Castle gardens and shabby and need sprucing up to attract visitors.
	Ensure rents and rates are affordable enough to attract and retain independent retailers.	Support collaboration between businesses.	No mention of bus services in draft plan.	Wall opposite Majestic wine in Clitheroe should be made to look more attractive.
	Need for Warehouse space >30,000ft^2	RVBC to be link point between businesses and business support.		LCC should paint mini roundabouts to make them more obvious.
	No reference to 'quality' of places throughout document.			Clean all road signs as they're dirty and look unkempt.
	No reference to the impact of Climate Change and what we can do to seek to minimise it.			Sandblast 3 wells in Clitheroe and install information signs by them.
	Keep on street parking free.			Electric charging points for visitors.
				Focus on extending visitor stays - link accommodation providers with retail, cultural and heritage offer.
				No reference in plan to significance of heritage assets.
				Toilets - going into retail premises is not sufficient.

APPENDIX 3

ECONOMIC PLAN

Ribble Valley
Borough Council

ECONOMIC PLAN
2019-2022
Ribble Valley Borough Council

Our Vision

An area with an exceptional environment and quality of life for all; sustained by vital and vibrant market towns and villages acting as thriving service centres meeting the needs of residents, businesses and visitors.

Ambition

The prosperity of the economy in the Ribble Valley is demonstrated though the continuing high levels of economic growth in the area. However, there is a need to ensure that opportunities are available for businesses to continue to develop in the area. There is a need to continue to market and regenerate our market towns and villages as places to do business and to ensure that there is employment land available for development.

The issues of public transport, particularly accessibility to isolated villages, are part of a perceived need for a more flexible approach and a more accessible service.

Without economic prosperity, many other problems e.g. health, housing, crime, access to services are all much harder to address.

Our 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;

- To seek to improve the transport network, especially to our rural areas;

- To work with our partners to ensure that the infrastructure in the Ribble Valley is improved;

- To promote stronger, more confident and more active communities throughout the borough.

People:

focuses on those actions and projects that will be a catalyst for business growth, more local employment opportunities and the skills to support aspirational growth.

Places:

focuses on those actions and projects that will ensure the right land and premises are available along with opportunities to place the attractive environment at the heart of key sectors.

Business Support and Growth:

focuses on those actions and projects that will equip residents and businesses with the right information to support new and existing businesses along with enabling experience and knowledge sharing opportunities.

Connectivity:

focuses on those actions and projects that will act as the catalyst for job creation and growth.

Tourism:

focuses on those actions and projects that will promote the development of accommodation, improve hospitality and support events building on the attraction of the local area.

RIBBLE VALLEY ECONOMIC PLAN:

TO ENABLE BUSINESSES TO BE SUSTAINABLE AND TO CONTINUE TO DEVELOP IN THE BOROUGH

Action Area 1:
People

1. Develop a jobs / careers fair
2. Undertake a Housing and Economic Needs Assessment
3. Explore options for developing a work placement plan

Action Area 2:
Places

1. Develop Key Service Centre Action Plans
2. Explore options for serviced office accommodation or community business hubs
3. Undertake place branding exercise
4. Expand the property search function
5. Develop an on-line business directory

Action Area 3:
Business Support and Growth

1. Set up business advice and support web-page/ site
2. Set up 'One stop shop' business support package
3. Quarterly meetings of the Ribble Valley Economic Partnership

Action Area 4:
Connectivity

1. Explore rail improvements to Manchester and Preston
2. Develop digital strategy
3. Integrate sustainable modes of transport within developments

Action Area 5:
Tourism

1. Develop cultural strategy
2. Explore options to increase visitor stay
3. Develop strategy for the future of the castle and its grounds
4. Develop a Heritage Strategy
5. Create one-stop events directory