

RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL REPORT TO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Agenda Item No. 7

meeting date: 5 NOVEMBER 2020
title: Tourism progress report, including the response to the pandemic.
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principal author: TOM PRIDMORE, TOURISM AND EVENTS OFFICER

1 PURPOSE

1.1 To receive a general progress report on tourism activity, with particular reference to measures taken to support the visitor economy during the pandemic.

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 TOURISM REVIEW

2.1 Background

Tourism and hospitality form a major part of the Ribble Valley economy, both in terms of income and employment. The most recent figures indicate that Tourism in Ribble Valley contributes over £260 million into the local economy. In recent years, and certainly up until the current crisis, it has been a rapidly expanding sector, in which both the economic impact and visitor numbers were rising by over 7% per annum with employment figures growing by more than 6% p.a.

Tourism and hospitality have been amongst the hardest hit sectors by COVID-19. The resulting restrictions, at the start of the Spring/Summer season, had a devastating impact on all tourism-related businesses. This included the food and drink sector, wedding venues, accommodation providers, and attractions, along with a wide variety of support services and other supply industries. Some businesses have not reopened, significant refunds have had to be made, and countless staff have been furloughed.

Uncertainty about the implications of social distancing and other restrictions, which to ensure the safety of visitors, presented further challenges to the viability of individual businesses, and to the retail centres.

The sectors most seriously affected by the early measures, and for some of which the impact continues, include –

- Dining experiences
- Weddings
- Group travel / residential / adventure centres
- Cultural venues including theatre and cinemas

- Events

2.2 Recovery Plan for Tourism and Hospitality

The Council's tourism and promotional activity is usually guided by a destination management plan, the progress of which is reported regularly to this committee. The plan identifies the key target areas and opportunities for action. Given the ongoing pandemic, the plan was suspended, and in an immediate response to the crisis, your officers worked closely with the Ribble Valley Tourism Association to draft a 'Response and Recovery Plan', aimed at supporting tourism through good communication and marketing initiatives.

The plan sought to be positive and took into consideration the opportunities presented now and post virus. It was clear that as restrictions were lifted post initial lockdown and people would travel more freely again, that competition, in terms of tourism marketing, would be fiercer than ever. That is why it has been so important for Ribble Valley, a place where tourism and hospitality are so integral to the local economy, to stay ahead of the game.

Research suggests some very distinct consumer trends emerging from the crisis, from we should take heart. These include -

- A boost in the UK domestic travel market
- The need for visitors to feel and be safe – both during travel and whilst at the destination
- A desire to visit open space and countryside, and experience nature
- Strong interest in visiting and staying relatively locally
- Greater interest in buying locally made products and eating locally sourced produce

The plan was subject to consultation resulting in some clear conclusions including: -

- The crisis has brought the Ribble Valley tourism community together and demonstrated that there are many benefits to be achieved by working collaboratively
- 'Ribble Valley' is a strong, generic tourism brand which people are keen to 'rally behind'
- The food offer is particularly distinctive to Ribble Valley, and it should feature more significantly in tourism promotion
- The countryside is an under maximised resource which could realise its' potential as part of the recovery process
- By working together and being creative, Ribble Valley tourism has all the necessary ingredients to thrive in recovery from this crisis.

The Ribble Valley Borough Council 'Response and Recovery Plan for Tourism and Hospitality' was launched in June 2020. The launch coincided with an imaginative

video called “**When the time is right**’ designed to keep the area in people’s minds during lockdown

The plan has two parts: -

Response ‘Remaining confident for the period during which closure restrictions are in place’

and

Recovery ‘Confidently adapting, as restrictions are relaxed’

The Response and Recovery Plan is attached, and for the purposes of reviewing its progress, the performance tables have been updated and attached to this report as an appendix. This indicates the types of activity which have taken place in response to the crisis, this has included the Tourism officer delivering the following: -

- Regular on-line meetings for business representatives (over 70 businesses participating)
- Business advice seminars delivered with partners on specific themes –
 - Legal
 - Finance
 - Marketing
 - Human resources
 - Health and wellbeing
- Regular Tourism Update newsletters providing information to 230 businesses
- Bespoke promotion of business as they re-opened which engaged (involving over 250 social media posts)
- Direct advice/contact to over 80 businesses

2.3 **Business Reaction**

Many tourism and hospitality businesses have benefited from the various programmes of central government support, many of which have been successfully administered at district level. A good number of businesses have used the ‘Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme’ to furlough their staff, and therefore avoid redundancies. A survey of the hospitality sector nationally reported 84% of businesses have used the scheme and only 2% have laid staff off. This is encouraging news for the recovery period, with a wealth of talent ready to return to work.

Many local businesses have tried to remodel and provide alternative services during the lockdown, in order to generate at least some income, and to keep in contact with customers. There are also good examples where our businesses have supported their communities and key workers, including offering take-away services, donating to food banks, and making rooms available for key workers and quarantine purposes.

There have been some amazing examples of innovation during this time. Some businesses have kept in touch with their customers using social media and

newsletters, or by staging virtual events, each designed to maintain contact ready for when they are able to reopen. Similarly, many operators have used lockdown to physically refurbish and refresh their business, and develop their skills, particularly with respect to the use of technology.

The effectiveness of the measures implemented by Ribble Valley businesses has been widely applauded including a letter in a national newspaper and social media reaction applauding the measures taken by businesses in Ribble Valley to make visitors feel safe and welcome.

It is important to note that services across the Council, beyond tourism, have been effectively supporting the business sector with advice, assistance and the distribution of grant aid. The speed and way in which the Council has delivered the discretionary grants has been singled out for praise by both the government, for whom it was ranked amongst the best performing in the country, as well as locally where our performance has been the subject of many compliments from local businesses.

Also, the information in relation to the pandemic sent out to businesses by the Council has been of great value. In a recent survey of local businesses about the pandemic, the information provided by the Council was used by over 78% of respondents, second only as a source of information to the government's own official website.

2.3 Implications for promotional activities

The crisis has necessitated a significant change in the way we work, and this situation continues to evolve. In summary

- Summer events, including tourism promotional activities out of the area, were cancelled
- A much larger amount of time has been devoted to providing advice and assistance to business owners
- A much greater emphasis has been placed on electronic communication and promotion

The demise of overseas travel, and the promotion of staycation resulted in significant interest in Ribble Valley by national travel media. A number of press visits have been hosted with partners, so far resulting in features

- Country Life Magazine
- Daily Mirror
- Sunday Telegraph
- The Guardian

With more anticipated.

In addition, two social media influencers, both Visit England ambassadors, spent four days here resulting in a flurry of social media activity, a number of national travel blogs, and promotional video is yet to be released.

2.4 Post lockdown period

The period from full lock down until early October saw a massive surge in tourism and this was experienced across the different sectors, except for those businesses still closed or heavily restricted, including wedding venues, cultural venues and group travel attractions. There is no doubt that the government support for business through

VAT relief and schemes like 'Eat out to help out' were contributing factors to the revival, as was the diversion of interest from foreign to domestic holidays.

2.5 **The latest situation**

One important element of the Response and Recovery plan is that we must remain flexible and responsive to the on-going change to the coronavirus and the resulting necessary restrictions. At the time of writing, with the area entering tier three, the area is experiencing probably the most challenging phase thus far. The tourism industry locally is experiencing a dramatic drop in business, both as a result of the enforced restrictions, as well as the perception that Lancashire is not currently a safe place to visit. Businesses are reporting widespread cancellations for the period between now and Christmas.

4 **ISSUES**

The main issue to note is the way in which the Council has responded and continued to respond to the current crisis. This continues to evolve with the changing circumstances and this change is reflected in the Response and Recovery Plan

5 **RISK ASSESSMENT**

The approval of this report may have the following implications;

- Resources – The cost of promotional activities are contained within existing budgets and, where appropriate supported by the government
- Technical, Environmental and Legal – None in the context of this report
- Reputation – The Council is an active contributor in terms of strategic and operational tourism service.
- Equality and Diversity – None

6 **CONCLUSION**

Further progress of the Response and Recovery Plan will be reported to future committees

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BACKGROUND PAPERS None

For further information, please contact Tom Pridmore 01200 414496

Ribble Valley Borough Council

Response and Recovery Plan for Tourism and Hospitality June 2020

Review of Progress November 2020

Phase One – Response *‘Remaining confident for the period during which closure restrictions are in place’*

| Measure | Support messages from central Government | | | |
|---|---|----------|----------------------------|--|
| Action | Details | Partners | Timescale | Actions taken |
| Disseminate and convey relevant information to businesses | Promote on website and circulars Reinforce, in all communications, current government messages regarding the coronavirus | RVTA | Immediate and ongoing | RVTA website was established as a point of contact for business advice Government guidance has been promoted regularly in newsletters to 230 tourism related businesses |
| Promote sources of guidance and support | Regular ‘Tourism Update’ e-shots to tourism-related businesses, containing the latest guidance | RVTA | Initially every 10-14 days | E-shots issued regularly every 7-14 days or when relevant government information is issued. Content includes any areas of support to businesses including grants |
| Intelligence gathering | Promote and respond to consumer and business consultations and research | ML VE/VB | As and when required | We have promoted Visit Lancashire business surveys and these have fed into regional and national surveys |

| Measure | Protect and support local businesses | | | |
|--|--|------------|---|---|
| Action | Details | Partners | Timescale | Actions taken |
| Distribute grant aid and promote other sources of support | Promote the availability of grant aid and other support through regular E-shots to businesses Promote RVBC and RVTA websites as central points of reference | RVTA | Grants - ongoing as funds are available | Clear information about the discretionary grants has been sent out to businesses RVTA AND RVBC websites have been promoted as sources of information. |
| Publicise and support local best practice | Features on social media platforms Share good news to media and Lancashire audiences | RVTA ML | Ongoing during crisis | Regular posts on all tourism social media platforms have promoted examples of business demonstrating innovation or best practice. |
| Facilitate knowledge sharing, networking and promote relevant training opportunities | Regular webinar meetings with business on various themes Distribute the latest guidance on social distancing and safe practice | RVTA | Weekly As it becomes available | There have been regular on-line meetings for business representatives with over 70 businesses participating Business advice seminars have been delivered with partners on specific themes including <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal • Finance • Marketing • Human resources • Health and wellbeing |

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APPENDIX 1

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| Communicate with key stakeholders to gain support for our Recovery Plan | Involve stakeholders in the preparation of the plan and consult with stakeholders during English Tourism Week | RVTA and other stakeholders | English Tourism Week | The new promotional video was launched to coincide with National Tourism week |
|---|---|-----------------------------|----------------------|---|

| Measure | Maintain Ribble Valley brand awareness and begin to design new tourism products | | | |
|--|---|---|--|---|
| Action | Details | Partners | Timescale | Actions taken |
| Rebrand our marketing, keeping Ribble Valley very much in the mind of consumers | Launch promotional video 'When the time is right' during English Tourism week with underlying message of being ready soon for visitors Launch #loveribblevalley as a focus for businesses as they reopen | RVTA | English Tourism Week | The new video was launched as planned, along with the #loveribblevalley brand. This has been embraced by the private sector and promoted widely on all tourism promotional social media platforms |
| Work with tourism businesses to review their offer in line with any new restrictions and guidelines. | Circulate latest information through regular E-shots and RVTA webinars Individual support to specific business where appropriate | RVTA | E-shots every 10-14 days and weekly webinars | Up to date information has been shared in E-shots and webinars. This has resulted in sharing best practice and knowledge between businesses |
| Develop new tourism products ready to be shared with the media | Prepare locally focused digital and social media campaigns around key early themes including walking, driving, and cycling, including a review of the Tolkien Trail and an expansion of 'Walks with Taste' | Specific local communities Targeted businesses | Ongoing ahead of recovery | Work is progressing on new tourism products particularly country walking. We are currently consulting locally on a relaunch for the Tolkien Trail. |

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|--|---|---------------------|---------------------------|--|
| | | | | Two new 'walks with taste' have been launched, and four more local businesses expressing an interest in joining the initiative |
| Prepare targeted campaigns to attract residents and day visitors | Draft social media marketing awareness material ready for when the restrictions are lifted | Targeted businesses | Ongoing ahead of recovery | Social media campaigns were delivered following the initial lockdown. Two social media influencers (both Visit Britain ambassadors) have visited Ribble Valley and the resulting content will be launched when the time is right. |
| Monitor consumer behaviour to identify potential new markets | Be prepared to alter course on campaigns and marketing, dependent on consumer behaviours to changing restrictions | AONB RVTA | Ongoing | Mindful of the way in which restrictions continue to evolve and change, our campaigns and promotions have altered accordingly |
| Participate in wider campaigns to maximise exposure of the area and its businesses | Contribute content and ideas to Marketing Lancashire and similar campaigns | ML VE/VB | As opportunities arise | Numerous social media posts have been shared with #Visit Lancashire |

| Measure | Stay engaged with communities and promote the importance of tourism | | | |
|---|---|------------------|-----------|---|
| Action | Details | Partners | Timescale | Actions taken |
| Share relevant public information | <p>Actively promote industry best practice and other measures to ensure confidence about tourism within the community</p> <p>Promote via media and social media releases with positive tourism outcomes</p> | RVTA | Ongoing | <p>Good news stories about tourism have been continually featured throughout the pandemic</p> |
| Promote an understanding of the importance of tourism | <p>Incorporate the positive aspects of the visitor economy into media releases</p> | RVTA | Ongoing | <p>The value of the local visitor economy continues to feature in all levels of the media. We continue to promote the positive aspect of tourism to the economy</p> |
| Adapt and continue event planning | <p>Monitor any new guidelines relating to event management and work with event organisers to seek solutions for 2021</p> | Event organisers | Ongoing | <p>The current restrictions make event planning very difficult however we have promoted both virtual events as well as those few 'actual' ones taking place</p> |
| Mitigate any potential impacts of 'Over Tourism' | <p>In planning the various campaigns, take into consideration the potential for 'over tourism' and plan accordingly e.g. by promoting non-honeypots, seasonal experiences, and extended opening</p> | AONB RVTA | Ongoing | <p>The visitor flow to sensitive areas has been watched carefully with no major problems arising</p> |

Phase Two – Recovery ‘Confidently adapting, as restrictions are relaxed’

| Measure | Reinforce Ribble Valley brand awareness | | | |
|--|---|------------------------------------|---|--|
| Action | Details | Partners | Timescale (all subject to further restrictions) | Actions taken |
| <p>Unify and deliver positive, up-beat messages, conveying ‘safe and welcome’ messages and ensuring Ribble Valley stands out</p> | <p>Relaunch promotional video incorporating more confident key messages</p> <p>Develop follow up video containing consumer activity</p> <p>Use ‘Safe and Welcome’ narrative in all campaigns and communications</p> | <p>Various businesses RVTA</p> | <p>Upon restrictions being lifted</p> | <p>The promotional video was relaunched post initial lockdown</p> <p>Further video promotions are ready for release once the time is right</p> <p>The safe and welcome narrative is being incorporated into website content and promoted through social media platforms</p> |
| <p>Engage with press and media identifying key opportunities for press promotion,</p> | <p>Target media contacts located within one hour’s drive time and drip feed relevant content. e.g. new experiences, publications, and events</p> <p>Promote key themes to specialist media including food, walking, cycling etc</p> | <p>ML RVTA</p> | <p>After restrictions are lifted, feed over a period of weeks</p> <p>September 2020</p> | <p>Regional media campaigns are ready to go once the latest restrictions are lifted.</p> <p>Various national press visits have been hosted</p> |

| Measure | Continue to support local businesses | | | |
|---|--|----------|---|--|
| Action | Details | Partners | Timescale <small>(all subject to further restrictions)</small> | Actions taken |
| Continued promotion of government guidance and support | Continue to promote opportunities for support and funding to businesses in the regular 'Tourism Update' newsletter | RVTA | Every 10-14 days as continues to be relevant | The Tourism Update newsletter has been sent out to over 230 businesses on a regular basis |
| Support businesses in dealing with peaks and fluctuations in visitor interest | <p>Promote 'Love to be Open' social media campaign – celebrating individual businesses as they open up</p> <p>Support measures to redesign tourism, ensuring it is safe</p> <p>Launch 'Made in Ribble Valley' - a celebration of arts, craft, and creativity</p> | RVTA | <p>Upon restrictions being lifted</p> <p>Ongoing from restrictions being lifted</p> <p>Once sufficient relevant businesses are open</p> | <p>We have delivered bespoke promotion of businesses as they re-opened and this has involved over 40 businesses and over 250 social media posts</p> <p>The launch of 'made in Ribble Valley' will follow when the time is right and link closely to Arts development activity.</p> |
| Continue networking and knowledge sharing | <p>Continue to host business webinar events with the RVTA</p> <p>Promote suitable events organised by other parties</p> | RVTA | Gradually relaxing frequency from weekly to two monthly over time as appropriate | The webinars have continued but have now reduced in frequency. Thus far they have engaged with over 70 business representatives |
| Facilitate and promote business-to-business support and training | Support regular training and workshop events run by the RVTA in support of local businesses | RVTA | RVTA timetable | Regular events have taken place, the most recent being a Mental Health workshop run by Harrison Drury solicitors and the charity Mindsight |

| Measure | Create safe and welcoming tourism | | | |
|---|--|----------------------------------|---|---|
| Action | Details | Partners | Timescale <small>(all subject to further restrictions)</small> | Actions taken |
| Review all tourism marketing to ensure positive and confident messages are portrayed | Review each of the tourism websites to ensure the content is portraying the new language and portrayal of 'safe and welcoming' tourism Invest in new imagery for online and print material | | By mid-July | Each of the websites was reviewed by July and they are now subject to continual review |
| Encourage tourism businesses to adhere to new regulations and join accredited schemes | Ensure that all businesses participating in promotional campaigns are adhering to new safety guidelines Actively promote and encourage participation in safe and legal type accreditation | RVTA VE VE, QIT HSE | In accordance with each campaign | We have promoted participation in the two national accreditation schemes with around 50 RV businesses signing up to the national 'We're good to go' scheme so far. |
| Promote examples of innovation and best practice | Actively seek out best practice and highlight on social media Incorporate best practice into the annual tourism awards | RVTA | Regular weekly feed | The tourism awards, promoted with the RVTA will include new awards for businesses demonstrating innovation during the crisis |

| Measure | Develop a programme of new tourism themes | | | |
|--|---|--|--|---|
| Action | Details | Partners | Timescale <small>(all subject to further restrictions)</small> | Actions taken |
| Promote to new markets including to a younger audience | <p>Devise specific marketing campaigns</p> <p>Design and promote a 'Families together' campaigns</p> | <p>Hospitality businesses</p> <p>Family-friendly businesses</p> <p>FA UU</p> | <p>September 2020</p> <p>August 2020</p> | <p>The imagery used in promotions have been revised to reflect new markets</p> <p>We have hosted two social media influencers to provided refreshed content for website and social media</p> <p>Current restrictions continue to delay further progress.</p> |
| Launch a new 'Love the Great Outdoors' campaign | <p>Promote a new series of 'Trustworthy Trips' including walking cycling, driving itineraries along with a selection of virtual experiences</p> <p>Reviving the Tolkien Trail and promotion of the Ribble Way, including exploring the potential of linking accommodation and luggage transport</p> | <p>RVTA</p> <p>FA UU</p> <p>Parish Council</p> <p>Neighbouring Councils</p> | <p>Staggered programme over 12 months</p> <p>September 2020</p> <p>Spring 2021</p> | <p>Current restrictions continue to delay the launch of such initiatives but planning has continued on new itineraries.</p> <p>Consultation has begun on the refreshed Tolkien Trail</p> |
| Promote food and drink experiences | Launch Great Food Experiences, with the relaunch of a Ribble Valley Food and Drink Trail, a web based mobile friendly layered map. | Hospitality businesses | Autumn 2020 | Ongoing restrictions has delayed this work but initial concepts for the web-based trail have been developed |

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| | <p>Investigate the potential for a week long Ribble Valley-wide series of food and walking events, culminating in the Clitheroe food festival</p> <p>‘Love Picnics’ – locally sourced foods enjoyed in great locations</p> | <p>Food outlets and producers</p> | <p>August 2020 2020/2021</p> <p>Summer 2020</p> | <p>There have been some promotions around outdoor eating and picnics but ongoing restrictions have delayed a major launch.</p> |
| <p>Sustain the promotion of important longer-term markets</p> | <p>Promotion of Ribble Valley as a safe and welcoming wedding destination – launch virtual guide June 2020 and printed guide once social distancing measures have been agreed</p> <p>‘Meeting Places’ campaign to promote safe and welcoming venues for business and family occasions</p> <p>Promotion of a ‘Made in Ribble Valley’ arts and crafts trail</p> <p>Resume group travel promotions</p> | <p>RVWH</p> <p>RVTA</p> <p>Creative businesses</p> <p>ML</p> | <p>June 2020</p> <p>October 2020</p> <p>January 2021</p> <p>Once sufficient businesses are open</p> <p>2021</p> | <p>The new virtual wedding guide was launched on schedule and has been well received. Social media promotion of venues and suppliers has continued.</p> <p>(The Council has also been actively involved with the government’s national consultation on new laws in relation to weddings)</p> <p>Ongoing restrictions have prevented progress in these areas.</p> |
| <p>Promote Ribble Valley as a place for all seasons</p> | <p>Seasonal campaigns based on midweek breaks, linked to walking cycling etc</p> <p>Stronger use of seasonally themed imagery on websites and social media</p> | <p>Accommodation providers</p> <p>RVTA</p> | <p>2021</p> | <p>Initial plans for 2021 are being formulated</p> |

| Measure | Manage tourism responsibly | | | |
|---|---|-------------------|--|---|
| Action | Details | Partners | Timescale (all subject to further restrictions) | Actions taken |
| Monitor visitor flows and indications of over tourism | Monitor tourism carefully to ensure that 'Over Tourism' does not occur, especially in sensitive areas such as Bowland and Pendle Hill | AONB Pendle BC | Ongoing | Tourism continues to be monitored and there are currently no evident issues |
| Promote seasonal offers and encourage a year-round calendar of events | Actively identify opportunities for off season events and activities and support 'Place for All Seasons' campaign above | RVTA | Autumn 2020 | The first winter campaign is currently being formatted for a November launch |
| Promote and support responsible and safe visitor behaviour | Include in all campaign and marketing the need for responsible behaviour, for example, using the countryside code and the need to be mindful of the needs of local people | NFU NE AONB | Ongoing | Important messages are being incorporated into social media posts, websites and publications such as the 'Walks with Taste' |

Notes

RVTA – Ribble Valley Tourism Association

AONB – Forest of Bowland Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Service (LCC)

NE - Natural England - the statutory agency for nature conservation

QIT - Quality in Tourism – Agency delivering inspection services

RVWH – Ribble Valley Wedding Heaven a promotional/consultative group

NFU – National Farmers Union

ML – Marketing Lancashire

VE -Visit England (National Tourist Board)

UU – United Utilities

HSE – Health and Safety Executive