

RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL REPORT TO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Agenda Item No.

meeting date: 30 March 2023.
title: TOURISM UPDATE
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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 since the pandemic.
- 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 WORK UNDERTAKEN

Response and Recovery Plan for Tourism and Hospitality

- 2.1 The Council's tourism and promotional activity is usually guided by a 'Destination Management Plan', the progress of which is reported regularly to this committee. The plan, which identifies the key target areas and opportunities for action, was suspended, in response to the pandemic. In order to address the severe consequences resulting from the lockdowns, your officers worked closely with the Ribble Valley Tourism Association to produce a 'Response and Recovery Plan' early during the pandemic, aimed at supporting tourism businesses and marketing activity through good communication and careful targeting.
- 2.2 The 'Response and Recovery Plan' sought to be positive, and took into consideration the opportunities presented now and 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 fiercer than ever.
- 2.3 The predictions in the plan and reported to this committee in 2020 have been borne out. These included -
 - 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.
- 2.4 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'.

- 2.5 An important part of the plan has been a series of actions, the progress of which continues to be monitored and periodically reported to this committee. Part One, 'Response', has effectively been delivered, and so just the Part Two progress report is attached, as appendix one
- 2.6 The Council was invited to present the 'Ribble Valley Response and Recovery Plan' as an example of good practices at a national seminar on the Visitor Economy organised by the Local Government Association.
- 2.7 With the Response and Recovery Plan now almost fully implemented, we shall be developing a new Destination Management Plan for the Visitor economy, taking into consideration new challenges and opportunities, and this will be reported to this committee in due course.

Forthcoming marketing and promotional priorities

- 2.8 There continues to be a steady revival in tourism and hospitality, and moreover many new enterprises have started up, particularly in the accommodation sector. By contrast there are challenges too, in terms of rising prices and particular problems in recruiting and retaining staff. Again, these are not a local challenges, and the causes vary.
- 2.9 The following highlights, along with those in the Response and Recovery Plan, aim to help address the current challenges and opportunities.

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

- 2.10 The emergence of the staycation, albeit the long-term appeal remains uncertain, became a reality and businesses have been boosted as people keenly rediscover staycation type experiences, particularly of an outdoor nature. We are building on success with campaigns to promote Ribble Valley as 'A Place for All Seasons'. This is designed to help reduce seasonality and spread the business. The branding is used on publications and promotional activities.
- 2.11 There are several strands to our campaign, including food promotion, weddings and country walking, including our popular 'Walks with Taste' series.
- 2.12 Targeted marketing has included attending the popular Destinations Holiday Show, and summer s events including the Royal Lancashire show.
- 2.13 To mark the campaign launch, and to reduce the costs of advertising to businesses, we produced two new guides with different print runs, a general visitor guide called 'Ribble Valley - A Place for All Seasons' and a 'Staycation' (Accommodation) guide. These are available in hard print copies, virtual brochures, and downloads. These were produced instead of a main visitor guide, the viability of which would have been doubtful, in terms of advertising sales.
- 2.14 The Place for all Seasons guide has remained popular through the winter to early spring and was distributed to accommodation providers and visitor outlets. The Staycation guide is solely about accommodation and is used in response to visitor enquiries via the website and suitable visitor outlets. Both guides are available in hard print copy, virtual brochures, and downloads. The popular Visit Ribble Website is the

next priority for attention, and this will hopefully be refreshed over the next few months, potentially using grant aid. The new site will hopefully contain interactive maps and more video and live content.

- 2.15 The Tolkien Trail was relaunched and there are four new 'Walks with Taste.' New cycle routes using quiet, scenic lanes are soon to be published.
- 2.16 As part of our forward campaign to encourage year-round tourism, we also produced a series of 'Greatest Days' with promotional postcards designed to 'whet the appetite' of would-be visitors, with the full itineraries available online. Deliberately adopting the title of the recently made movie, they are designed to maximise the tourism potential arising from its launch and spread the benefits of film tourism across Ribble Valley.

British Travel Trade Show - Virtual Ribble Valley – Unique launch

- 2.17 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 partner with Lancaster Tourism and other Lancashire private sector partners to attend the British Travel and Tourism Shows following last year's success at which at least five Ribble Valley tourism business benefited.

Ribble Valley Wedding Heaven

- 2.18 Following the pandemic there was a surge in the number of weddings, and the Council, along with the support of Lancashire County Council, continues to coordinate a Ribble Valley Weddings group. Whilst no longer a 'partnership', the group provides an excellent forum for addressing mutual challenges and devising collective marketing activity.
- 2.19 During 2022, a film crew spent several months in Ribble Valley creating a new ten-episode series called 'Wedding Valley', which will be launched next month. This will not only increase awareness of the area's unique wedding appeal but generally promote Ribble Valley as an attractive welcoming visitor destination.

Ribble Valley Tourism Association

- 2.20 Since the pandemic, the membership of the association has continued to grow. It collaborated closely with the Council in organising members webinars and zoom meetings to help support members during the crisis. These events have now become 'real time' and have been extremely well attended.
- 2.21 RVTA events are used as a sounding block for new ideas, and in recent consultative meeting, Group travel and retail tourism were identified as areas to consider for new marketing campaigns. The group also highlighted the need to increase the profile for the Ribble Valley brand and to appeal to new to new, younger audiences through new media. The consultation also revealed demand for better more timely information about event taking place throughout the year. Measures are also being taken to address this.
- 2.22 In partnership with the council, the association held a major event, 'the Tourism Gathering', where it relaunched its membership offer. The event, which was attended by around 100 businesses leaders, and included guests speakers on the topical themes of recruitment and food tourism. It also resulted in the formulation of a new committee and an opportunity to restore the 'Stars in Tourism' Awards, aimed at

celebrating success in tourism. A similar event will be repeated this year on the 16th May 2023.

Ribble Valley Food Heaven

2.23 Another great tourism theme which thrives locally is Food Tourism and this campaign has been refreshed with an overhaul of the website. www.ribblevalleyfoodheaven.com and the launch of a new promotional video. It is a short video primarily for use in social media campaigns, but it illustrates the diversity of food choices available locally. 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 an extension to the Annual Food Festival to create a Ribble Valley Taste Week involving smaller satellite events across the area.

Resources.

2.24 We supported the government's Kickstart programme by taking 6-month placements and continue to take work placements from UCLAN and Chester University, along with local schools and colleges. All these work placements provided valuable support and new ideas to the Tourism Officer, particularly with respect to website and social media. Restructuring resulting in tourism joining regeneration within the Council will further boost the ability to develop support for the visitor economy.

Film and TV

2.25 Ribble Valley has always played host to film and TV media but just recently there has been a flurry of activity including the making of the movie 'Greatest Days, and a new TV series promoting Ribble Valley as a wedding destination, along with other enquiries relating to travel shows. These opportunities offer a great platform for tourism promotion.

Recruitment crisis

2.26 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 and we are currently working on the production of positive PR highlighting individual success stories of local employees, to translate online, video and in print.

3 WAY FORWARD

3.1 The Council successfully responded to the pandemic and the changing nature of the visitor economy will be taken into consideration resulting in new markets and new opportunities. Progress in Tourism will continue to be reported to future committees.

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BACKGROUND PAPERS None

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