

RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

meeting date: 20 JANUARY 2022
title: TOURISM PROGRESS REPORT, INCLUDING THE ONGOING RESPONSE TO THE PANDEMIC
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1 PURPOSE

1.1 To receive a general progress report on tourism activity, with particular reference to measures taken to support the visitor economy during the pandemic, as well as the priorities as we continue through to recovery.

1.2 Relevance to the Council's ambitions and priorities:

- Community Objectives – To sustain a strong and prosperous Ribble Valley
- Corporate Priorities - To encourage economic development throughout the borough, with specific focus on tourism
- Other Considerations – To develop, with relevant partners, measures to support the visitor economy

2 ISSUES

2.1 Background

Tourism and hospitality businesses have been amongst the hardest hit by the pandemic, with the resulting restrictions, having a significant impact on trade. During the initial stages some businesses did not reopen, significant refunds were made to customers, and countless staff were furloughed. Conversely, many businesses responded to the crisis with determination and innovation to survive in what proved to be ever-changing circumstances. Most subsequently rose to the challenges resulting from the growth in 'Staycations,' and the subsequent boom in domestic tourism

The sectors most seriously affected were –

- Dining experiences
- Weddings
- Group travel / residential / adventure centres
- Cultural venues including theatre and cinemas
- Events

2.2 Recovery Plan for Tourism and Hospitality

The Council's tourism and promotional activity is usually guided by a 'Destination Management Plan,' the progress of which was reported regularly to this committee. The plan, which identified the key target areas and opportunities for action, was suspended, in response to the pandemic, and your officers worked closely with the Ribble Valley Tourism Association to launch a 'Response and Recovery Plan,' aimed at supporting tourism, through effective communication and forward-thinking marketing initiatives.

The 'Response and Recovery Plan' sought to identify positive opportunities, within a very challenging environment. the opportunities presented post virus. It was clear that as restrictions were lifted, post initial lockdown, with people travelling more freely

again, that competition, in terms of domestic tourism marketing, would be stronger than ever.

The predictions in the plan, as reported to this committee in 2020 have been borne out.

These include -

- A major boost in the UK domestic travel market
- Visitors seeking to feel and be safe – both during travel and whilst at the destination
- Huge demand to visit open space and countryside, and experience nature
- Strong interest in visiting and staying locally
- Greater interest in buying locally made products and eating locally sourced produce

The Ribble Valley Borough Council 'Response and Recovery Plan for Tourism and Hospitality' was launched in June 2020 and contained two parts: -

Response 'Remaining confident for the period during which closure restrictions are in place' and

Recovery 'Confidently adapting, as restrictions are relaxed'

An important part of the plan is a series of actions, reported in appendix one.

2.3 Forthcoming marketing and promotional priorities

There has, and continues to be, a major resurgence in tourism and hospitality. In Ribble Valley this is further intensified by the need to clear a huge backlog of wedding business. By contrast there are challenges too, as we move forward, particularly in terms of resourcing the industry, where there are huge problems in recruiting staff. This is not just a local problem, and the causes vary, but Brexit, Covid and people changing occupations during furlough are all factors which are mentioned by business leaders.

In this report we highlight some of the successful tourism promotional activities, both from the plan, as well as arising from other opportunities.

2.4 Ribble Valley – A Place for All Seasons – building on success

The emergence of the staycation, albeit the long-term appeal remains uncertain, became a reality and businesses have also been boosted with people keen to rediscover hospitality experiences post lockdown.

We are keen to build on this demand by launching various campaigns which promote Ribble Valley as 'A Place for All Seasons'. This is designed to help reduce seasonality and spread the business.

There are a number of strands to our campaign, including food promotion, weddings, and country walking, including our popular 'Walks with Taste' series. We have also launched a series of 'Greatest Days' – suggested itineraries for different Ribble Valley locations.

To mark the campaign launch we produced two new guides, a general visitor guide called 'Ribble Valley - A Place for All Seasons' and a 'Staycation' (Accommodation) guide. These were made available in hard print copies, virtual brochures, and downloads. (The guides are combined online). These were produced instead of a main visitor guide, the viability of which was doubtful in terms of advertising sales. These

guides were launched at the 'Lancashire Game and Country Festival', an event which attracts thousands of country loving people.

The 'Place for all Seasons' guide, which remained popular through the winter and will continue to early spring, was distributed to accommodation providers and other tourism outlets. The Staycation guide is solely about accommodation and is used in response to visitor enquiries via the website and other outlets. The businesses included in both of these guides are those which featured in our 2020 Love Ribble Valley Visitor Guide, plus those responding to our subsequent call to action. Work on the next editions have just begun, as there is still an appetite for printed marketing. We are mindful that generating income is likely to be more challenging, so we are planning guides with different shelf lives, and reduced print runs. The popular Visit Ribble Website is the next marketing tool in need of attention, and this will be refreshed over the next few months.

The Tolkien Trail has been relaunched and there are four new 'Walks with Taste' soon to be published. New cycle routes are also currently being created. As part of our forward campaign to encourage year-round tourism, we produced a series of 'Greatest Days' with promotional postcards designed to whet the appetite of would-be visitors, with the full itineraries available online.

2.5 British Travel Trade Show - Virtual Ribble Valley – Unique launch

We attended the first major tourism trade show since the outbreak of the pandemic. Visitors to the 'British Travel Trade Show,' had the opportunity to be virtually immersed in the Ribble Valley experience, as we teamed up with 'Teleport' to provide virtual reality tours of the area. Wearing an immersive headset, visitors were transported to three of Ribble Valley's best-known landmarks including, Clitheroe Castle, Whalley Abbey and Browsholme Hall. This is believed to be the first time that virtual reality of a destination has been used in this way.

We partnered with Lancaster Tourism at the event, to promote the clear message that our tourism industry is still very much keen to welcome visitors back. As a direct result of attending the exhibition, at least five Ribble Valley tourism business so far, are likely to benefit with new business generated from the event.

The virtual reality headset will be available after the meeting should any members of the committee wish to try the experience.

2.6 Ribble Valley Wedding Heaven

In order to help extend business all year round, and well into the future, an emphasis has been placed on supporting the revival of Wedding Tourism. The profile of this area recently received a boost when Ribble Valley featured in the national media, being hailed as 'England's new Wedding Heaven' referring to Clitheroe as 'The most romantic town in England and Wales' These were just two of many national newspaper headlines which appeared following the release of Office of National statistics figures which demonstrate Ribble Valley being one of few local authority areas to experience an increase in the number of weddings over the past 50 years. The figures illustrated Ribble Valley 'bucking the national trend' and this resulted in the widespread media coverage.

Wedding tourism provides benefits to many other tourism businesses, especially dining out, accommodation and shopping, as well as providing a showcase opportunity for first time visitors, who have never visited before, but then choose to return in subsequent years. We are currently considering ways which the full value of weddings can be properly evaluated. The Ribble Valley Wedding consultative group, which includes the majority of licenced venues in its membership, enables everyone with a

stake in weddings to work together to encourage more business into area. By promoting Ribble Valley as 'a Wedding Heaven.' The group, initiated by the Council, is believed to be the only one of its kind in the country and the success of this collaborative working' is now becoming apparent.

The new edition of our comprehensive wedding guide to Ribble Valley has also just been launched with an on-line version available.

2.7 Ribble Valley Tourism Association

During the pandemic, the membership of the association has continued to grow and it is now believed to have more members than ever before in its history. RVTA members have worked closely with the Council in organising members webinars and zoom meetings to help support members during the crisis. These have taken the form of practical advice sessions along with more targeted events to address some of the serious issues of finance and human resource management, including recruitment and staff welfare.

Mindful of the pressures that members have been under in the past few months and, with the increase in business but also staffing shortages, no meetings have been held. The association are however planning a major event and relaunch early this year. Due to a number of committee members leaving the industry during the pandemic, they are looking to create a new management committee.

2.8 Ribble Valley Food Heaven

Another great tourism theme which thrives locally is Food Tourism and this campaign has been refreshed with an overhaul of the website. www.ribbonvalleyfoodheaven.com Ribble Valley is one of the great 'the food capitals of the north' and we are collaborating with partners to promote local food in a variety of ways including a new promotional video which will be launched in a few weeks. It is a short video primarily for use in social media campaigns, but it illustrates the diversity of food choices available locally.

2.8 Media and bloggers

More press and travel bloggers have been welcomed into Ribble Valley as the area becomes better known nationally as a tourism destination. We have recently hosted visits from an award-winning blogger, and the journalist of a national leisure magazine. More media visits are anticipated in the coming months.

2.9 Tourism Team Resources

We are currently supporting the government's Kickstart programme by taking 6-month work placements. One has just concluded and two are currently in post. These fully funded work placements are providing valuable support to the Tourism Officer, particularly with respect to updating websites and expanding social media activity.

2.10 Film and TV

Ribble Valley has often hosted film and TV media activity and just recently there has been a flurry of interest. Part of this new interest is a natural emergence from lockdown restrictions, with companies making up for lost time, but it is also due to the relocation of media companies away from London, including the ongoing development of media city, all of which is bringing new opportunities to the north. The Council receives regular requests for filming, especially in relation to the castle and just a few weeks ago a comedy drama was filmed there. We are currently dealing with a production company wishing to explore the possibility of a TV series highlighting the success of the area's wedding industry.

The 'Filming in England Partnership' was established to connect different organisations across England to create a film friendly environment and they have a regional

Production Liaison Manager (Northwest & Midlands) who is the point of contact for local authorities. He regularly sends out location requests to local authorities. Hosting film or TV productions can be quite lucrative and, in some cases, extremely valuable for tourism promotion. It is however something that can become quite involved and have local impacts. Their regional officer has offered to make a presentation to this committee about their work and opportunity the Council has, to sign up to the film partnership.

2.9 Annual Photographic Competition

We have just held the annual photographic competition where the public enter their photographs under several categories. The shortlisted entries were published on the 'Love Ribble Valley' Facebook page and the public voted on their favourites. We received another great response to the competition and have announced the winners. The quality of entries was, once again, very good and many of them will now be feature in our publications and websites.

2.10 Recruitment crisis

Whilst the recruitment of tourism and hospitality staff is a national crisis, we are keen to work with partners locally to promote employment in the industry. We are currently working on the production of some positive PR which will promote case studies and individual success stories, and these will be shared online, video and in print.

3 ISSUES

The main issue to note is the way in which the Council has responded and continued to respond to the ongoing crisis. This continues to evolve with the changing circumstances and this change is reflected in the Response and Recovery Plan. Appendix one illustrates the progress being made.

4 RISK ASSESSMENT

The approval of this report may have the following implications.

- Resources – The cost of promotional activities are contained within existing budgets and, where appropriate supported by the government
- Technical, Environmental and Legal – None in the context of this report
- Reputation – The Council is an active contributor in terms of strategic and operational tourism service.
- Equality and Diversity – None

5 CONCLUSION

5.1 Progress in Tourism will continue to be reported to future committees.

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Ribbles Valley Borough Council

Response and Recovery Plan for Tourism and Hospitality June 2020 - date

Review of Progress January 2022

Phase One – Response *'Remaining confident for the period during which closure restrictions are in place'*

Measure	Support messages from central Government			
Action	Details	Partners	Timescale	Actions taken
Disseminate and convey relevant information to businesses	Promote on website and circulars Reinforce, in all communications, current government messages regarding the coronavirus	RVTA	Immediate and ongoing	RVTA website was established as a point of contact for business advice Government guidance has been promoted regularly in newsletters to 230 tourism related businesses
Promote sources of guidance and support	Regular 'Tourism Update' e-shots to tourism-related businesses, containing the latest guidance	RVTA	Initially every 10-14 days	E-shots issued regularly every 7-14 days or when relevant government information is issued. Content includes any areas of support to businesses including grants
Intelligence gathering	Promote and respond to consumer and business consultations and research	ML VE/VB	As and when required	We have promoted Visit Lancashire business surveys, and these have fed into regional and national surveys

Measure	Protect and support local businesses			
Action	Details	Partners	Timescale	Actions taken
Distribute grant aid and promote other sources of support	Promote the availability of grant aid and other support through regular E-shots to businesses Promote RVBC and RVTA websites as central points of reference	RVTA	Grants - ongoing as funds are available	Clear information about the discretionary grants was sent out to businesses RVTA AND RVBC websites were promoted as sources of information.
Publicise and support local best practice	Features on social media platforms Share good news to media and Lancashire audiences	RVTA ML	Ongoing during crisis	Regular posts on all tourism social media platforms promoted examples of business demonstrating innovation or best practice.
Facilitate knowledge sharing, networking and promote relevant training opportunities	Regular on-line meetings with business on various themes Distribute the latest guidance on social distancing and safe practice	RVTA	Weekly As it becomes available	There were regular on-line meetings for business representatives with over seventy businesses participating Business advice seminars were delivered with partners on specific themes including <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal • Finance • Marketing • Human resources • Health and wellbeing •

Communicate with key stakeholders to gain support for our Recovery Plan	Involve stakeholders in the preparation of the plan and consult with stakeholders during English Tourism Week	RVTA and other stakeholders	English Tourism Week	The new promotional video was launched to coincide with National Tourism week
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Measure	Maintain Ribble Valley brand awareness and begin to design new tourism products			
Action	Details	Partners	Timescale	Actions taken
Rebrand our marketing, keeping Ribble Valley very much in the mind of consumers	Launch promotional video 'When the time is right' during English Tourism week with underlying message of being ready soon for visitors Launch #loveribblevalley as a focus for businesses as they reopen	RVTA	English Tourism Week	The new video was launched as planned, along with the #loveribblevalley brand. This was embraced by the private sector and promoted widely on all tourism promotional social media platforms
Work with tourism businesses to review their offer in line with any new restrictions and guidelines.	Circulate latest information through regular E-shots and RVTA webinars Individual support to specific business where appropriate	RVTA	E-shots every 10-14 days and weekly webinars	Up to date information was shared in E-shots and webinars. This resulted in sharing best practice and knowledge between businesses
Develop new tourism products ready to be shared with the media	Prepare locally focused digital and social media campaigns around key early themes including walking, driving, and cycling, including a review of the Tolkien Trail and an expansion of 'Walks with Taste'	Specific local communities Targeted businesses	Ongoing ahead of recovery	Work is progressing on new tourism products particularly country walking. The Tolkien Trail was relaunched. The publication of four new 'walks with taste' is imminent

Prepare targeted campaigns to attract residents and day visitors	Draft social media marketing awareness material ready for when the restrictions are lifted	Targeted businesses	Ongoing ahead of recovery	Social media campaigns were delivered following the initial lockdown. Two social media influencers and one award winning blogger visited Ribble Valley and the resulting content was used on social media and websites
Monitor consumer behaviour to identify potential new markets	Be prepared to alter course on campaigns and marketing, dependent on consumer behaviours to changing restrictions	AONB RVTA	Ongoing	Mindful of the way in which restrictions continue to evolve and change, our campaigns and promotions have altered accordingly
Participate in wider campaigns to maximise exposure of the area and its businesses	Contribute content and ideas to Marketing Lancashire and similar campaigns	ML VE/VB	As opportunities arise	Numerous social media posts have been shared with #Visit Lancashire

Measure	Stay engaged with communities and promote the importance of tourism			
Action	Details	Partners	Timescale	Actions taken
Share relevant public information	<p>Actively promote industry best practice and other measures to ensure confidence about tourism within the community</p> <p>Promote via media and social media releases with positive tourism outcomes</p>	RVTA	Ongoing	Good news stories about tourism are continually featured throughout the pandemic
Promote an understanding of the importance of tourism	Incorporate the positive aspects of the visitor economy into media releases	RVTA	Ongoing	The value of the local visitor economy continues to feature in all levels of the media. We continue to promote the positive aspect of tourism to the economy
Adapt and continue event planning	Monitor any new guidelines relating to event management and work with event organisers to seek solutions for 202	Event organisers	Ongoing	The restrictions made event planning very difficult however we promoted both virtual events as well as those few 'actual' ones taking place
Mitigate any potential impacts of 'Over Tourism'	In planning the various campaigns, take into consideration the potential for 'over tourism' and plan accordingly e.g. by promoting non-honeypots, seasonal experiences, and extended opening	AONB RVTA	Ongoing	The visitor flow to sensitive areas was carefully monitored with no major problems arising

Phase Two – Recovery ‘Confidently adapting, as restrictions are relaxed’

Measure	Reinforce Ribble Valley brand awareness			
Action	Details	Partners	Timescale (all subject to further restrictions)	Actions taken
Unify and deliver positive, up-beat messages, conveying ‘safe and welcome’ messages and ensuring Ribble Valley stands out	<p>Relaunch promotional video incorporating more confident key messages</p> <p>Develop follow up video containing consumer activity</p> <p>Use ‘Safe and Welcome’ narrative in all campaigns and communications</p>	Various businesses RVTA	Upon restrictions being lifted	<p>The promotional video was relaunched post initial lockdown</p> <p>The new food video will be available soon</p> <p>Three Christmas shopping videos were produced, one each for Clitheroe Longridge and Whalley.</p> <p>The safe and welcome narrative is incorporated into website content and promoted through social media platforms</p>
Engage with press and media identifying key opportunities for press promotion,	<p>Target media contacts located within one hour’s drive time and drip feed relevant content. e.g. new experiences, publications, and events</p> <p>Promote key themes to specialist media including food, walking, cycling etc</p>	ML RVTA	<p>After restrictions are lifted, feed over a period of weeks</p> <p>Ongoing</p>	<p>There have been various media contacts developed resulting in some good PR.</p> <p>Various national press visits have been hosted</p>

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Measure	Continue to support local businesses			
Action	Details	Partners	Timescale <small>(all subject to further restrictions)</small>	Actions taken
Continued promotion of government guidance and support	Continue to promote opportunities for support and funding to businesses in the regular 'Tourism Update' newsletter	RVTA	Every 10-14 days as continues to be relevant	The Tourism Update newsletter is sent out regularly to over 230 businesses
Support businesses in dealing with peaks and fluctuations in visitor interest	<p>Promote 'Love to be Open' social media campaign – celebrating individual businesses as they open up</p> <p>Support measures to redesign tourism, ensuring it is safe</p> <p>Launch 'Made in Ribble Valley' - a celebration of arts, craft, and creativity</p>	RVTA	<p>Upon restrictions being lifted</p> <p>Ongoing from restrictions being lifted</p> <p>Once sufficient relevant businesses are open</p>	<p>Bespoke promotion of businesses as they re-opened involved over forty businesses and over 250 social media posts</p> <p>The launch of 'made in Ribble Valley' will resume when the time is right and link closely to Arts development activity.</p>
Continue networking and knowledge sharing	<p>Continue to host business on line events with the RVTA</p> <p>Promote suitable events organised by other parties</p>	RVTA	Gradually relaxing frequency from weekly to two monthly over time as appropriate	The webinars for local businesses were suspended late last year when customer demand made attendance difficult . They had engaged with over seventy business representatives

Facilitate and promote business-to-business support and training	Support regular training and workshop events run by the RVTA in support of local businesses	RVTA	RVTA timetable	Regular events took place up until late-2021
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Measure	Create safe and welcoming tourism			
Action	Details	Partners	Timescale (all subject to further restrictions)	Actions taken
Review all tourism marketing to ensure positive and confident messages are portrayed	Review each of the tourism websites to ensure the content is portraying the new language and portrayal of 'safe and welcoming' tourism Invest in new imagery for online and print material		By mid-July	The RVTA, food and weddings websites have been reviewed and the focus is now on refreshing the main site, www.wisitribblevalley.co.uk
Encourage tourism businesses to adhere to new regulations and join accredited schemes	Ensure that all businesses participating in promotional campaigns are adhering to new safety guidelines Actively promote and encourage participation in safe and legal type accreditation	RVTA VE VE, QIT HSE	In accordance with each campaign	We promoted the two national accreditation schemes with around 50 RV businesses signing up to the national 'We're good to go' scheme
Promote examples of innovation and best practice	Actively seek out best practice and highlight on social media Incorporate best practice into the annual tourism awards	RVTA	Regular weekly feed	The tourism awards, promoted with the RVTA were made for 2021 but for 2022 remain suspended but will eventually include new awards for businesses demonstrating innovation during the crisis

Measure	Develop a programme of new tourism themes			
Action	Details	Partners	Timescale <small>(all subject to further restrictions)</small>	Actions taken
Promote to new markets including to a younger audience	<p>Devise specific marketing campaigns</p> <p>Design and promote a 'Families together' campaigns</p>	<p>Hospitality businesses</p> <p>Family-friendly businesses</p> <p>FA UU</p>	<p>Spring 2022</p> <p>August 2021</p>	<p>The imagery used in promotions is being revised to reflect new markets</p> <p>New Greatest Days Itineraries were produced</p> <p>We have hosted two social media influencers who provided refreshed content for website and our own social media</p>
Launch a new 'Love the Great Outdoors' campaign	<p>Promote a new series of 'Trustworthy Trips' including walking cycling, driving itineraries along with a selection of virtual experiences</p> <p>Reviving the Tolkien Trail and promotion of the Ribble Way, including exploring the potential of linking accommodation and luggage transport</p>	<p>RVTA</p> <p>Parish Council Neighbouring Councils</p>	<p>Staggered programme over 12 months</p> <p>Spring 2022</p>	<p>The Tolkien Trail has been relaunched and there are four new 'Walks with Taste' soon to be published.</p> <p>New cycle routes will soon be launched.</p>

				opportunities for at least five local companies
Promote Ribble Valley as a place for all seasons	Seasonal campaigns based on midweek breaks, linked to walking cycling etc Stronger use of seasonally themed imagery on websites and social media	Accommodation providers RVTA	2022	Initial plans for 2022 are being formulated

Measure	Manage tourism responsibly			
Action	Details	Partners	Timescale (all subject to further restrictions)	Actions taken
Monitor visitor flows and indications of over tourism	Monitor tourism carefully to ensure that 'Over Tourism' does not occur, especially in sensitive areas such as Bowland and Pendle Hill	AONB Pendle BC	Ongoing	Tourism continues to be monitored and there are currently no evident issues
Promote seasonal offers and encourage a year-round calendar of events	Actively identify opportunities for off season events, activities, and support 'Place for All Seasons' campaign above	RVTA	Autumn 2021	The second winter campaign is currently running
Promote and support responsible and safe visitor behaviour	Include in all campaign and marketing the need for responsible behaviour, for example, using the countryside code and the need to be mindful of the needs of local people	NFU NE AONB	Ongoing	Important messages are being incorporated into social media posts, websites, and publications such as the 'Walks with Taste'

Notes

RVTA – Ribble Valley Tourism Association

NFU – National Farmers Union

AONB – Forest of Bowland Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Service (LCC)
NE - Natural England - the statutory agency for nature conservation
QIT - Quality in Tourism – Agency delivering inspection services
RVWH – Ribble Valley Wedding Heaven a promotional/consultative group

ML – Marketing Lancashire
VE -Visit England (National Tourist Board)
UU – United Utilities
HSE – Health and Safety Executive