

# RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL REPORT TO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

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Meeting date: 25 JANUARY 2024  
Title: TOURISM PROGRESS UPDATE  
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## 1 PURPOSE

1.1 To receive a general progress report on tourism activity.

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 The Visitor Economy of Ribble Valley

An annual tourism economic impact survey is undertaken by Marketing Lancashire, the destination management organisation for the county. The resulting figures are always one year in arrears and the report for 2022 has just been released. A summary attached as Appendix 1, shows figures for volume in spend, employment numbers, and economic values, with comparisons to the three previous calendar years 2018 to 2022. There is also an indication of the recovery rate compared to pre pandemic figures. The estimated outputs in this report have been generated using the Scarborough Tourism Economic Activity Monitor (STEAM), owned, and operated by Global Tourism Solutions (UK) Ltd. Economic Plan. Whilst the figures are only ever an estimate, and quite likely an underestimate of true figures, the summary clearly illustrates a steady upward trend in the economic value of tourism, demonstrating a clear path of recovery from the pandemic period. The figures show that 'staying visitor' numbers have recovered to pre-pandemic figures with the economic impact of 'staying visitors' and total economic impact exceeding pre-pandemic figures.

### 2.2 Ribble Valley Destination Management Plan

A major action included in the Council's new economic plan is the production of a new Destination Management Plan for Ribble Valley, work for which has now commenced. The plan will steer tourism promotional and development activity over the next few years, recognising in particular, the changing trends resulting from the pandemic.

The plan will involve several stages of research and consultation -

- Evaluation of the new Lancashire Visitor economy strategy along consideration of national trends and statistical information
- Consultation with visitor economy partners, primarily through the Ribble Valley Tourism Association,
- Targeted community and business sector consultation, including trade organisations.

Progress, including a draft plan, will be reported back to this committee in April for consideration.

## **2.2 Funded projects**

In support of the Councils wider ambitious programmes funded by central government, a number of tourism related initiatives are currently being implemented, namely-

### UK Shared Prosperity fund

- Four new Cycle Routes – to meet the demand for circular routes following quieter lanes. Two start from Longridge, one of which takes in Chipping and the other Longridge Fell. The other two are Sawley taking in Hodder Valley, and Chatburn taking in Rimington and Gisburn.
- A new series of the popular 'Walks with Taste' circular routes – we are currently looking for six new host venues and evaluating routes.
- A new Tourism interactive website, due to be completed by end of March 2024

## **2.3 Current marketing and promotional activity**

The council's tourism team attended the Royal Lancashire Show which, in spite of the inclement weather, proved successful with the promotional stand attracting plenty of interest.

The Ribble Valley stand at the Destination Holiday Show in Manchester proved, yet again, to be hugely successful. Destinations is a consumer show, high volume, and with significant potential for the Ribble Valley visitor economy. The event attracts the target market consumers for Ribble Valley of food, walking and quality short breaks. The promotional stand took the form of country pub, attracting plenty of interest. Attendance at the event was supported by one premium partner and also by the Ribble Valley Tourism Association. In addition to being primarily a public show, the stand also attracted trade interest including a company that organises midweek walking holidays and an inbound tourism company looking for authentic English experiences for Japanese visitors.

In March, the Council will be attending the British Travel and Tourism Show, a trade show attended by group organisers, journalists, travel influencers and coach operators. The stand will be shared with Lancaster City Council and Fylde Borough Council and supported by private sector operators. Such partnership working not only minimises costs but increases impact.

## **2.4 Print marketing**

In 2020, in response to the circumstances created by the pandemic, the longstanding strategy of producing one all-embracing annual visitor guide was changed to the production of two guides namely 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, this

approach was successfully repeated 2022. The Guides incorporated further changes in design and production, which enabled them to have an extended shelf life.

The benefits of this new approach

- Keeping costs down for businesses
- Including a growing number of new businesses.
- A recognition that much business has gone 'online.'
- Ability to target the information customers need, resulting in minimised waste.

The latest main visitor guide and a bespoke accommodation guide have just been published and copies will be available for members at the meeting. Support in the form of advertising has been sustained to cover the cost of production. Both guides are available in hard print copies, virtual brochures, and downloads.

## **2.5 Photographic Competition**

Very much aligned to the production of the visitor guides and new website, the annual photographic competition achieved much interest again and resulted in a new selection of images which can be used for promotional purposes. The competition is open to professionals and amateurs with judging by the public via the 'Love Ribble Valley' Facebook page. This year there were four categories and four winners, namely-

- Landscapes & Landmarks- Stephen Peckham, Sunrise over Longridge Fell
- People Together- Emma Bruney, Parlick from Ribble Valley
- Events- Ruth O'Niell, Ribble Valley Scooter Rally
- Taste- Cathy Broadley, Wellsprings, Pendle Hill

Each winner won a prize Christmas hamper. Over recent years the competition has generated a variety of new images of local people, places, and events.

## **2.6 Ribble Valley Tourism Association**

Membership of the association continues 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 the council supports its activities. The association provides an ideal forum for the council for consultation, and it has become a good partner for promotional activities.

The Council has two places on their executive Committee, namely Cllr Janet Alcock, as appointed recently, and the Council's Tourism and Events Officer.

The association organises regular meetings which provide a forum for networking and business development, as well as workshops designed to support business improvement. Recent events have included workshops on Mailchimp/newsletter marketing, staff wellbeing and practical podcasting. Forthcoming events will include a food hygiene course and an employment workshop.

The Council and the RVTA continue to produce a regular email newsletter which reaches over three hundred tourism contacts.

## **2.7 The Tourism Gathering and Stars in Tourism Awards**

The Council will once again join forces with the Ribble Valley Tourism Association to host an event called 'the Tourism Gathering' which, last year, attracted more than one hundred representatives from local tourism and hospitality businesses. The event was sponsored and had the support of UCLAN.

The Gathering is a showcase for Ribble Valley tourism, and comprises a morning business seminar, along with an information exchange involving suppliers and local colleges. In the afternoon, the 'Stars in Tourism' awards are presented. These awards not only recognise excellence and creativity in tourism, but specifically focus on people working in the industry, including awards for unsung heroes, team achievement and rising stars. The next Ribble Valley Tourism Gathering will be held on 14<sup>th</sup> May 2024, and the venue is yet to be announced.

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