

# RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL REPORT TO POLICY & FINANCE COMMITTEE

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Agenda Item No.

meeting date: 10<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 2014  
title: ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT UPDATE  
submitted by: CHIEF EXECUTIVE  
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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 and their significance to the Borough.

## 3 INFORMATION

### 3.1 Economic Development Overview

Whilst across Lancashire and the UK as a whole, the economy has been showing some signs of improvement over recent months, economic growth, business performance, and unemployment remain key challenges within the local economy across Lancashire and Ribble Valley, and whilst the Borough contains proportionally high levels economic activity and lower levels of unemployment in comparison to neighbouring districts, economic activity has been impacted in Ribble Valley as result of recent recessions. It has since seen a moderate recovery with economic forecasts suggesting future growth. Ongoing monitoring and economic intelligence gathering, partnership working with other districts and the county council continue to help us to further understand and be responsive to the changing nature of the economy locally and across the UK.

### 3.2 Economic Development Working Group

The Council's Economic Development Working Group (EDWG) held its last meeting on 15th May 2014. The Group, whilst recognising the broad number of areas in connection with the Boroughs' economic development, have identified initial priorities to provide the basis of key projects and activities to support and monitor delivery of the Councils' economic objectives. These four work areas form the basis of current project activity: -

1. Employment Land and Premises: Developing measures, which ensure that current employment land and premises provision in the area meet with business, economic and employment growth needs. Identify measures to bring these forward including options to deliver land and premises and maximising opportunities from empty properties in the Borough.
2. Clitheroe Market: To bring forward options for an appropriate scheme for the future of the market development area in line with the aims within the Clitheroe Town Centre Masterplan.
3. Tourism & Visitor Economy: To further develop measures, activities and events to support tourism and the visitor economy in Ribble Valley.
4. Transport & Infrastructure: Promoting improvements to services between Clitheroe and Manchester and Clitheroe and Preston, and working with the County Council and others providers to improve the local infrastructure. Extension of rail services from Clitheroe to Hellifield.

Vacant business land and properties, key service centres, key business sectors and the wider rural economy are key project areas the group are addressing alongside the areas detailed above.

### 3.3 Lancashire Economic Development

The Councils' Regeneration Team have been involved and are continuing work in a number areas at county-wide level to support economic initiatives of importance to the Borough. These activities are being channelled through the Lancashire Enterprise Partnership (LEP).

The Lancashire Strategic Economic Plan and Growth deal documents have recently been submitted to Government. These plans aim to address the economic needs of all districts within Lancashire and set out economic growth ambitions for the county over the next 10 years.

As part of this a strategy to guide the investment of future European Structural and Investment (ESI) funds has been produced in partnership with Lancashire County Council and other Lancashire Local Authorities. This Strategy, now in its final draft form, sets out the ambitions for the Lancashire economy and indicates how the ESI Funds can support their achievement. The LEP has been notionally allocated £232m of ESI Funds for the programme period 2014-20. These funds will be invested as part of the Lancashire Growth Deal with a focus on their use to increase productivity levels for key economic sectors, promote sustainable employment growth and tackle the barriers to employment for Lancashire's most disadvantaged communities.

The LEP is also continuing in its work on the Lancashire Enterprise Zone with BAE Systems, covering the two BAE Systems sites at Samlesbury in Ribble Valley and Warton in Fylde, where it is stated that 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.

The LEP is also overseeing delivery of the Regional Growth Fund (RGF) projects, which include the Accelerating Business Growth programme explained below to support companies with high growth potential, and the Growing Places capital fund aimed at infrastructure projects to unlock development and recycle the funding for new projects when developments are completed.

### 3.4 Business Support

Businesses in Ribble Valley have and are continuing to benefit through a number of business support projects and programmes, accessing advice and grant funding to support their growth plans, and whilst since the last update, a number of business support programmes have closed in recent months, such as the Rural Development Programme, which is summarised later in this report, work has begun in preparing for new programmes coming on stream throughout 2014/15.

Boost Business Lancashire has been established as the Lancashire Business Growth Hub project, which provides a single gateway and 'umbrella' brand for several other business support programmes being delivered across the county. Boost aims to enable £20m, create at least 1,200 new jobs and safeguard 700 more by 2015. It offers a wide range of services, some 100% funded and some part-funded, including business mentoring by Community & Business Partners; providing high growth mentoring support, a peer-to-peer networking and development programme, advice to pre-start and early start businesses, supporting advanced manufacturing and engineering companies develop new products and move into new markets, and additional support through a group of private sector advisory firms that specialise in helping growing businesses.

In terms of financial support for businesses in Ribble Valley and across Lancashire, the Accelerating Business Growth programme is a capital grant scheme for non-retail businesses of typically 20% of the cost of new machinery through to infrastructure improvements. Additionally, the Fuse Fund has grants from £5,000 to £50,000 for businesses trading for under three years in Lancashire. Successful applicants can access grants of up to 25% of project costs for capital investments such as machinery, property investment and building expansion.

Furthermore, the Regeneration Team are currently working with Growth Accelerator representatives, a government initiative that links individual businesses with private sector business growth experts from Grant Thornton, Pera, Oxford Innovation and Winning Pitch. The initiative provides subsidised help to grow business, access investment and help develop ideas and strategy for business to achieve its full potential.

### 3.5 Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE)

During the last programme, 28 Ribble Valley businesses received financial support through the Rural Development Programme (RDPE). The Councils Regeneration

Team are currently working with the County Council on a development strategy for the next RDPE programme, which will operate in Lancashire from 2015 and again focus 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

### 3.6 Service Centres & Business Groups

The need to maintain activities that will help support and maintain the vibrancy of all town and key service centres across the Borough (i.e. Clitheroe, Longridge and Whalley) remain a key area of work also and the issues nationally in relation to retail centres and the high street retail economy in general highlights that the future context for retailing in centres is changing.

The Clitheroe Town Team, Longridge Town Team and Whalley Village Partnership, are continuing to develop their individual initiatives and work on identified priorities to support their local areas and the wider community to help ensure that the Borough's service centres are economically successful and attractive places. For example, new loyalty card for shoppers in Longridge is due to be launched in July, this follows on from previous support from the Council for a similar scheme now operating successfully in Clitheroe.

As well as this, the Regeneration Team continue to provide individual support, information and guidance directly to the three business groups in Clitheroe, Longridge and Whalley to assist in partnership working on activities to support trade in each of their locations. Events, such as the Clitheroe Food Festival, Longridge Big Weekend and Whalley Pickwick Night are examples where joint working between the Council, business groups and the community assist in the success of Ribble Valley's key service centres.

### 3.7 Other Activities / Projects

The regeneration team support a number of project activities to further assist economic activity in the Borough such as support towards the delivery of the Clitheroe Food Festival including marketing, receiving exhibitor applications and co-ordinating activities to be delivered on the day.

In partnership with Geraud Markets, and through a carefully managed marketing exercise, thousands of shoppers visited Clitheroe during the 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> April for the town's first continental market. The event was well received by visitors and traders, and now a further event is being planned for 26<sup>th</sup>, 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> September and will complement the existing offer on Clitheroe Market.

Joint working also with Clitheroe Civic Society has taken place to produce a more up to date heritage trail leaflet for Clitheroe, along with the creation of 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 along with support for a new Rambler Bus that runs from Clitheroe to Settle via Newton and Slaidburn, with

good connections from East Lancashire and Manchester, providing access into the Forest of Bowland.

### 3.8 The Economic Climate

The most recent data shows the Job Seekers Allowance claimant rate for Ribble Valley of just under 1.0%. However, whilst the Borough consistently records one of the lowest unemployment rates in the region the effects of the economy are prevalent within the Borough and the Regeneration Team maintain contact with support agencies and Job Centre Plus. Also, vacant business premises in the Borough are marketed using the Evolutive property database and the Regeneration team are continuing to monitor issues 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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