RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL
REPORT TO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

meeting date: 15 JUNE 2023
title: RIBBLE VALLEY ECONOMIC PLAN 2023 – 2026
submitted by: NICOLA HOPKINS – DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & PLANNING
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1   PURPOSE

1.1   To present the draft Economic Plan 2023 – 2026 (Appendix 1).

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 a specific focus on developing a new Economic Plan.

- Other Considerations – The Economic Plan will support a range of Council activities and assist in financial planning for the Authority.

2   BACKGROUND

2.1   The current Economic Plan was adopted in September 2019 and covers the period 2019-2022. A copy of the existing plan is included in Appendix 2.

2.2   The existing Economic Plan is still a working document. Several projects identified in the Plan have been delivered and work is continuing to deliver the projects that have not yet been completed.

2.3   Due to Covid, not all projects have been delivered as the Council's priorities changed during this unexpected period. Focus shifted to providing multiple rounds of grant support direct to businesses instead of continuing to deliver the Economic Plan.

3   THE ECONOMIC PLAN (2023-2026).

3.1   A special Ribble Valley Economic Partnership meeting was held on Wednesday 12th October 2022. The meeting was run as a workshop and allowed delegates to provide feedback to Officers on the key issues they are facing and expecting to face in the future.

3.2   The existing Economic Plan was used as a starting point for the session and a SWOT analysis carried out on the 5 Action areas. This format was successfully used to produce the current Economic Plan; therefore a similar approach has been adopted to produce the new Plan. The results of the workshop are provided in Appendix 3.

3.3   Based on the workshop and SWOT analysis, a draft Economic Plan was created and a second workshop was held on 20th February 2023 with the Ribble Valley Economic Partnership to ensure the plan reflected the challenges and issues businesses are facing. The findings of this second workshop are presented in Appendix 4.

3.4 A copy of the draft Economic Plan is attached in Appendix 1. Members will note that the plan follows a similar format of the existing Economic Plan clearly setting out the Council's proposed actions.

3.5 The plan will once again be split into the following five priority areas:

People
Focuses on those actions that will support skills development.

Place
Focuses on those actions that recognise and respect the value and character of the Ribble Valley.

Business Support
Focuses on those actions that sustain competitiveness and strengthens business networks.

Connectivity
Focuses on those actions that will act as the catalyst for better digital and public transport connectivity.

Tourism
Focuses on those actions that will promote the development of accommodation, improve hospitality and support events building on the attraction of the local area.

3.6 The actions within the plan can be delivered in a timely manner and will support the local economy as well as the Council's economic ambition to sustain the strong local economy the Borough currently has. The plan is intended to focus the delivery against key priorities identified with the Ribble Valley Economic Partnership.

3.7 For each priority area, deliverable projects that will sustain the local economy have been identified.

3.8 Priority Area 1: People

Work with partners to deliver recruitment events – businesses who attended the meetings, in particular tourism businesses raised the fact that recruitment events would be beneficial to reduce ongoing difficulties when recruiting. Delivery partners identified include DWP and Lancashire Skills Hub.

Enhance digital skills of employees – engage with partners to deliver digital upskilling sessions for employees and residents alike. Digital skills support for the workforce has been identified by businesses on a number of occasions and working with partners, specific sessions will be delivered in the Borough.

Improve connectivity between schools and businesses – build on enhancing the Enterprise Advisor scheme by increasing the engagement between schools and businesses. Opportunities for businesses to visit schools and talk about career routes will be explored.

3.9 Priority Area 2: Place

Deliver on Town Centre Action Plans – identified by the current Economic Plan and still relevant as the use and future of Town Centres is constantly evolving. Work will continue to develop and deliver Town Centre Action Plans for Clitheroe, Longridge and Whalley.

Undertake place branding exercise – having a clear identity for Ribble Valley will help promote the Borough as an area where businesses can thrive which is essential for the well-being of the Borough. The Council has successfully completed this exercise for Tourism and a similar exercise for the wider economy will result in a clear brand for the Borough.

Integrate property search onto the Council website – additional business support the Council can offer to businesses growing within the Borough. The Council will work with estate agents to ensure an up-to-date database of properties is available on our website. This will also be effective as a monitoring tool for commercial property available in the Borough and the types of businesses expanding or moving within the Borough.

3.10 Priority Area 3: Business Growth

Create networking opportunities – businesses have identified that there is a limited offering for Ribble Valley based networking which will help connect local businesses. The three service centres in Ribble Valley have successfully adopted individual networking models so a larger borough wide networking model will be explored.

Provide support to businesses in the Borough – linking with partners across Lancashire to provide workshops on business skills which will help support businesses. The Council will also help raise awareness of the support available to local businesses from our partners by improving information flow to our businesses in the format of quarterly newsletters with information on up-to-date business support.

Support businesses to reduce their carbon footprint – The Council will provide support for businesses seeking to reduce their carbon footprint by working with East Lancashire Chamber of Commerce. The support will help businesses improve energy and environmental efficiencies, introduce on site renewable energy generation and save money.

3.11 Priority Area 4: Connectivity

Explore rail Improvements – Work is ongoing to identify improvements and the Council will commit to continue to develop and implement options identified.

Develop an electric vehicle including bike charging strategy – The current infrastructure for electric vehicle charging will not be sufficient as the UK moves away from petrol and diesel engines. The Council will develop an electric vehicle charging strategy which will help ensure the Borough has sufficient coverage of charging points.

Work collaboratively with partners to improve sustainable modes of transport in the Borough – continue to work with partners at Lancashire County Council to ensure necessary services are retained and supported within the Borough.

3.12   Priority Area 5: Tourism

Develop a new Destination Management Plan – work with partners to develop a plan which will encourage the volume and diversity of visitor accommodation available in the Valley and maximise new market opportunities as they arise.

Develop a Marketing Plan including the development of an interactive website **–** building on the successful Love Ribble Valley Brand, develop a new coordinated, tourism marketing plan including a new interactive Visit Ribble Valley website.

Develop a coordinated approach to the promotion of new and existing events – events are organised by partners throughout the Borough and a more coordinated approach to the promotion of events will result in raising the profile of the events and the Borough encouraging more visitors to the area.

4   RISK ASSESSMENT

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

- Resources – Budgets are already in place for some of the priority areas identified with resources being allocated from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, Rural England Prosperity Fund and the Council's Economic Promotions budget. Any additional work arising out of the identified actions with additional budget implications will be the subject of individual reports to the relevant Service Committees in due course as part of the Council's budgetary process. Such actions would not proceed unless adequate approved budget or external funding was in place, in line with Financial regulations.

  The plan will also provide a vehicle to inform bidding rounds for external funding where relevant, which will also be subject to future reports as projects come forward.

- Technical, Environmental and Legal – Having an up-to-date Economic Plan is not a statutory requirement however it fits in with the Council's Corporate Strategy (2019-2023) Ambition 2 – to sustain a strong and prosperous Ribble Valley.

- Political – The Council has identified economic development as a key political priority.

- Reputation – This report will assist the Council in demonstrating delivery of the Corporate Strategy.

- Equality & Diversity – No equality and diversity issues. 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   RECOMMEND THAT COMMITTEE

5.1   Authorise the Director of Economic Development and Planning to carry out a public for a period of six weeks on the draft Economic Plan.

HASSAN DITTA   NICOLA HOPKINS
SENIOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT   DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC
OFFICER   DEVELOPMENT AND PLANNING

BACKGROUND PAPERS

None.

For further information please ask for Hassan Ditta, extension 4424

Ambition

The prosperity of the economy in Ribble Valley is demonstrated through sustaining businesses and nurturing the entrepreneurial drive in the local community.

Sustainable economic prosperity is an important component to the quality of life in Ribble Valley in terms of health, housing, reduced crime and access to services. To ensure this, our objectives are;

- To support businesses throughout the Borough to remain competitive
- To support skills development including linking with schools/colleges and creating networking opportunities
- To work with our partners in the Ribble Valley to improve infrastructure including non-private transport, digital connectivity and moving towards a carbon free Borough.

People – Priority Area 1

Focuses on those actions that will support skills development.

- Work with partners to deliver recruitment events
- Enhance digital skills of employees
- Improve connectivity between schools and businesses

Place – Priority Area 2

Focuses on those actions that recognise and respect the value and character of the Ribble Valley. Enhance sustain and maintain the character environment

- Deliver on town centre action plans
- Undertake place branding exercise
- Integrate property search onto the Council website

Business Support – Priority Area 3

Focuses on those actions which sustain business competitiveness and strengthen business networks.

- Provide support to businesses in the Borough
- Support businesses to reduce their carbon footprint
- Create networking opportunities

Connectivity – Priority Area 4

Focuses on those actions that will act as the catalyst for digital connectivity and public transport connectivity.

- Explore rail improvements
- Develop an electric vehicle including bikes charging strategy
- Work collaboratively with partners to improve sustainable modes of transport in the Borough

Tourism – Priority Area 5
Focuses on those actions that improves the visitor experience and support events building on the attraction of the local area.

- Develop a new destination management plan
- Develop a marketing plan including the development of an interactive website
- Develop a coordinated approach to the promotion of new and existing events

www.ribblevalley.gov.uk

Ribble Valley
Borough Council

Ribble Valley Borough Council
ECONOMIC PLAN
2019-2022

Our Vision

An area with an exceptional environment and quality of life for all; sustained by vital and vibrant market towns and villages acting as thriving service centres meeting the needs of residents, businesses and visitors.

Ambition

The prosperity of the economy in the Ribble Valley is demonstrated though the continuing high levels of economic growth in the area. However, there is a need to ensure that opportunities are available for businesses to continue to develop in the area. There is a need to continue to market and regenerate our market towns and villages as places to do business and to ensure that there is employment land available for development.

The issues of public transport, particularly accessibility to isolated villages, are part of a perceived need for a more flexible approach and a more accessible service.

Without economic prosperity, many other problems e.g. health, housing, crime, access to services are all much harder to address.

Our objectives

- To encourage economic development throughout the borough with specific focus on tourism, the delivery of sufficient land for business development, and supporting high growth business opportunities;

- To seek to improve the transport network, especially to our rural areas;

- To work with our partners to ensure that the infrastructure in the Ribble Valley is improved;

- To promote stronger, more confident and more active communities throughout the borough.

People:

focuses on those actions and projects that will be a catalyst for business growth, more local employment opportunities and the skills to support aspirational growth.

Places:

focuses on those actions and projects that will ensure the right land and premises are available along with opportunities to place the attractive environment at the heart of key sectors.

Business Support and Growth:

focuses on those actions and projects that will equip residents and businesses with the right information to support new and existing businesses along with enabling experience and knowledge sharing opportunities.

Connectivity:

focuses on those actions and projects that will act as the catalyst for job creation and growth.

Tourism:

focuses on those actions and projects that will promote the development of accommodation, improve hospitality and support events building on the attraction of the local area.

RIBBLE VALLEY ECONOMIC PLAN:

TO ENABLE BUSINESSES TO BE SUSTAINABLE AND TO CONTINUE TO DEVELOP IN THE BOROUGH

Action Area 1:

People

1. Develop a jobs / careers fair
2. Undertake a Housing and Economic Needs Assessment
3. Explore options for developing a work placement plan

Action Area 2:

Places

1. Develop Key Service Centre Action Plans
2. Explore options for serviced office accommodation or community business hubs
3. Undertake place branding exercise
4. Expand the property search function
5. Develop an on-line business directory

Action Area 3:

Business Support and Growth

1. Set up business advice and support web-page/ site
2. Set up 'One stop shop' business support package
3. Quarterly meetings of the Ribble Valley Economic Partnership

Action Area 4:

Connectivity

1. Explore rail improvements to Manchester and Preston
2. Develop digital strategy
3. Integrate sustainable modes of transport within developments

Action Area 5:

Tourism

1. Develop cultural strategy
2. Explore options to increase visitor stay
3. Develop strategy for the future of the castle and its grounds
4. Develop a Heritage Strategy
5. Create one-stop events directory

APPENDIX 3
People and Place

Strengths	Weakness
• Location- Branding, promotion • Film opportunity- make use of it	• Lack of slick promotion/branding • Unloved centres • Older estates- vehicle movement • Covid- an excuse to move it on • Staff- time/cost • Branding- wider offer • Dev- advice service
Opportunities	**Threats**
• Youth Train incentives • Place Directory- what's on, modern • Students- link with college • Connectivity- rail • Business input to branding collaboration • Network events- lack focus • Marketing- directory • Instagram/Tiktok	• People- Skills, capacity • Parking infrastructure- footfall driver • Need for employment sites/units • Transport costs • Cost of accommodation- entry level housing- house type • Service support for investors • Expansion sites- land needed

Connectivity

Strengths	Weakness
• A59 Infrastructure • Railways • Dog Friendly	• Too much reliance on cars • Cost- bus • Lack of Uber • Lack if buses/direct transport/timings • Parking • Sunday opening • A59 • Pedestrian connectivity • Quality of roads-cyclists • Lack of coordination between centres • Road closures • Improve infrastructure- schools and transport links • Signage • Lack of fibre connectivity
Opportunities	**Threats**
• Could be a central hub • Assets 'Castle' • Collaborate- coach trips • Sunday opening • Dog friendly • Park and ride • Improve road links • Cycle transport- electric bike hire- scooters • Collaborate with schools and understand issues • Joined up when get to destination • Direct people where to go • Pull traffic out of centre • Events • Point of contact for works being undertaken	• Safe- pandemic- buses and shopping • Nearby competiton

• Mike Cliffe (LCC) Connect with businesses/ involve LCC • Send updates to Chambers	

Tourism

Strengths	Weakness
• RV tourism association • AONB • Ribble Valley Brand • Historical assets • Country side • Walking • Restaurants- Michelin star • Weddings • Hotels • Steady flow of tourists- could be better • Craft production- local food and drink • Events- mod weekender • Food Festival	• Facing potential recession • Could be seen as non-essential spend • Staffing crisis- image, skills • Transport- diesel/ petrol prices increasing • Public Transport • Inaccessible Heritage site e.g. Stonehurst can't open all year round due to school/safeguarding • Lack of accommodation/beds • Our online promos/websites arent as user friendly compared to other sites like visit Lancashire • Clitheroe has great potential but lacks the tourism infrastructure • Skipton vs Clitheroe- Skipton feels more like a tourist destination • Sign posting- should bring digital advertising boards into centre
Opportunities	Threats
• Marketing could improve- Encourage businesses to pass over dates+ event info for us to promote • Create itineraries e.g. 72hrs in the Ribble Valley… • Promotional videos highlighting the RV offer • Curb appeal- could be more edgy+ work collaboratively to promote our offer • Collaborative advertising for businesses- mix of online and offline • Create a '5 year marketing strategy'- look at what other areas are undertaking • Gap in family offering • Staycations • Longer breaks/ shorter breaks more frequent as people can't go abroad due to lack of funds • Growth in Air BnB • Population increase in the valley • Outdoor venue space • Need to have a clear collective but also independent promotional offer for Whalley, Longridge and Clitheroe	• Being able to travel abroad • Finances • Customers from outside the Ribble Valley won't travel • Air BnB- unregulated/ non insured/fire/ food hygiene etc • Public transport is bad but could actually get worse • People weren't going abroad this year- could good profits this year be "artificially inflated" because of this? • Supermarkets threaten independent shops • Shop closures/ vacancies are creeping in, reducing the offer

Business support and growth

Strengths	Weakness
• Independent businesses have a strong voice • Experienced local business leaders	• Historically weak business support • Other authorities help whereas it feels like RV actively hinder and lose businesses money • Needs to be more communication between RV and LCC • Signage issues • Talent into the borough through school open days hindered by signage issues • Inconsistency on signage removals e.g. crafty vintage/ food festival • Welcome back funding was poorly spent- spent on consultants in Birmingham and the findings from the Ark report haven't been acted on • Marketing • Skilled staff • Improve communication- need to hear from us more often • Need more business visits • Social media needs improving but connection also requires a personal touch • Need to see results from the economic plan or people will stop turning up to meetings • Need the right people to come to meetings and the meetings need to have clear direction.
Opportunities	Threats
• Links with schools for staff/ apprentices- fences to jump, too difficult, colleges/training, not the money it's the ease of access • Solar • Biomass knowledge- empress fencing has knowledge • Other alternative fuel systems make more efficient • Business Liaison Office to communicate frequently with businesses and be their first point of call • Chamber and Council need to meet frequently • Proactive officers- networking and facilitating conversations between other businesses • Networking- could be a separate strand of the Economic Partnership meetings • Make meeting venues more interesting • Push current businesses to keep growing and moving forward • UKSPF	• Energy bills • Universally rising costs • Interest rates • Inflation cost of doing business • Electric

• Capturing passion of local businesses • Local manufacturing consultants need an input • Business climate- opportunity for a plan to be put in place to support new+ current businesses • Digital screens on highstreet to promote business	

APPENDIX 4

Place
Integrate evolutive property search onto RVBC website
- Advertise vacant properties across RV
- This needs a resource for council or chambers of trade to keep it up to date
- Right move style/commercial
- Old fashioned

Develop business directory
- Old fashioned approach
- e.g. love Ribble Valley
- Towns underneath
- Needs interactive map for visual learners too (not just wordy folks)
- Comprehensive and simple to navigate/find
- Needs to be constantly monitored and kept up to date
- Businesses could update themselves?
- How do you tell businesses about it?
- Who is it for? Visitors? Residents? Local businesses?
- Scope far too wide
- QR code – shop Whalley/shop Clitheroe/shop Longridge etc.
- Offers/news can be easily updated, e.g. restaurants offers
- Who does SM now? Fund vacancy?
- Better SM (TikTok)

Promote existing businesses – e.g. hotdesking
- Social media online portal to advertise offers/business events
- YouTube
- QR Codes
- Hashtags

Deliver on town center action plan
- Collective utilities for each location to enable businesses to benefit from cheaper unit prices
- Collective renewable energy incentives – grants for solar/wind etc
- Clitheroe – pedestrianize castle street, Sunday road closures for cyclists
- Parking spaces – in other towns as well as Clitheroe
- Repair paving slabs that are broken

Undertake place branding exercise
- Identify the specialisms i.e. food/rural/historic etc
- Food trail
- Promote individuality
- Clitheroe/RV Finest on FB like "Manchester Finest" reviews food establishments (cafes/restaurants/mobile)
- Highlight varieties available
- Promote market with pop up events – covered area (new opportunities)

- Tenant/retail mix – make sure new, different businesses are entering the high street
- Encourage businesses to support and promote each other. E.g. social media/carry flyers for each other/ stock each others products (many do as it works really well for them in Longridge and Clitheroe)
- Specialists events

People

Work with partners
- Excellent
    - Link across Lancashire
    - Businesses
    - Colleges
    - Online and face to face
- Skills hub link
- Centralise job vacancies for Lancashire
- Link to college – advertise vacancies direct to students
- Support grown your own
- Which careers
    - Hospitality
    - Cyber security
    - Health and wellness

Host focused networking sessions
- Geography
- Sector
- Range of networking (Lancashire wide/NW/Regional)
- Whose doing it already – Chamber/FSS/Growth Hub/Shout/Love Loca
- Goals/aims – objectives

Improve digital connectivity
- Digital Lancashire
- Upskilling Lancashire
- Skills support for workforce
- Boost
- Digital hub –
    - high connectivity/hot desking
    - interaction between occupiers
    - Link to education/UCLan
- Banking hub – combine presence of more high street branches under one roof
- Young people lead digital/promotions of local business and facilities
- Man shed – retirees using skills like repair shop
- Wigan Tech Mates – buddy system for digital upskilling
- In general – skills connect businesses to with all 3 unis. So much funded support available

Enterprise advisor
- This already exists – Lancashire Skills HUB

- Help small businesses with paperwork with apprenticeship schemes for school leavers/employment
- Link with skills hub
- Link vacancies directly with colleges – advertise direct to students. Support businesses to grow your own
- Improved/cheaper transport links to connect more rural areas to employers/businesses
- Encourage businesses to sing up to Lancashire Skills Pledge – promote "Give an Hour"
- Schools and businesses – opportunities for businesses to visit schools and talk about careers routes. E.g. brag at the Grand
- Use people to deliver what they are already doing – no need to reinvent the wheel

Business
Support local businesses
- Monthly RVBC newsletter about all business support
- Discount business rates for the right type of retailers to encourage interesting tenant/retailer mix – not just coffee shops and charity shops
- BIDs
- Incentives and discounts such as loyalty schemes
- Workshops on business skills such as marketing/productivity/sales/import/export
- BOOST
- UKSPF is also supporting exporting
- Blanket refurbishment of shop fronts – uniformity within areas

Carbon footprint
- Not to add pressure to businesses
- Reduce energy bills and to open up new customers
- Chamber low carbon initiative/UKSPF
- Needs to be signposted to RV Businesses – all support should have dedicated website page for business support
- Support implementation and installation initiatives
- Reduced rates for lower emissions
- Signpost businesses to things that are already available (low cost)

Explore networking
- Aims?
- Burnley bondholders – brilliant but has 2/3FT employees and large investment
- RVEP networking quarterly?
- Regular events without the pressure of cross selling membership
- NWST focus on ID problems for business and solve
- Sporting events and sponsorship
- Council to buy sites and develop infrastructure for an industrial estate of the A59 to encourage development of industrial units in the right area

Connectivity

Rail

- Improve rail links to Manchester and shorter travel times, more frequent, every 30 mins such as a the Witch way bus
- Open Helifield line
- Rail links to North – Lancaster/Preston/Morecambe/Eden project
- Use railways or bus to market specific RV "excursions" e.g. gin trail or food
- Needs marketing
- Heavy rail, not light rail so enables freight movement

Develop EV charging

- Changing planning policy
- Do we want town center charging points? Where would they be
- Grants available for businesses
- Put them on public car parks?
- Central govt. policy issue?
- Electric supply inefficient for current needs now let alone for ev/electric heating

Sustainable travel

- Private companies?
- Circular hop on/off constant bus service between 3 service centers and points of interest/local businesses
- Connect local villages
- Electric bikes to hire – app based like Manchester
- Who are the partners?

Tourism

New visitor economy strategy

- Need tangible actions associated with strategy and measurable success factors
- What are the key campaigns?
- Develop new areas – retail/heritage etc
- Maintain historic appeal/look of buildings
- Events in market area
- Events calendar/regular
- More funding for events
- Make more use out of Castle Grounds
- Closed road cycling event – family event like sky ride
- Open Sundays, close Mondays?

Work with partners

- Integrate online communication to plan whole day – journey in/out – lunch dinner etc
- Identify key events e.g. Take That film launch
    o Action plan required to promote RV using these events
- Support promotional videos
- Website improvements (main RVTA website and links to Whalley/Longridge etc)
- Coordinated discounts
- Encourage staying on for dinner etc.

Educational establishments
- Multi business job fayres
- Council to organize and hold event?
- Produce promotional videos/media for schools/colleges (students can produce – UCLan)
- Favorable rates for those who offer education/training opportunities.