

RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL REPORT TO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Agenda Item No.

meeting date: THURSDAY, 14 NOVEMBER 2019
title: THE ECONOMIC PLAN UPDATE
submitted by: DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND PLANNING
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1 PURPOSE

1.1 To update Members on the actions contained within 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 The Council's Economic Plan was agreed by the Members of Economic Development Committee on 19 September 2019.

2.2 The aim of the Economic Plan for the Ribble Valley is to enable businesses within the Borough to be sustainable and to continue to develop. Other Lancashire authorities are seeking to grow their business infrastructure and development opportunities however Ribble Valley is unique in that its high quality landscape and environmental quality could be adversely affected by significant new development. The fact that Ribble Valley is officially the happiest place to live reflects the high quality environment and it is important that any economic strategies for the Valley enable the economy to grow whilst protecting the unique setting which the Valley offers.

2.3 To ensure that the plan acts as an enabler to the economy of the Valley the plan contains a series of suitable actions. The next stage is to identify the priorities for the Council and establish mechanisms for delivering the actions. These are set out below.

3 THE ECONOMIC PLAN

3.1 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, Places, Business Support and Growth, Connectivity and Tourism) each with their own individual actions/projects.

3.2 The actions have been prioritised (and some grouped together) as follows:

3.3 *Short Term Priorities*

3.3.1 Action Area 1: People - Undertake a Housing and Economic Needs Assessment.

This document has been drafted and is currently out for consultation. Later this year Members will determine the Council's new housing target based upon the advice contained with the assessment and the response to the consultation.

3.3.2 Action Area 2: Places - Develop a Key Service Centre Action Plan for Longridge
The Plan identifies the need for an Action Plan for each of the three key service centres within the Borough. As there is an existing Masterplan for Clitheroe with potential future funding streams in respect of the second round of the Future High Street fund and given recent developments within Longridge with associated S106 contributions it has been decided to undertake the action plan for Longridge first.

3.3.3 Action Area 2: Places - Deliver more choice for more modern working arrangements

Across Lancashire there are various serviced office models including:

- Blackburn Technology Management Centre which is run by Blackburn with Darwen Council and includes serviced office and industrial space with a staffed reception area and virtual office facilities. The centre offers meeting space which can be hired for meetings/ events. The facility provides onsite parking provision.
- Manor Court near Ribchester which is privately owned and offers serviced office accommodation ranging from 22sqft to 1439sqft available on flexible lease terms. The office accommodation does not have a staffed reception area and the meeting rooms are reserved for tenants in the building. The facility has on-site parking provision.
- The Landmark, Burnley is privately owned and offers a mix of hot-desking/ collaborative working space, office accommodation, conferencing and meeting space. With a staffed reception area the facility is aiming to provide a digital hub within Burnley. There is limited on-site parking at the centre however the town centre location means there is public car parks within the vicinity of the site.

3.3.4 Options for the Council to provide serviced office/ meeting space within the Valley will be explored with a report taken to Policy and Finance Committee with potential options later this year.

3.3.5 Action Area 2: Places - Undertake place branding

Officers have met with Blackburn College University Centre to identify any possible options for working with the students as 'live' projects. One option is to engage with the students to undertake a place branding exercise in respect of Economic Development within the Borough. The students would be given a scope for the work and pitch their ideas with the favoured idea chosen to undertake the place branding exercise. The panel of judges could include Ribble Valley Businesses and the College students would engage with local schools in developing their ideas.

Linked to this piece of work would be the publication of the Economic Plan. The detail and simplified format of the Plan has been agreed by Economic Development Committee however the finalised document has yet to be published. A small piece of work with the College would involve working with the design and photography students to design the look and appearance of the Plan. The photographs taken would add to the Council's stock of photographs.

3.3.6 Action Area 3: Business Support and Growth - Work Ribble Valley

The Council already has a web-site (<http://theribblevalley.org.uk/>) which was originally created to be a promotional website but does lend itself to being an economic development website and this could be an option for creating a dedicated web-page which would enable the following actions to be implemented:

- Create a 'one stop shop' business support package
- Develop an on-line business directory
- Implement a property search function

There may be some wider regulatory issues around accessibility to satellite websites such as this. As such these matters will be fully explored before any detailed work happens in respect of re-designing this web-site and setting up the directories above.

3.3.7 Action Area 3: Business Support and Growth - Utilise the Ribble Valley Economic Partnership

The most recent Partnership meeting was held at Thwaite's headquarters in Mellor which is an excellent venue for meetings and events. The partnership meetings are very well attended by a mix of businesses throughout the Valley and the intention is to hold meetings at various business venues throughout the Valley to provide networking opportunities and to showcase the diverse mix of businesses which exist within the Borough.

The members of the Partnership have expressed an interest in being involved in the specific actions of the plan which is welcomed as the purpose of the plan is to assist existing businesses. All of the members have been contacted to establish which businesses would like to be involved in the following actions: developing a jobs/ careers fair, exploring options for developing a work placement plan, developing key service centre action plans, undertaking place branding exercise, developing an online business directory, setting up business advice and support web page/ site, setting up a 'One Stop Shop' business support package, quarterly meetings of the Ribble Valley Economic Partnership, developing a Digital Strategy, developing a cultural strategy, exploring options for increasing visitor stay, developing a strategy for the castle and its grounds, heritage strategy and the creation of a one stop events directory.

3.3.8 Action Area 4: Connectivity- Rail Improvements

Discussions have commenced with the relevant partners to identify potential improvements to the Network with a meeting arranged for early November with the relevant partners. It is envisaged that the initial stage will be to appoint consultants to undertake a feasibility study of the 3 potential options with further studies likely once the feasible options have been identified. The study will most likely consider:

- 1) Increase the frequency of trains from Clitheroe to Manchester including shortening the journey time.
- 2) The provision of a direct train from Clitheroe to Preston (removing the need to change at Blackburn).
- 3) Re-open the northern rail link to Yorkshire.

3.3.9 Action Area 4: Connectivity - Develop a digital strategy

The scope of this strategy will be scoped out by Officers in the first instance to agree a way forward. The External Investment and Funding Officer at Lancashire County Council and the Digital Skills Coordinator at Lancashire

Enterprise Partnership will be invited to the next Partnership meeting to present directly to the Members. Members of the Partnership have expressed an interest in being involved in the development of this strategy. Further details will be brought back to a later Committee meeting.

3.3.10 Action Area 5: Tourism - Develop a one-stop events directory

The Council has a community directory, Signpost, featuring information about events and activities in the borough which is accessed via the Council's web-site

(https://www.ribblevalley.gov.uk/info/200289/people_and_communities/1615/signpost) and facilities for annual larger event organisers to upload events onto the Visit Ribble Valley web-site (<https://www.visitribblevalley.co.uk/events/>). It would not be possible to have one overarching events diary as given the number of events which occur within the Valley any diary style directory would be illegible. As such separating the community events and larger annual events, as currently occurs, enables as many events as possible to be included.

The Tourism Officer undertakes an annual exercise to encourage event organisers to include their events on the Council's event directory. To ensure residents, visitors and event organisers are aware of the existing facilities a promotional exercise will be undertaken by the Tourism Officer in conjunction with the Communications Officer to re-promote this facility.

3.4 *Medium Term Priorities*

3.4.1 Action Area 1: People - Develop a jobs/ careers fair/ explore the options for developing a work placement plan.

Links with the schools are being established and further work will be undertaken in respect of developing these actions

3.4.2 Action Area 2: Places - Develop a Key Service Centre Action Plan for Whalley
Following the completion of the Longridge Action Plan a similar exercise will be undertaken within Whalley

3.4.3 Action Area 2: Places - Develop a Key Service Centre Action Plan for Clitheroe
A second round of Future High Street Fund is expected to be released within 2020. A High Street Task Force has been created which is a consortium of experts, experienced place leaders and organisations who will work with organisations that represent Local Authorities, SMEs, big businesses, property and finance across England. It is due to launch its full range of products and services in 2020, prior to a second round of the Future High Streets Fund and The Local Authority will seek to engage with the Task Force.

3.4.4 Action Area 4: Connectivity - Sustainable Transport

The Council's Local Plan will be updated within the next few years. Discussions with the transport providers will be utilised to formulate planning policies which seek to enhance and create sustainable transport opportunities within the Borough.

3.4.5 Action Area 5: Tourism - Develop a cultural strategy for the Borough and develop a Borough wide heritage strategy

Marketing Lancashire and the Lancashire Enterprise Partnership (LEP) have confirmed they are in the early stages of putting together a submission to be the 2025 UK City of Culture. Lancashire's bid window will open at the end of 2019 and needs to be submitted in 2021. The winning entry will be announced in December 2021.

The work undertaken in respect of this bid will be awaited to identify options for a cultural strategy within the Valley. It is also considered that linking the heritage assets from a tourism and economic development perspective with the cultural aspects could be more suitable for the Ribble Valley.

3.4.6 Action Area 5: Tourism - Develop planning policies

Policies to support the provision of a mix of visitor accommodation to widen opportunities within the Borough for overnight stays will be explored as part of the Local Plan update. This will be supported by an evidence base to justify any potential schemes to be taken forward.

3.4.7 Action Area 5: Tourism - Develop a strategy for the future of the castle and its grounds

Clitheroe Castle and its grounds is owned by the Council although the museum is currently run by Lancashire County Council. Options for developing a strategy for the Castle will need to be linked to the how the museum is taken forward, options for the Bowling Green café and in conjunction with partners. This is a longer term piece of work and could line into the work undertaken as part of the Future High Street Fund.

4 RISK ASSESSMENT

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

- Resources – There is approximately £9,000 remaining within the budget which will be partly utilised to fund the rail study. The full cost of this study is not yet known however partners such as Community Rail Lancashire may contribute to the cost and there are grants available, such as the Northern Community Rail Seed Corn Fund, which will be explored.

There is currently a Regeneration Policy Officer post vacant within the Economic Development and Planning Directorate. This role will be advertised as a project officer position to assist in the delivery of the actions within the plan.

- 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 RECOMMENDED THAT COMMITTEE

5.1 Approve the short and medium-term priorities set out above and specifically that officers are asked to:

1. commence the action plan programme with the Longridge Key Service Centre Action Plan;

2. progress with Blackburn College to develop a piece of work with their students in respect of an economic development place branding exercise and engage with them to develop a piece of work with their students in respect of the final design of the Economic Plan document; and
3. progress a rail study with key partners.

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