

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR REGENERATION & ENVIRONMENT
29th APRIL 2010

Waste and Recycling

Tonnages to landfill fell in January and February but rose in March, when compared with the previous year. Whilst final calculations are being carried out, it is anticipated that the council will be under its LATS threshold for the year, which was not expected some two years ago. This is due to a fall in tonnage centre landfill in 09/10. Our Recycling performance latest figures for quarter 1 to 3 shows at 44.2% and is a credible achievement for the Borough and its system of household collection.

New arrangements for ongoing landfill is shortly to be agreed, with a report to Executive Board earlier this month confirming the outcomes of the recent tender. The recycling contract is due to commence in May with a re-award of the contract awarded to Verdant who are part of the Greenstar group. The longer waste treatment contract for a major treatment facility that will take non recyclable waste in the longer term will be out to tender later this year.

Street Cleansing

A revision of the cleansing programme is planned with a more focused neighbourhood working regime implemented from May 2010, as services will be focused in a particular neighbourhood on a specific day of the week, each and every week. Early trails of this have been welcomed. The main routes through the borough, town centres and other hot-spots will be given more frequent attention.

Markets Re-location

The relocation of the Market into The Mall is generating a lot of activity and interest. Several meetings with traders have taken place to explain the process and the Council's approach, and intensive support has been given to individual traders. The close of applications for current traders was 16th April. A verbal report will be given to Council Forum on the number of applications and the take up of stalls by existing traders, but already it looks clear that a good core of the present market will make the transition into the new site, and that they would be likely to take up around three-quarters of the available stalls.

There will be opportunities for new traders to enter the town and interest is already high. No applications from outside traders will be received until June, when the process of looking at existing traders has been completed and we have had a chance to see whether any key trades are missing

What is also clear is that the business opportunities for the market on the new site should be considerable. Its modern design and excellent facilities will attract in customers and benefit traders. It will be immediately below the busiest part of the extended Mall, connected to the upper floors by escalators and two lifts to the extended car park. The foot fall through the Market will be much greater, as indeed the Blackburn Market will be at the heart of the Town Centre, both physically and economically.

Recent discussions have taken place with the National Market Traders Federation who are very supportive of the Council's proposals to relocate the Market to the new Mall location and trade 6 days a week. They have offered to work jointly with the Council in promoting the new Market and in providing business support advice to traders.

Future Jobs Refund (FJF)

The Pennine Lancashire Future Jobs Fund Initiative has achieved its initial target of 210 young people placed into work by the end of March 2010. This includes 23 young people now working for the Council. This is an impressive achievement given the initiative has only been live for 6 months and has been a learning experience for all involved.

FJF is a Department for Work & Pensions initiative designed to give young people work experience in the current recession. It provides a wage subsidy for 6 months to public or voluntary sector organisations to recruit a young person not in education or employment.

The target for the second phase of FJF up to the end of March 2011 is to get a further 515 young people into work. This may seem ambitious but is dwarfed by the scale of the problem. Nevertheless this will make an important contribution and we will work together to make sure this target will be achieved.

Pennine Reach

The government announced first stage programme entry approval for the Pennine Reach rapid bus transport scheme in March, as part of the Budget, inviting the Council and Lancashire County Council to prepare detailed submissions for full approval which we expect in the next nine months. Because of the extent of consultation which took place in 2008 Members should be aware of the key elements of the scheme which will produce £22m infrastructure investment in Blackburn with Darwen. This will provide for a new bus station in Blackburn, junction and interchange facilities improvements at Ewood and improvements to the A666 and routes to Accrington. Approximately £7m will be invested in ticketing technology aspects of the scheme including new shelters, bus stop information, smart card ticketing, and CCTV. Benefits for the borough generally, and especially for bus passengers, should be significant, and the investment in highways and junctions mean that general traffic should face no additional delays.

Darwen Town Centre

Darwen Townscape Heritage Scheme (THI) has awarded grants totalling £889,399 to date towards 10 schemes for property improvements to the total value of £1,438,433 and a further seven schemes are anticipated to compete for the remaining grant funding. These projects include seven target buildings and ten generic properties. Two key projects currently on site are Darwen Town Hall Frontage and Holker House. Works to premises on Bridge Street and Bolton Road are also underway. Projects on Market Street, Foundry Street and Railway Road are due to start from June. Other schemes are in various stages of acceptance of grant award or pending application subject to planning consent and return of tenders. It is expected that the total THI grant funding amounting to £1,316,352 will have been committed by June 2010 and works successfully completed one year ahead of the scheme closing date of 31st December 2011.

The improvements to the frontage of Darwen Town Hall include creating an active shopping front onto the Market Square which is due to complete by the end of April.

Throughout the town, signs of investment are evident, notably the construction of the Darwen Aldridge Academy. Highways works to Sudell and Redearth Roads to improve safety for pupils and other visitors are on site and a further boost to the Town Centre economy can be expected with the Academy's opening in September.

Fielden Street Car Park

To add to the additional car parking provided in the Mall, the new Council multi storey car park at Fielden Street is now complete and open for business. Special arrangements are being made to provide for late night events at King Georges Hall. The Parking Services staff are relocating from Mill Lane to the car park to provide enhanced security. We are sure that the high standard of finishes and security at the car park will make a valuable addition for shoppers, for users of the new health centre, for students and staff at Blackburn College and all at this end of town. There's considerable interest in the new commercial units provided on the Nab Lane frontage.

Cathedral Quarter

The redevelopment of Blackburn Cathedral Quarter is moving forward with site investigations in the area almost complete. Some early design work has also been carried out on the public realm and Clergy Court. This will give us more accurate costs for the scheme, particularly around some of the big areas of work that may be required on site decontamination and strengthening of the culvert. It is expected that revised costs and an updated Business Plan will be in place by June and then detailed grant applications to the funding agencies will be submitted. At the same time, the contract with the Developer, by way of a Development Agreement, will be signed up to by all partners. The indicative programme following this is below:

July/August 2010 - Phase one detailed design completed

November/December 2010 - Detailed grant and planning approvals received

March 2011 - Development Finance and pre lets secured

June 2011 - Works commence on Clergy Court, Hotel and Office Building

March 2013 - Clergy Court, Hotel and Office completes

Transport

The two cross-party reviews of community transport and public transport were commissioned to consider issues of accessibility across the borough (heightened by the withdrawal of some commercial services in late 2009) and the efficiency, value and quality of current providers. The Council currently invests £1.5m each year in supporting community transport, providing welfare transport and subsidising commercial bus routes. Findings from the two reviews were reported to a joint meeting of the cross party groups in March. It has been agreed that options be developed with a view to reporting recommendations to the Executive Board in June. The recent announcement on Pennine Reach is also having to be considered for its possible impacts and benefits. In the meantime there is a need to ensure that services are maintained. To this effect a retender of the subsidised commercial routes was reported to the Executive Board in April, and extensions to service level agreements have been issued to the two community transport operators.