

RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

meeting date: THURSDAY, 3 NOVEMBER 2022
title: TOWN CENTRE HEALTH CHECK UPDATE
submitted by: NICOLA HOPKINS – DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & PLANNING
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1 PURPOSE

1.1 To receive information on the Ribble Valley Borough's Key Service Centres of Clitheroe, Longridge and Whalley.

1.2 Relevance to the Council's ambitions and priorities:

- Councils Ambitions - To secure and maintain a sustainable economic base for the borough.
- Community Objectives - To promote a thriving, diverse and balanced local economy.
- Corporate Priorities - Delivery of services to all.
- Other Considerations - None.

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 The Ribble Valley Core Strategy outlines a commitment to promoting sustainable development of the local economy. The council recognises the importance of ensuring the vitality and viability of the key services centres (Clitheroe, Longridge and Whalley), contributing to a strong and prosperous borough.

2.2 In connection with this, the report serves to update the data on the general state of the Ribble Valley economy, with particular focus on Clitheroe, Longridge and Whalley.

3 INFORMATION

3.1 Vacancy Survey

3.2 The proportion of vacant property and the length of time vacant in the town centre is the most demonstrative indicator reflecting the current health and performance of a town centre.

3.3 Appendix A shows the results of the vacancy surveys undertaken in the main centres of Clitheroe, Whalley and Longridge between March and October 2022. All commercial properties in the designated town centre boundaries were covered.

3.4 In the seven-month period between March 2022 and October 2022, there have been increases in the number of vacant commercial premises recorded within all three centres (see Appendix B).

3.5 The most significant increase has been seen in Longridge which currently has 7 vacant premises in the town centre boundary. In August 2021 of the pandemic, there were zero vacant properties in Longridge's town centre boundary. From March 2022 to October 2022 the number of vacancies increased from 2 to 7. The two vacancies from March (14 Towneley Parade and The Palace Cinema) remained vacant in October.

Swifts Hardware Store also remains vacant due to fire damage with renovations ongoing.

- 3.6 In Whalley just one vacant unit was recorded. This is a respective increase of zero to one. The vacancy is a large (2,015 Sq Ft), multi-use unit To Let on Trevor Dawson for £45,000 per annum.
- 3.7 Finally, Clitheroe town centre has seen an increase of 12 to 15 vacant units between March and October. From the last survey, 7 properties remain unoccupied.
- 3.8 Whilst vacant units exist in the three centres, particularly Longridge and Clitheroe, 'churn' occurs regularly within many market town centres across the country as retail changes.
- 3.9 Monitoring the Town Centres to ensure the vacant units are being filled is of high importance.
- 3.10 No change in Footfall trends have been noted.
- 3.11 Unemployment
- 3.12 Before the outbreak of Covid-19, the percentage of those unemployed within the borough was stable at an average of 1.2%. Claimant Count numbers increased dramatically between March 2020 and May 2020 peaking at 3.5% as the initial Covid-19 lockdown resulted in deep economic recession.
- 3.13 From February 2021, we saw continuous decreases in the percentage of those unemployed in the borough until levels steadied at 1.9% in December 2021. Since then, unemployment levels have fallen marginally and as of August 2022, claimant count in the Ribble Valley sits at 1.6%. This is the lowest level of unemployment in the Ribble Valley since the pandemic.
- 3.14 The August 2022 figure for Ribble Valley (1.6%) is the lowest provisional Claimant Count total in the Lancashire-12 area. The average Claimant Count for Lancashire in August 2022 was 4% (see Appendix C).
- 3.15 A comparison with unemployment rates across Lancashire and the UK shows that the stabilisation of Claimant Count numbers has occurred on a national scale. There is no indication that the Ribble Valley is experiencing trends different to those which are being experienced on a regional and national scale.



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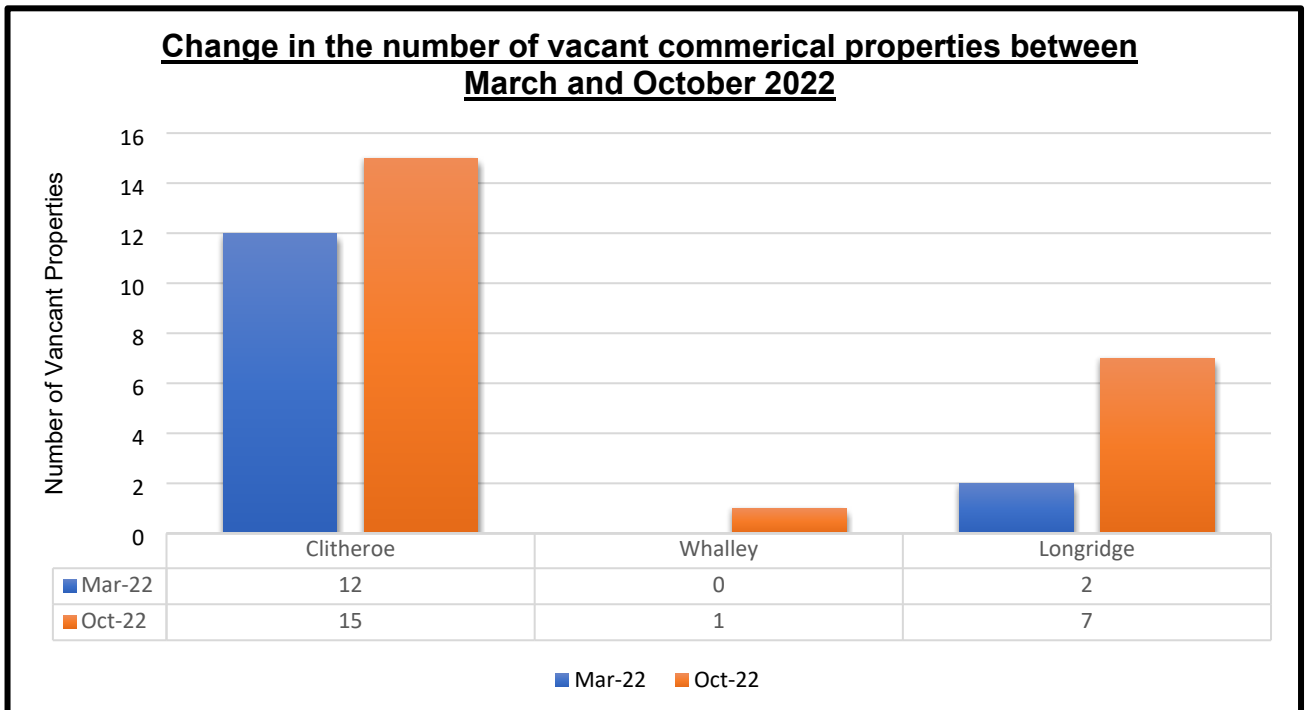
APPENDIX A

Table showing the results of the March and October 2022 Vacancy Surveys

Location	Number of Vacancies		Mar- Oct Swing
	March 2022	October 2022	
Clitheroe	12	15	+3 (25% increase)
Whalley	0	1	+1 (100% increase)
Longridge	2	7	+5 (250% increase)

APPENDIX B

Graph to show the March and October 2022 Vacancy Surveys



Appendix C

Graph showing Universal Credit receipts in the Ribble Valley, Lancashire and UK. Data taken from NOMIS- Claimant Count by unitary and local authority data set.

