

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR REGENERATION

1. BLACKBURN MARKET

The Mall's footfall figures for the four weeks leading up to Christmas were 11% up from last year on average with a 15% rise in the last week. Footfall between Christmas and New Year when the sales started was 13.7% up on last year. Feedback from traders has been positive and ongoing promotion work for January and February 2012 will be important to help support traders through what will no doubt be a quieter period. Signage proposals and an update on marketing were considered at the Markets Shadow Board on the 16th January 2012. The market has also been submitted for National Association of British Market Authorities (NABMA) Market of the Year Award.

January and February are traditionally quiet months on the market as many traders take their holidays at this time of the year, nevertheless 80% of the stalls are now let and new letting enquiries are still being received. The Visitor Centre is moving to the market to provide a one stop transport and customer information service in addition to general information for shoppers and should open at the end of January.

There is also positive news with the recent Pennine Reach scheme approval, development options for the markets site will need to be reviewed to ensure the bus station element can be accommodated.

2. DARWEN TOWN CENTRE STRATEGY

Public consultation is underway on the draft strategy with a static public display available at Darwen market and sessions planned at the Leisure Centre and Community Centres for residents to see the plans. There is a Member briefing planned for the 23rd February 2012 and also a drop in session for businesses. The consultation feedback and final strategy will be reported to Members in March 2012.

3. BLACKBURN CATHEDRAL QUARTER

The official VIP opening of Blackburn Youthzone will be held on the 6th February 2012, launching the first major step in the development of the Cathedral Quarter. The Centre will open to young people in March 2012, building up the offer and activities from the opening programme. More details of the programme and future planned activities will be available on the Youthzone website.

A planning application is due for submission at the end of January 2012 following a successful Places Matter Design Review. The initial designs for the hotel, office building, Clergy Court and the new public realm areas were praised for their quality and ambition with some constructive advice given on potential improvements. The £30 million scheme is expected to start on site at the end of 2012 with completion mid 2014.

4. PENNINE REACH

Following consideration of the bid the Department for Transport (DfT) has confirmed that Ministers have agreed to provide the £32m of funding requested to deliver the £40m project with the balance coming from a combination of other public and private sector contributions. The Council intends to complete the remaining legal, procurement, design and planning processes within the next 12 months. The Council will then seek "Full Approval" from the DfT to deliver the scheme, the delivery programme for which runs from April 2013 to March 2016.

The cornerstone of the Pennine Reach project is the delivery of a £6m state of the art bus station in Blackburn Town Centre adjacent to the main shopping centre, with toilet facilities, information, manned help, refreshments, and a warm, covered area for waiting

passengers. The new bus facility will have sufficient capacity for existing bus services and scope for additional services in the future. There will be further public consultation on all aspects of future detailed proposals.

5. WINTER MAINTENANCE

To date the 2011/12 winter season has been generally mild requiring limited treatments. Consequently we continue to maintain good stock levels of salt. Pre-planned salt deliveries scheduled for week commencing 9th January 2012 brought levels back to its maximum capacity.

Salt bins have been filled twice to date since the start of the season, we will continue to monitor conditions in individual areas and will replenish as required. The use of social media has again been positive along with the email bulletin advising of the latest conditions expected and appropriate action being taken.

5.1 BWD WINTER SQUADS

The Winter Squad Trial Project has been delivered jointly with the Executive Member for Neighbourhoods and Customer Services to help volunteer residents support older and more vulnerable people in case of severe cold weather. Three groups of volunteers are involved in East Rural, Brownhill and Corporation Park.

6. ASSISTANCE TO INDUSTRY

The Council's Assistance to Industry programme provides investment support in the form of grants to encourage businesses to expand, relocate or safeguard employment in the borough. The total annual budget allocation for the programme is £150,000, which the Council has funded since 2009/10. It provides funds to businesses on assessment of formal applications, which can demonstrate job creation and preservation, new investment, physical improvements to commercial / industrial properties and measures to improve business competitiveness.

The programme is on target to offer £150,000 in grants by the end of the current financial year and is expected to support nine companies, with grants ranging from £3,000 to £40,000. A total of 50 jobs will be safeguarded as well as 50 new jobs created by the end of March 2012 and 150 new jobs over the next two years.