

RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL REPORT TO POLICY & FINANCE COMMITTEE

Agenda Item No.

meeting date: 11TH JUNE 2013
title: ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT UPDATE
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1 PURPOSE

1.1 To receive an update on economic development and regeneration activities and issues.

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. The work of the regeneration section seeks to promote this.
- 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 This report follows previous updates from the Regeneration Team providing information on a number of economic development issues in relation to local delivery as well as their significance to the Borough on the implementation of these changes on a local, regional and national level.

3 INFORMATION

3.1 Economic Development Overview

Whilst the UK, as well as regionally and locally, continues to face challenges as a result of the difficult economic climate, and the last twelve months has continued to see a number of further changes with regard to the structures and delivery of economic development and business support both nationally and in Lancashire, during this period, the Councils' Regeneration Team have been working in partnership with economic development staff within Lancashire County Council and other Lancashire Local Authorities to assist where possible in the coordination of these transitions and ensure disruptions to business support and economic development activities in general are minimised.

Also, the Councils' Regeneration Team have also been committing significant resource in recent months towards ensuring the Council meets its commitment to put in place the Core Strategy (with a robust and up to date evidence base) and a

number of other local initiatives, such as developing and supporting the work towards ensuring the successful delivery of Clitheroe Food Festival in August 2013, which will be explained in more detail within this report.

In terms of the Ribble Valley economy generally, the last few months have seen the release of a number of new data sets spanning from the census in 2011, which will continue to emerge throughout 2013. These along with other sources of data collated in recent months by the Regeneration Team help us to further understand the nature of the economy in Ribble Valley.

The population of the Ribble Valley, as of the 2011 Census, was 57,132 residents and that the Borough's population increased by 5.6 percent (from 53,960) over that 10 year period, but well below the national growth rate (7.8 percent). The Census also showed that, as of March 2011, 66.9 percent of Ribble Valley's economically active population was in employment. This was higher than the North West (59.6 percent) and national (62.1 percent) averages. At 2.1 percent, local unemployment was less than half the regional (4.7 percent) and national (4.4 percent) averages. Ribble Valley's employment was initially impacted by the recent recessions, but has since been a sharp recovery with economic forecasts suggest a year on year growth from 2013.

As explained earlier, that much of this information will support the Council's commitment to put in place the Core Strategy and its essential evidence base, however, the information drawn from this will also assist and inform the Council's Economic Development Working Group, established to support and monitor delivery of the Councils' economic objectives, identify individual projects and address the issues in relation to the Ribble Valley economy, which is expected to meet next month.

3.2 Ribble Valley Employment Land Study 2013

The Ribble Valley Employment Land Study will form part of the evidence base for policies and proposals in the Ribble Valley Local Plan and to review and assess the level and quality of its existing employment sites and premises to help ensure an adequate supply of appropriate sites has been identified over the plan period. Additionally, a schedule of the vacant floorspace being marketed throughout the Borough has been compiled.

In relation to future employment land provision and the Borough's future land needs, to 2028, the study identifies that further land allocations for B1 (a, b and c uses), B2 and B uses in the order of 8 ha of land is needed in the future for the Local Plan for the period to 2028.

3.3 Ribble Valley Service Centre Health Checks

The Regeneration Team have also conducted Service Centre Health Checks for Clitheroe, Longridge & Whalley to provide evidence to underpin and inform the Council's Local Plan. The study assesses the vitality and viability of each of the three centres in the form of a 'health check' exercise in line with national policy.

In summary, the Service Centre Health Check assessments draw some positive conclusions in such that the vitality and viability of all three centres - Clitheroe, Longridge and Whalley appear to be continuing in their own individual roles and function in the wider Borough in terms of healthy functioning centres.

3.4 Village Amenities Grant Fund

The Village Amenities Grant Fund was established through the use of performance reward grant to support a range of project initiatives throughout Ribble Valley and give local communities the opportunity to bid for funding to support village amenities.

A number of the initiatives supported have been supported with further match funding through the RDPE programme (detailed later in this report) in order to maximise grant opportunity. A total of 11 projects are being supported through this initiative.

3.5 Lancashire Enterprise Partnership

In order to support the delivery of larger more strategic economic initiatives on a County wide scale, the Lancashire Enterprise Partnership (LEP) was established as the over arching body to support economic growth in Lancashire, the LEP has had a role in three major programmes of relevance to Ribble Valley as detailed below: -

Lancashire Enterprise Zone

The Enterprise Zone, covering the two BAE Systems sites at Samlesbury in Ribble Valley and Warton in Fylde is intended to support genuinely additional growth, attract businesses and create new jobs in specifically defined geographic areas. Officially titled the Lancashire Advanced Engineering and Manufacturing Enterprise Zone, the LEP is working in partnership with BAE Systems, with the ambition of establishing it as a location for advanced engineering and manufacturing. Companies investing in operations at the Enterprise Zone will be based alongside BAE Systems operations, creating a hub of expertise in a sector recognised as one of Lancashire's economic strengths. For at least 25 years, all business rate growth within the Enterprise Zone will be retained and reinvested in the county, in support of the LEP's priorities.

Regional Growth Fund

The Government's Regional Growth Fund (RGF) supports projects and programmes that lever private sector investment, creating economic growth and sustainable employment. It had been in existence for 2½ years and was a prominent product in the Government's drive to rebalance the economy. It offered grant payments at a leverage ratio of 20% of total projects to projects capable of generating a net increase in private sector employment within three years. The minimum grant allocation was £1million, which leant towards take-up coming from medium and large sized firms. Three rounds of RGF had now been completed. In Round One the programme had been exclusively targeted at individual companies. From Round Two business agencies were also allowed to bid for programmes of activity benefitting more than one company. In all rounds the targeting of the fund was predominantly aimed at companies, which could generate net increases in employment, or to a lesser extent safeguard jobs in a time window of three years.

Three successful Lancashire RGF bids include the Accelerating Business Growth in Lancashire Programme, which secured £7.5m from the RGF, this will support companies with high growth potential in the county's advanced engineering and manufacturing supply chain to overcome barriers to investment; the Growing Autonomous Systems Mission Management (GAMMA) Programme led by the North

West Aerospace Alliance (NWAA) in partnership with BAE Systems and leading universities supporting increased investment in small and medium enterprises. It will also deliver high value sustainable employment within the advanced engineering and manufacturing and science sectors through the development of autonomous system technologies; also the Todmorden Curve and Weavers Triangle Programme will see the reinstatement of the Todmorden Curve section of the railway network in East Lancashire to create a fast and direct rail link between Burnley and Manchester, while also stimulate the regeneration of the Weavers Triangle.

Growing Places Fund

Lancashire Enterprise Partnership was awarded £12.9m from the Government's new Growing Places Fund in November 2011. The GPF is a capital fund aimed at generating economic activity in the short term by addressing immediate infrastructure and site constraints, unlocking development and enabling the delivery of new jobs and housing. The investment is part of a new £500m Government-backed programme which gives local enterprise partnerships across the country the ability to manage the funding of infrastructure projects, including the flexibility to recycle funding for new projects as developments are completed. Lancashire Enterprise Partnership is currently undertaking work to identify which projects in the county should benefit from a share of the money.

3.6 Business Support Initiatives

Regarding activities in the areas of enterprise, employment and business support, a number of projects and programmes are continuing their work, such as the Rural Development Programme, summarised later in this report. The Regeneration Team at Ribble Valley continues to work in partnership with other Economic Development Teams within the Lancashire Local Authorities, Lancashire County Council, including the cluster of East Lancashire authorities as well as Regenerate Pennine Lancashire to help both new and existing business access areas of support.

For example, the Accelerating Business Growth project in Lancashire (ABG) scheme has been designed to meet the needs of local advanced manufacturing businesses by offering them capital investment for expansion projects, including premises, plant and machinery. The successful Regional Growth Fund bid was written in partnership between the Pennine Lancashire Local Authorities and Regenerate Pennine Lancashire. Lancashire County Council, the University of Central Lancashire, Lancaster University and the Lancashire Chambers of Commerce, will also assist delivery of the programme.

The Regeneration Team is also assisting with the coordination and delivery of two further business support initiatives. Firstly following a successful bid developed in partnership between the Lancashire Local Authorities and Regenerate Pennine Lancashire, BIS has approved the Lancashire Business Enterprise Programme, which will provide capital grant investment of up to a maximum of £50,000 for SMEs trading less than 36 months. Similar to ABG, the grants will be directly linked to job creation, targeted at priority sectors and operate across Lancashire.

Also, the Business Start-Up Support in Lancashire (BSUS Lancashire) ERDF programme is targeted at individuals considering self-employment from under-represented target groups. The programme provides coaching, training, ongoing mentoring and finance support to those individuals who would not necessarily be considered high growth and are unable to access Pennine LEAP or Growth

Accelerator, and will operate across all Lancashire districts for start-up and business support with targeted Enterprise Vouchers (for specialist consultancy/equipment) to the end of the current ERDF programme.

3.7 Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE)

Now heading for a successful completion of the overall programme to the end of 2013, Ribble Valley businesses have continued to receive support through the Rural Development Programme (RDPE) funded by the EU Commission. Ribble Valley Borough Council took the lead role in the production of the Local Development Strategy on behalf of Pennine Lancashire partners and following the successful application for £2.7 million funding. The programme is focussed on the following three themes, or axis, these are: -

- Axis 1 – improving the competitiveness of the farming and forestry sectors
- Axis 2 – improving the environment and the countryside
- Axis 3 – rural quality of life and diversification of the rural economy
- Axis 4 – management, administration and the LEADER approach

Delivery of the programme is overseen by Local Action Groups (LAGs). In Lancashire 3 LAGs manage the RDPE programme of activity under Axis 1, 3 & 4, whilst Natural England and the Forestry Commission are delivering Axis 2. To date 37 live projects have been approved to date under Axis 1 and 3 of the programme across the 6 Pennine Lancashire Local Authority districts. 28 of these projects are in Ribble Valley. Along with this a number of additional projects that are ongoing, all remaining spend expected to be completed by the end of year.

3.8 Town Centres & Business Groups

The Regeneration Team continue to provide support, information and guidance where required for the three business groups Clitheroe, Longridge and Whalley as well as attending meetings with the groups to assist their continued activities to support trade in each of their locations. Events, such as the Clitheroe Food Festival, Pickwick Night and Longridge Big Weekend, are examples where joint working between the Council, business groups and the community assist greatly in the success of Ribble Valley's key town and service centres.

3.9 Other Activities / Projects

- Clitheroe Food Festival: as explained earlier the regeneration team have been supporting the work of the Clitheroe Food Festival including receiving all exhibitors applications and processing payments and also co-ordinating the chefs demonstrations on the day including marketing these before the event. Also providing other additional backup support where necessary.
- Ribble Valley Business Scene: the production of a 20-page business magazine titled 'Ribble Valley Business Scene' promoting Ribble Valley Businesses with the aim of attracting inward investment to the Borough. Copies have been distributed to members.
- Clitheroe Heritage Trail leaflet: working with Clitheroe Civic Society to produce a more up to date heritage trail leaflet for Clitheroe

- Food Trail APP: working alongside Corporate Communications and Tourism to produce an APP for the Ribble Valley food trail in a joint project with the Forest of Bowland and Pendle Borough Council who are also producing trails for their areas.
- New Rambler bus service: financial support for a new Rambler Bus which has just come into service. On Summer Sundays and Bank Holidays, the bus runs from Clitheroe to Settle via Newton and Slaidburn, with good connections from East Lancashire and Manchester, making Bowland potentially accessible to millions of Sunday walkers, and without creating any traffic chaos! The bus, which is run by Dales and Bowland Community Interest Company, is a two year pilot service. Suites of self-guided walks are now on offer from the bus route.
- Superfast Lancashire: high speed fibre broadband is being rolled out across Lancashire between 2013 and the end of 2015. The network will be delivered in seven phases and the first delivery quarter is quarter 2 2013-2014 (July to September 2013) and expected completion is by the end of quarter 4 2014-2015 (January-March 2015). Phase 1 delivers coverage in Blackburn, Burnley, Caton, Chatburn, Forton, Galgate, Lancaster, Leyland and Preston. Around 40% of premises in the Ribble Valley will receive Fibre Broadband services through the BT/Openreach commercial rollout. This is predominantly through the Clitheroe and Longridge exchanges. The Regeneration Team have met with broadband project officers to assist in activities in Ribble Valley.

3.10 The Economic Climate

Whilst the number of people claiming Job Seekers Allowance in Ribble Valley remains consistently one of the lowest in the region, the Regeneration Team are in regular contact with support agencies and Job Centre Plus redundancy teams to assist and coordinate any support should this be required. Vacant business premises are marketed using the Evolutive property database and the Regeneration team are continuing to monitor issues during the current economic climate across Ribble Valley (empty business property & unemployment), as well as monitoring activities across the wider region and the UK to assess current and future implications for the Borough's economy.

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