

**RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL  
REPORT TO PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE**

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Agenda Item No.

meeting date: 8<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER 2011  
title: CORE STRATEGY - EMPLOYMENT LAND REVIEW  
submitted by: CHIEF EXECUTIVE  
principal author: CRAIG MATTHEWS

1 PURPOSE

1.1 To receive an update on employment land in Ribble Valley.

1.2 Relevance to the Council's ambitions and priorities

- Council Ambitions - In addition to Ribble Valley Borough Council striving to meet its three ambitions, it also recognises the importance of securing a diverse, sustainable economic base for the Borough.
- Community Objectives – The issues highlighted in this report will contribute to objectives of a sustainable economy and thriving market towns.
- Corporate Priorities - Delivery of services to all
- Other Considerations - None

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 As part of the Ribble Valley Core Strategy consultation process an Employment Land Position Statement was produced to provide an up to date position in terms of the current employment land situation in the Borough, updating the work undertaken by the BE Group in 2008 on the Ribble Valley Employment Land and Retail Study as a guide to allocating future employment land needs and for considering the use and viability of existing sites allocated for employment needs in light of the still relatively high demand for new housing causing pressure for existing employment sites to be redeveloped for alternative land uses in the Borough.

2.2 Since the original study in 2008, the wider economy has continued to change as the effects of the economic downturn have progressed. Since this time also, a change of government has brought with it new policy directions including the proposed abolition of the Regional Spatial Strategy. It is intended that the Employment Land Position Statement be used in future, as an evidence base for future land needs for employment uses and as a means to inform the Core Strategy. The statement identifies that there is a need to bring forward employment land and that provision will need to be made for additional land of an appropriate type in future years.

2.3 A copy of the statement has been emailed to members of this committee and a reference copy is available in the members' room on level D of the Council Offices. It can also be viewed on the Council's website. Whilst overall, the local economy in Ribble Valley remains comparatively strong and reasonably vibrant there remains a number of issues and risks that need to be addressed to ensure that the area does not lose that inherent strength and that, perhaps more importantly, is able to deliver

growth and further strengthening of the local economy particularly in the current economic climate and recovery period.

- 2.4 As stated, the sites in existing use, or with a recognised employment commitment, are facing pressure for the development of other uses, in particular residential. Sites in existing employment use are seen as particularly vulnerable and it is recommended that the Council will need to ensure that where redevelopment is to be allowed, that this should be treated as an exception delivering justifiable benefits and providing the loss of land in employment use can be accommodated elsewhere in the Borough. This is especially so when the Council is facing significant pressure to deliver on its housing requirements in the shorter term whilst pressure for employment land provision, whilst within a longer time frame, will increase and the Borough will need to make provision for future investment.
- 2.5 Also, during the production the Employment Land Position Statement, a number of communications took place with land agents in order to ascertain their own views as to the future market viability of various existing and potential new or expanding sites within the Borough specifically for their employment uses. Part of the statement was then produced using their views, which broadly agreed with the approach being taken by the Council on future employment land provision.

### 3 INFORMATION

- 3.1 In overview, members will be unsurprised to find that by far the greatest number of responses received across this latest Core Strategy consultation were in relation to potential new housing development within the Borough rather than the provision of sites for future employment needs. Whilst this is the case, however, it is acknowledged generally that the Borough needs to make provision for future employment needs, and the following provides an overview of the responses received in relation to the Ribble Valley Employment Land Provision Statement: -

#### 3.2 Employment Land Provision

All respondents supported the general approach being taken to support future employment land requirements and the need to identify more land and suitable sites to respond to changing economic sectors and their requirements. Some, including discussions with agents, suggested being more ambitious above the additional 6ha of employment land requirement threshold identified, however this figure has been suggested as a minimum requirement and took account, for example, of the BAE Systems strategic site at Samlesbury. Furthermore, other sites and opportunities for additional employment growth, where appropriate, will continue to be identified. Although the Employment Land Provision Statement concentrated on growth and development in B1, B2 & B8 planning class uses, the importance was emphasised of other employers outside these uses across the wider rural area as significant employers in the Borough, which is acknowledged but does not fall within the context of the statements intent of identifying industrial sites for employment.

#### 3.3 Locations

In relation to the locations for future provision of land and sites being concentrated adjacent to the A59 corridor and key service centres, general agreement to this approach is acknowledged. Also, it is pointed out that whilst the A59 is the most suitable location for employment growth in the main, consideration should be given to settlements north of the River Ribble such as Longridge, Chipping, and other

settlements to the north of Ribble Valley, to serve the future employment needs of these communities.

More recognition should be made with reference to areas further south of the A59 is suggested also, such as the key industrial sites located in and around Simonstone, their proximity to the M65 motorway and future growth and development potential and serving communities south of the Borough. It was also suggested that by highlighting the A59 corridor for future employment development also strengthened the case for additional housing growth also near to the A59.

#### 3.4 Town & Key Service Centres

There is general support for promoting town centre regeneration, although there was a concern about impacting on the character of Clitheroe, as an example, and the risk of becoming a clone town with the influx of national retailers (many of which started as small independent businesses) potentially affecting the attraction of the town centre's independent retail offer.

3.5 Finally, it is appropriate to review the Employment Land Position Statement regularly to monitor economic activity and act as a guide to allocating future employment land needs to contribute to a sustainable economic future in the Borough.

### 4 RISK ASSESSMENT

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

- Resources – No immediate implications.
- Technical, Environmental and Legal – The Core Strategy is a statutory requirement of the planning process.
- Political – No direct political implications.
- Reputation – The position statement helps to demonstrate how the Council is seeking to take account of the local economy in its activities.

### 5 RECOMMENDED THAT COMMITTEE

5.1 Agree that the Employment Land Position Statement is published as part of the evidence base and used to inform the Core Strategy.

CHIEF EXECUTIVE

BACKGROUND PAPERS: -

Ribble Valley Employment Land & Retail Study 2008

For further information please ask for Craig Matthews (ext 4531)