

# RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL REPORT TO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

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meeting date: 31 OCTOBER 2024  
title: TOURISM 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 Ribble Valley Destination Management Plan

A major action included in the Council's economic plan was the production of a new Destination Management Plan for Ribble Valley. The draft was completed and then approved by this committee at its meeting on 13 June 2024. The plan identifies the priorities for future marketing and promotional activity, progress for which will be reported back to this committee. The document has thus far been well received, and your officers are currently working on a promotional summary to share with partners.

### 2.2 Funded projects

In support of the Council's wider ambitious programmes funded by central government, a number of tourism related initiatives have been programmed, namely-

#### UK Shared Prosperity fund

- Four new cycle routes have been launched.  
These are designed to meet demand from leisure cyclists, particularly families and small groups, seeking self-guided circular routes which follow quieter, scenic lanes. Two of the routes start from Longridge, one taking in Chipping whilst the second includes Hurst Green and Longridge Fell. The other two routes are Sawley, taking in Hodder Valley, and Chatburn, taking in Rimington and Gisburn. The cycling leaflets are available in print form and also downloadable from the website.
- Six more of the popular 'Walks with Taste' circular routes have been published. This coincides with the reprint of the existing fifteen routes, making a set of 21twenty-one walks. The aim of the walks is to combine walking with food and drink experiences, thus encouraging benefits to the local economy. Also, by starting a

walk from a venue car park, safe parking is ensured, reducing potential congestion in more rural locations. Another benefit of the walks series as a whole is that there is evidence of customers keen to experience more than one of the routes, with some seeing the whole series, including food at the host venue, as a desirable challenge, thereby multiplying the economic benefits.

- The new Tourism interactive website is almost complete. The new site will be fully accessible and include valuable filters to ensure customers can search for the information they require more swiftly. The website also has completely refreshed photography plus the addition of videography in the introduction of places and experiences. To achieve the required standard of accessibility, and product content, a greater dedication of staff time than originally anticipated has been necessary, the costs for which have been contained within the project budget. The site will be formally launched in the next few weeks.

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

The council's tourism team attended the Royal Lancashire Show, which this year, enjoyed very fine weather, and the promotional stand attracted plenty of interest. To ensure attendance was cost effective and had maximum impact, space was taken in the popular lifestyle marquee.

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 of 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 design of a country pub which attracted plenty of interest, with the 'Walks with Taste' series being particularly popular. Attendance at the event was supported by one contributing private sector partner, as well as 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 walking holidays and an inbound tourism company looking for authentic English experiences.

In March, the team attended the British Travel and Tourism Show, a trade show for group organisers, journalists, travel influencers and coach operators. The stand was shared this time with Lancaster City Council and supported by various private sector operators, including attractions and hotels in the Ribble Valley and wider Lancashire area. Such partnership working not only minimises costs but increases impact. It is also important to link up attractions which geographically create useful itineraries, particularly for coach parties. A particular emphasis was placed on promoting Clitheroe Market to coach operators. Ninety-four trade contacts were made or renewed.

### **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, (post pandemic) this approach was successfully repeated. The Guides incorporated further changes in design and production, which enabled them to have an extended shelf life.

The benefits of this new approach have been

- Keeping costs down for businesses

- Inclusion of the 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 were published for 2024. Support in the form of advertising has been sustained to cover the cost of production. Both guides are also available in hard print copies, virtual brochures, and downloads.

In spite of the trend towards on line marketing, the printed guide remains popular with customers and tourism operators. We have consulted local businesses including advertisers and non-advertisers, and as a result, for 2025, there will be a return to one all-embracing guide. The guide will be self-financing in terms of design and production costs and launched in January 2025.

## **2.5 Online marketing**

Ribble Valley Tourism has a varied on-line presence on different platforms, and these are regularly managed and monitored. They include -

### Websites

- Visit Ribble Valley – the primary access point for visitor information
- Ribble Valley Wedding Heaven -Bespoke website for information about wedding venues and suppliers

### Facebook

- 'Love Ribble Valley' currently has 9.5k followers
- 'Ribble Valley Wedding Heaven' is used primarily to promote wedding events

### Instagram

- Visit Ribble Valley

When the new website is launched performance will be carefully monitored and reported back as part of future tourism updates to this committee

## **2.6 PR and media**

Support for TV and media has included two live national TV broadcasts, along with regular BBC local radio features. Editorial and images have been supplied to local magazine and newspapers. The annual tour of Ribble Valley for Lancashire Mayors was also arranged. A visit by award winning Blogger Marion Collinson – 'Love Travelling' was organised, resulting in an excellent feature on the area.

## **2.7 Business support /liaison**

In order to ensure effective communication and consultation, meetings of Whalley Chamber of Trade are regularly attended and meetings with representatives of Clitheroe Chamber of Trade and the Love Longridge group are also held.

A major part of the work of the Tourism and Events Officer has become advice and support particularly to new businesses as well as to new owners of established businesses. Around thirty such business visits have been made so far this year. These have ranged from a Gin school to a whiskey distillery and a village pub to a farm attraction. Advice normally relates to marketing although there also a lot of signposting to other Council services and peer businesses for case study. Collaboration between

Ribble Valley businesses is encouraged and largely facilitated by membership of Ribble Valley Tourism Association or where appropriate groups like the Ribble Valley wedding partnership.

## 2.8 Ribble Valley Tourism Association

Membership of the association continues to grow and has an active and varied programme of training and networking events which the Council help to facilitate. .

Recent events-

- Foraging Event
- Food Hygiene level 2
- Handling challenging behaviours in the workplace in an evolving legal landscape
- Mailchimp Workshop
- First Aid at Work Training Level 3 award (RQF)

Forthcoming programme –

- 21<sup>st</sup> November                      Employment law update
- 2nd December                      Christmas social event at Holmes Mill
- 9th January                          Accessibility Workshop
- 4th February                        Sustainability Workshop
- 11th March                          Open Meeting
- TBC April                              Guest/Visitor Experience
- 20th May 2025                      AGM Tourism Gathering and Stars in Tourism awards

The association is a separate body to the Council, with a private sector Chair and committee, but the council supports its activities with administration, along with shared communication channels because the association provides an ideal forum for consultation, and a good partner for promotional activities. The Council has two places on their executive Committee, one Councillor and the Council's Tourism and Events Officer.

The Council and the RVTA continue to produce a regular email newsletter which reaches over three hundred tourism business contacts and contains up to date information and advice.

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

The Council once again joined forces with the Ribble Valley Tourism Association in May, to host an event called 'the Tourism Gathering' which, attracted over 130 representatives from local tourism and hospitality businesses. The event was sponsored and also had the support of UCLAN.

The Tourism Gathering is becoming an annual celebration of Ribble Valley tourism, and includes a morning business seminar, along with an information exchange involving twenty trade exhibitors and the 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

This year's award winners were –

- Tourism Team 3 Millstones, West Bradford
- Food Tourism Simon Mathews, Country Fried
- Business Excellence Bowland Brewery
- Tourism Entrepreneur Matthew Alpe, Inch Perfect
- Outstanding Achievement Lisa Brady, Perfect Recruitment
- Tourism Innovation Eight at Gazegill.
- New Business The Milking Parlour, Clitheroe
- Team Excellence Everything Retreat, Mellor
- Rising Star Megan Simpson, Stanley House Hotel Spa
- Above and beyond David Graveson, Bowland Wild Boar Park
- Above and beyond Amy Harling, Eaves Hall
- Customer Service Peter Herbert Bowland Beer Hall
- Excellence in Customer service Valley View Lodges
- Excellence in Customer service Fitness plus Gym, Longridge
- Customer Service Lyndsey Barnes, Bowland Retreat Lodges
- Retail Experience La Tete et Tout, Clitheroe
- Tourism and the Environment Hackings Caravan Park
- Hospitality Greendale Teahouse & Rooms
- Tourism Event Clitheroe Clogfest
- Food Tourism the Fell Urban Bistro
- Quality Tourism Wellsprings
- Lifetime Achievement Dorothy Dowling RVBC
- Transformational Tourism Holgates Ribble Valley
- Transformational Tourism Foxfields Country Hotel
- Imaginative Tourism Mrs Dowsons Farm Park
- Food Hero Lisa Goodwin-Allen Northcote
- Unsung Hero Matthew Simpson

The next Ribble Valley Tourism Gathering will be held on 20<sup>th</sup> May 2025, with the venue yet to be announced.

## **2.10 Ribble Valley Wedding Heaven**

The Ribble Valley weddings group is now meeting again regularly. The group, coordinated by the Tourism and Events Officer is open to representatives of licenced wedding venues within the Ribble Valley administrative area. Meetings are also attended by the Lancashire County Registration officers. Whilst the group was originally established to promote the Ribble Valley as a wedding destination brand, the group now also discuss matters which help business development and collaboration. It is still believed to be the only group of its kind in UK. Lancashire now leads Cheshire in the number of weddings hosted and Ribble Valley is the wedding market leader in Lancashire.

## **2.11 Employment and skills for Tourism and Hospitality**

Recognizing the ongoing challenges of recruitment and retention in the industry, the Council continues to support initiatives which encourage careers within, and which raise the profile of, this sector.

The Council is now part of the Lancashire Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) Catering & Hospitality Cluster Group, which includes colleges, businesses, and the public sector. We are also involved with the innovation for business' initiatives.

The Councils Tourism Officer also supports students studying tourism at UCLan and at Blackburn College. Ribble Valley school placements are also taken and careers events at local schools are attended

### 3 RECOMMEND THAT COMMITTEE

3.1 Note the report.

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