

RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

meeting date: 16 JUNE 2022
title: TOURISM PROGRESS REPORT
submitted by: NICOLA HOPKINS
DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & PLANNING
principal author: TOM PRIDMORE, TOURISM AND EVENTS OFFICER

1 PURPOSE

1.1 To receive a general progress report on tourism activity, including measures taken to support the visitor economy following the pandemic, and 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 INFORMATION

2.1 Background

Tourism and hospitality businesses were amongst the hardest hit by the pandemic, with the resulting restrictions, having a significant impact on trade. 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. However, 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.

2.2 Recovery Plan for Tourism and Hospitality

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'

The 'Response and Recovery Plan' sought to identify positive opportunities, within a very different tourism environment.

The predictions in the plan, as reported to this Committee in 2020 were borne out, namely:

- 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

An important part of the plan is the associated action plan which is regularly reported to this Committee.

2.3 Forthcoming marketing and promotional priorities

There has, and continues to be, a major resurgence in tourism and hospitality albeit some sectors have levelled out with the return of overseas tourism. There are new 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, with Brexit, public transport and the pandemic, particularly people changing occupations during furlough, being the contributing factors mentioned by business leaders.

The sustainability of staycation tourism, whilst currently buoyant, remains hard to predict not least with new pressures being experienced in the economy, including fuel and travel prices, along with the continued uncertainty of overseas travel, particularly flying.

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

There remains unprecedented demands and opportunities which we are addressing with targeted campaigns to promote Ribble Valley as 'A Place for All Seasons', designed to help reduce seasonality and spread the business.

There are a number of strands to our campaigns, including food promotion, cycling and country walking. We are just launching six new 'Walks with Taste' to add to the existing series of eleven. The walks are all based from businesses with a notable food offer, where walkers are encouraged to visit. The starting points for the walk are invariably the host business car park, which reduces potential parking congestion in rural lanes. Each walk is designed to be easy to follow with map and description, with each walk also available as a download. The production of the walks is partially funded by the host venues as and the project also receives sponsorship from a relevant private sector partner. The Tolkien Trail has also been relaunched.

Four new cycle routes have also been launched, providing options to explore Ribble Valley, using, wherever possible, quieter scene routes. The routes are also designed to bring opportunities for private sector businesses along the way.

In 2020, in response to the circumstances created by the pandemic, rather than one annual visitors guide, we produced two new guides, a general visitor guide called 'Ribble Valley - A Place for All Seasons' and a 'Staycation' (Accommodation) guide. Given the uncertainty of advertising uptake and changes to the way in which visitors access information, we have continued this approach for 2022 and moreover, changed our design and production to enable the guide an extended shelf life to cover 2023. Therefore, in July, two different publications will be produced, a main visitor guide and a bespoke accommodation guide.

The reasons to change our approach

- To keep costs down for businesses

- To be able to facilitate growing number of new businesses
- A recognition that much business has gone 'online'
- Give customers the information they need to minimise waste

The publications will have a more attractive advertising format and a longer shelf life. Resulting in ability to dramatically reduce the cost of advertising to businesses.

Both guides made available in hard print copies, virtual brochures, and downloads.

The popular Visit Ribble Website is the next marketing tool requiring attention, and this will be refreshed over the next few months.

2.5 Promotional events

We attended the first major tourism consumer show since the outbreak of the pandemic. Visitors to the 'National Outdoors Expo,' 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. The Coach travel event at Samlesbury Hall was also attended, resulting in good interest in Ribble Valley.

2.6 Ribble Valley Tourism Association

Membership of the association has continued to grow, and it now has around one hundred members across the sphere of tourism businesses. The association is a separate body to the Council, but we support its activities as it provides an ideal forum for consultation and a good partner in promotional activities. The Council has two places on their executive Committee.

RVTA members worked closely with the Council in organising members webinars and zoom meetings to help support members during the pandemic. These took the form of practical advice sessions along with more targeted events to address some of the serious issues of finance and human resource management.

2.7 The Tourism Gathering

The Council joined forces with the Ribble Valley Tourism Association to host an event called 'the Tourism Gathering' which attracted more than one hundred participants from local tourism and hospitality businesses.

The event, a showcase for Ribble Valley tourism, has a morning business seminar with presentations on food tourism, and recruitment, along with an information exchange. In the afternoon, the 'Stars in Tourism' awards were presented. These awards not only recognised excellence and creativity in tourism but specifically focused on people working in the industry, including unsung heroes, teams and rising stars. This year special awards were also made to those businesses that had supported communities and essential services during the pandemic, or successfully changed their business models to survive and retain jobs during extremely challenging circumstances.

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.

Clitheroe Food Festival, a showcase event for local food, returns to the events calendar this year. Officers are keen to restore it to its' pre pandemic popularity, and moreover, in future years, explore ways in which the event might expand in order to benefit the wider Ribble Valley area.

2.9 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. In the last year we have hosted visits from an award-winning blogger, and the journalist of a national leisure magazine. In September award winning influencers will visit Ribble Valley. Their previous visit can be viewed on line on many social media platforms.

2.10 Film and TV

Ribble Valley continues to host film and TV media activity, not least with the filming of 'Greatest Days' which brought immediate economic benefits to the area during filming and moreover, if successful will provide major promotional opportunities in the future. We have already launched a series of 'Greatest Days' – suggested itineraries for different Ribble Valley locations, maximising on the title of the film. Once the Film has premiered, more promotional and thematic activities will be developed.

There are a number of other media and filming activities currently progressing, including a film crew who are here for most of the summer making a documentary about weddings called 'Wedding Valley'.

2.11 Recruitment crisis

Whilst the recruitment of tourism and hospitality staff is a national crisis, we are keen to collaborate 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

- 3.1 The main issue to note is the way in which the Council continues to respond to the pandemic and other economic and environmental influences. Our strategy evolves with the changing circumstances and this change is currently reflected in the Response and Recovery Plan, but in the near future there will need to be a more comprehensive tourism strategy developed.



TOM PRIDMORE
TOURISM AND EVENTS OFFICER

NICOLA HOPKINS
DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT &
PLANNING

For further information, please contact Tom Pridmore 01200 414496