

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR REGENERATION

**COUNCILLOR MAUREEN
BATESON**

**PORTFOLIO CO-ORDINATING
DIRECTOR:
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CATHEDRAL QUARTER UPDATE

The Cathedral Quarter construction works are still progressing well with the target completion date of September 2015 as previously reported. Ground works are now practically complete and works are continuing to the taxi rank area, under the Railway Station canopy, paving along Railway Road and the bus interchange. It is expected that the traffic management will be off site at the end of September to co-ordinate with the National Grid gas replacement works on Salford.

Marketing brochures for both the office and the ground floor retail and restaurant units are now available and a launch event for the development is planned for late October. Known office requirements will be targeted for this event as well as local business leaders and regional agents. Ground floor retail and restaurant operators are now being formally approached by the letting agents.

PENNINE REACH

All bus station ground works are now complete and the steel structure is being erected with one roof section completed. Public realm works on Ainsworth Street have now commenced. Programmed completion is currently early 2015. Work is currently underway on a number of separate junction improvements on key routes, with work on Furthergate due to start in late September.

HASLINGDEN ROAD

Work commenced earlier this month on the Government funded scheme to improve the Haslingden Road approach to Junction 5, M65 and associated works to signalise the Junction 5 roundabout. The scheme is intended to ease congestion on this principle route and will be on site for 28 weeks.

BLACKBURN TOWN CENTRE

The latest statistics for the 12 Point Plan Priority area show a vacancy rate of 20.27% (June 2014) compared with the last Quarter which was 21.83%. The vacancy rate across the wider town centre is 17.1% (June 2014) and the national average for England is 14% (2013). 9 new businesses have now set up in the 12 Point Plan area and 8 applications had been received from new businesses for support under the Town Centre Business Rates Incentive Scheme.

TOWN CENTRE EVENTS

Two successful Blackburn town centre events have taken place – Blackburn Beat and Blackburn Heritage Festival. The 1940s day in Darwen proved to be a real hit with an increase in footfall.

The Christmas programmes this year for both town centres will have a traditional/vintage feel. In Blackburn the programme will be supported by Blackburn BID and will include four weekends of street entertainment as well as the Christmas Lights Switch On scheduled for 20 November and the Annual Lantern Parade and Cathedral Fireworks on 11 December. The Christmas Lights switch on in Darwen is scheduled for 22 November and there will be various other activities leading up to Christmas.

HIVE AND BUSINESS ENGAGEMENT

Latest firms to join the Hive Network include Presspart (manufacturing sector) and LEB Partnership (ICT sector). The Hive Steering Group is planning an event in September/October with Blackburn Rovers. Hive's commendation for 'Improving the Business Environment' was presented as part of the 2014 Enterprising Britain Awards at the House of Commons on 9 September.

BLACKBURN MARKET

Stall occupancy is close to 85% and the market continues to receive enquiries for stall lettings with many coming via the new website pages.

DARWEN MARKET

Darwen Market occupancy levels remain at 75% with some interest from existing market traders for stalls in the Annex. Improvement works to the Annex continue and are expected to be completed early October. The market continues to enjoy a healthy interest in stalls via the website and it is hoped to develop this further with the branded on-line trader pack due to be launched in September.