

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR REGENERATION

1. BLACKBURN MARKET

The new market is scheduled to open on 28th May 2011 although, like all major construction projects there are programme risks which the Council and Capita Symonds are addressing to make sure the market opens on time.

The reinstatement of Church Street is progressing well and should be completed by mid April and the permanent reinstatement works on Ainsworth Street have also now commenced on site. This work has to be completed before the market opens so that the access doors from Ainsworth Street can be used.

Regarding the letting of new stalls, 82 out of the 127 stalls are allocated or under offer. New enquiries continue to be received from new businesses, about 30 enquiries over the last two weeks, but there are still a number of island food stalls which need to be let and this is where marketing is being focussed.

Advertising and marketing connected to the disposal of the markets site for redevelopment has now begun and a number of initial enquiries have been received by Jones Lang Lasalle acting on the Council's behalf. An update report on this is scheduled for late April and a copy of the Developer Brief for the site will be made available in the Members Room.

2. BLACKBURN TOWN CENTRE MOVEMENT STRATEGY

Improvements are now well under way with works to Feilden Street / Montague Street junction, Preston New Road / Barbara Castle Way junction and Larkhill / Barbara Castle Way junction (including Penny Street southbound bus lane) all now completed. The next phase of works in 2011/12 include Cardwell Place / King Street reconfiguration to enable buses to serve the Blackburn College area and the new health centre, St Pauls Street bus gate and works to the Copy Nook gyratory to improve traffic flows.

Planning and Highways Committee gave approval to the central alignment of the Freckleton Street Link Road at the March 2011 meeting and was minded to approve the demolition of the listed 53 King Street building, subject to a potential "call-in" by the Secretary of State. English Heritage have confirmed their objection to the proposals on historic environment grounds but won't be asking for a "call-in" as they believe the Council to be in the best position to reach a decision in this case. The Council is continuing to progress the project with land and property owners in the Freckleton Street area. The expected construction period within the latest programme is from September 2012 until November 2013.

3. WINTER MAINTENANCE

The milder second half of the winter helped to conserve salt stocks which were in short supply across the country again this year.

The salt barn was full at the start of the winter but a lack of assurance from our main supplier that additional supplies would be available as the winter progressed, resulted in an order being placed with the Irish Salt Company for a guaranteed delivery of 1000 tonnes in January. This decision proved helpful in preventing salt shortages in the Borough this season.

The season has ended having consumed approximately 3200 tonnes of salt with a stock of approximately 1500 tonnes remaining. The salt barn will be filled during the summer in readiness for the next winter season.

Consideration is being given to offering some limited salt deliveries in early Autumn at cost to schools and local organisations.

4. LOCAL TRANSPORT PLAN 3

The Council is now finalising its LTP3 transport strategy for the next 10 years and implementation plan for the next 4 years. This can be found at www.blackburn.gov.uk/transportplan. The Department for Transport has confirmed that Blackburn with Darwen will receive approximately £6million over the next 2 years to deliver local transport improvements and to maintain highways and transport assets. The strategy has identified a number of transport challenges and goals for the borough, of particular importance being to support economic growth, reduce carbon emissions and to improve accessibility.

Upcoming schemes include planning and delivery of the Freckleton Street Link Road, a user interface transport matters notifying people of roadworks, delays, incidents, and realtime public transport information, and a new canopy over Blackburn Railway Station Platform 4.

With reference to the Pennine Reach major transport scheme, the Council intends to bid for funding in September 2011 with a ministerial decision expected in December 2011. Discussions will continue to take place with land and property owners on the route, and more detailed information will be circulated to the general public and businesses about the revised scheme in Summer 2011.

5. THE COALITION GOVERNMENTS PLAN FOR GROWTH - REFORM OF THE PLANNING SYSTEM

The Coalition Government's "Plan For Growth" document, which accompanied the Budget, has highlighted a number of reforms to the Planning System to reduce the bureaucracy and complexity of the system, reduce the cost on business and increase incentives for local communities to go for growth and remove unnecessary burdens.

The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government made a Written Ministerial Statement on 23 March 2011, setting clear expectations that local planning authorities and other bodies involved in granting development consents should prioritise growth and jobs. These expectations include:

- A new presumption in favour of sustainable development, so that the default answer to development is 'yes'.
- More development in suitable and viable locations with a shorter, more focused and inherently pro-growth National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) to deliver this.
- Enabling businesses to bring forward neighbourhood plans and neighbourhood development orders.
- Piloting a land auctions model, starting with public sector land.
- Localising choice about the use of previously developed land, removing nationally imposed targets.
- Consultation on proposals to make it easier to convert commercial premises to residential.
- A number of measures to streamline the planning applications and related consents regimes removing bureaucracy from the system and speeding it up. This will include a 12 month guarantee for the processing of all planning applications, including any appeals.

- A fast-track planning process for major infrastructure applications through the Major Infrastructure Planning system.
- A duty on local authorities and public bodies to require them to co-operate on planning issues.

It remains to be seen what the impact of these proposals will have on either promoting growth or on development control as a whole. It will clearly further reduce local influence on the planning application process.

6. SITE ALLOCATIONS AND DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT POLICIES DEVELOPMENT PLAN DOCUMENT (DPD)

The evidence base to support the preparation of the Site Allocations and Development Management Policies Development Plan Document is progressing. Studies have been commissioned from Consultants to consider retail, wildlife sites and the development market viability. Additional evidence relating to flood risk and highways will also be gathered.

A "Call for Sites" was carried out over a 6-week period up to 11 March 2011. This generated approximately 60 responses regarding sites. These will be considered for their suitability for development alongside existing information in the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment (SHLAA) and the Employment Land Survey, as part of the site selection process for the DPD's.

The Engagement Strategy is being prepared, and will set out how the community and stakeholders will be consulted throughout the preparation of the document.

7. COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE LEVY

A Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) is being developed alongside the Site Allocations and Development Management Policies DPD's. The CIL Charging Schedule will form part of the Local Development Framework, although it will not be a development plan document. The CIL establishes the process for raising funds from developers undertaking new building projects in the borough, to put towards identified infrastructure projects.

This document will set the rates of the Levy to be charged, along with an indicative list of infrastructure projects to be funded by CIL. It will be informed by the anticipated scale of development set out in the Core Strategy and the location of these developments through the preparation of the Site Allocations and Development Management Policies DPD.

The final adoption of the schedule is expected to be in spring 2013 following extensive consultation and public examination

8. NEW PRE-APPLICATION ADVICE SERVICE IN DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT

Development Management has introduced a new Pre-Application Advice Service from Monday 4th April 2011. Finance Council on the 7th March 2011 approved new charges to apply to all forms of pre-application advice. A request for pre-application advice will now receive a formal written response within 21 working days outlining the planning issues and advice relating to the proposed scheme.

What are the benefits to the customer?

- Customers will have a better understanding how their application will be judged against the policies in the development plan and other material considerations.
- More consistent and certainty about officer advice.

- Early identification of where specialist input is needed, particularly on historic buildings, trees and contaminated land.
- The opportunity to develop or modify a proposal to make it potentially more acceptable to the community and maximise the chances of achieving a smoother and quicker passage through the planning application process.
- A potential saving in the time spent by both the case officer and agents in working up a proposal.
- Where a proposal is completely unacceptable to the Local Planning Authority i.e. there are no alternatives, the advice can save the customer the costs of finalising an application and paying an application fee, if they wish to take the advice.
- Reduces the time wasted on processing planning applications where there is inadequate or insufficient information provided at the outset.

A list of the new charges, prescribed enquiry form, and flowcharts explaining how the new process for each development proposal is available to view on the council's planning website.

Based on the experience of other Councils which have introduced Pre-Application Charges, the number of informal pre-application enquiries is likely to drop which will ensure staff can concentrate on providing advice to those customers who are intent on applying for planning permission.

In addition there will be free workshops arranged for the general public on different aspects of planning rules and regulations. These sessions will not discuss specific applications and will just focus on general advice and guidance.

8. THE PROPOSALS FOR CHANGES TO PLANNING APPLICATION FEES IN ENGLAND

The Coalition government are planning to change the way Council's can charge for processing planning applications.

Currently the Council receives approximately 1221 planning applications in a year on average, including everything from house extensions to large developments. It is resource intensive for the planning service to handle, check and publicise applications and give each one appropriate and careful consideration. The Council is able to charge fees in order to recover the costs of processing most types of planning applications. However, fees are currently set nationally, which means they do not take account of differing local circumstances and market conditions. The Coalition Government considers this is contrary to the spirit of localism, and they propose that fees should set locally by councils.

This Council, as with the majority of Councils, is not recovering all its costs from planning application fee income. Since planning permission often adds significant value to land, this means that local tax payers are subsidising applications which may make the applicant a considerable profit. The only way to overcome this is to enable Councils to set their own fees which reflect local costs, and encourage them to run a fair and efficient system. There is a high likelihood that fees for certain applications types, that are currently subsidised, will rise to reflect the full economic cost of processing.

This government proposes changes to the planning application fees regime which would decentralise responsibility for setting fees to local planning authorities. They also propose to allow authorities to charge for some of those applications which are currently free, such as repeat applications. In addition to proposing that retrospective applications could be

subject to a higher charge. These proposals will help to reduce the subsidising of planning applications by local residents.

Although the changes in regulations were to come in force in April 2011 with a six month transition period until October 2011, the government have not met that target and the regulations are now expected in the summer.

Further information will be passed onto Members and the general public as it becomes available.