

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR REGENERATION

**COUNCILLOR MAUREEN
BATESON**

**PORTFOLIO CO-ORDINATING
DIRECTOR: BRIAN BAILEY
DATE: 26 June 2014**

CATHEDRAL QUARTER UPDATE

The Cathedral Quarter construction works are progressing well with the target completion date still September 2015. Works in the ground are ongoing with the final drain diversion commencing early June. Works to the bus interchange will accelerate in July with target completion for all highway works November 2014. There will inevitably be some local traffic disruption during this period, but the aim is to manage this as much as possible. Advanced signage warning of delays will help to divert some through traffic onto Barbara Castle Way and all traffic management will be manually operated at busy times. The culvert roof is now demolished and the strengthening of the south end of the development to enable vehicle access to Dandy Walk will enable the construction of the office and hotel buildings to take place from this July. Executive Board in May received a detailed update. A marketing campaign to let the office and restaurants and shops at ground level has commenced and regular update reports on progress will be brought to the Council.

PENNINE REACH

The £40m project is now 6 months into the delivery phase with corridor works on the A666 and the construction of Blackburn's new Bus Station now underway. Work has begun to upgrade bus stops to Pennine Reach standards with level access, new shelters and furniture. Traffic signal works are ongoing on the A666 with improvements to the Hollins Grove Street junction, and works at Ewood, Furthergate and Branch Road will follow on. Foundation and piling works to Blackburn Bus Station are now nearing completion and the summer months will see the construction of external steelwork. Additional public realm works on Railway Road and Salford including a new pedestrian crossing linking the new bus station and Morrisons will commence in the Autumn.

BLACKBURN TOWN CENTRE

Work on the Council's 12 Point Plan to revitalise the town centre continues to gain momentum. As a result of the Council's Business Rates Incentive Scheme which has been effective from 1st April 2014, three empty town centre retail properties have been let to new commercial businesses and more are pending.

Two major events have been commissioned to support the development of a vibrant annual town centre cultural events programme. 'Blackburn Beat' will take place on Saturday 23rd August 2014 and aims to celebrate the best in music, street food, craft ale and family entertainment from within 20 miles of

Blackburn and Blackburn Heritage Festival is planned for Saturday 13th and Sunday 14th September. The events will aim to attract a diverse audience, but both will have a strong family focus. The events are being funded by the Council with additional contribution and sponsorship from Blackburn BID, The Mall and local businesses.

Consultation on the Town Centre Movement Strategy has been underway since the beginning of April 2014. The first part of the consultation focused on businesses and stakeholder organisations. A number of meetings have taken place and feedback has been coming in via email and social media. The second stage of the consultation will now concentrate on the views of the public, including residents, visitors and disability groups. The consultation closes at the end of June, followed by a three month review of findings and report to the Executive Member.

LOCAL PLAN PART 2 – SITE ALLOCATIONS AND DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT POLICIES

The consultation on the Local Plan Part 2 finished on 10th March 2014. 231 individuals/organisations responded submitting 423 representations. Most of the representations concern housing matters and the overall requirement and land supply as well as highlighting specific sites. There are both objections and representations in support of specific allocations. Objections cover matters including the need for the proposed developments, that previously developed sites should be developed before any greenfield sites, flooding, loss of wildlife, and infrastructure requirements.

All representations will be forwarded to the Inspector who will examine the Plan and a summary will be published on the Council's website after submission. In March the Government published the National Planning Practice Guidance which has generated some additional work in ensuring that the Plan complies with the latest guidance. Submission of the Plan to the Government for examination into its soundness is now scheduled for the end of June / beginning of July. The hearing sessions are expected to take place in October 2014.

HIVE AND BUSINESS ENGAGEMENT

The Hive business leaders' group continues to make good progress, with current membership exceeding 190 local organisations. Recent companies to join Hive include Cosmotec – a large engineering firm on Highfield Road, and Kitchener 2000, specialising in Portable Appliance Testing.

To maintain the Council's commitment to supporting business, a new dedicated Council number has been established for incoming business enquiries. The helpline is aimed at making it easier for businesses to get information and help when they need it. Whether it is about rates, planning, property, land or business support, a call to the telephone number (01254 588180) offers advice and support from 8.45am until 5pm Monday to Friday.

LANCASHIRE STRATEGIC ECONOMIC PLAN (SEP)

The Council continues to work with Blackpool Council, Lancashire County Council and the Lancashire Enterprise Partnership on the Lancashire Strategic Economic Plan (SEP). The first submission has been made to Central Government and negotiations are ongoing. The SEP sets out our joint plan for economic growth over the next decade and has a clear focus on realising the potential of Lancashire. The SEP will provide funding for Blackburn to Bolton rail improvements, the completion of Pennine Reach, the delivery of key Town Centres improvements and will support future Local Sustainable Transport Fund initiatives. The plan also highlights the future role of the M65 and the importance of improving the motorway's capacity to accommodate growth and improve connections.

BLACKBURN MARKET

Blackburn Market occupancy is now at 80%. Lease renewals were completed in advance of the 1st June deadline with only one trader not renewing. A number of events are getting established, including monthly cookery demonstrations, music events, and also links are developing with the College with regular hair and beauty events. Following the work to promote coach parties, a steady flow of tour operators are starting to make bookings, most of which are linked to the events that are planned already. The website has been developed further to add an e-commerce platform. One trader is trialling this, with some early success, and roll out with all traders is planned from late June.

DARWEN MARKET

Darwen Market occupancy levels are at 78%. Improvement works to the Annex have been agreed and works will start in early summer. The new website launched in April. Feedback has been good with added publicity from the Lancashire Telegraph. The events have also been well received and buskers bay is now a regular attraction. Students from DACA developed the Darwen Market brand and this has provided an opportunity to get some good additional PR for the Market.