

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR REGENERATION

**COUNCILLOR MAUREEN BATESON PORTFOLIO CO-ORDINATING
DIRECTOR:
BRIAN BAILEY
DATE: 29.01.2015**

CATHEDRAL QUARTER UPDATE

Cathedral Quarter construction works are still on track for completion by end September 2015 with Clergy Court now likely to be the end of October. Hotel and Office building works are progressing well. Traffic management around Salford/Railway Road will be in place this quarter as gas pipeline replacement works progress. The Railway Station entrance and canopy works are now complete.

PENNINE REACH

The works on Blackburn bus station continue to progress along with the National Grid works at Salford, which will then enable the footway improvements to Salford and Railway Road to take place with Jubilee Street to follow on.

Branch Road junction works are substantially complete. At Earcroft, the new residents-only car park is open. Highway construction works at Ewood are well underway with the link road section under construction. These works will complete in summer 2015. We continue to work with BRFC on match day car parking arrangements. At Furthergate works to widen the 700m section of road between Copy Nook and Furthergate and the new 1.1km link road between Burnley Close and the Red Lion roundabout are underway. The new Siemens urban traffic control (UTMC) system is being upgraded and will link traffic junctions on the Pennine Reach route.

HASLINGDEN ROAD IMPROVEMENTS

Works are advancing on the Government "Pinch Point" funded scheme to improve the Haslingden Road approach to Junction 5, M65. The outbound carriageway outside Ensor Building Supplies is being widened to provide 2 outbound lanes and earthworks to Guide Roundabout will pave the way for the new 4-arm signalised junction. The Council has also begun signalisation of the Junction 5 roundabout on behalf of the Highways Agency. The schemes are intended to ease congestion on this principal route and will be completed by the end of March 2015.

TOWN CENTRES

Delivery of the Blackburn Town Centre 12 point plan continues to see retail core vacancy rates fall. During the last year 14 new businesses have been supported and incentivised with additional business rate relief to take empty properties in the area around Northgate and King William Street. 3 more businesses will open soon. 12 new businesses have benefited from small

grant assistance, many used to improve shop fronts and premises. The vacancy rate in the target area is now in-line with vacancy rates across the wider town centre and nationally at around 17.5%. An evaluation and financial review of the 12 Point Plan is taking place with a view to developing a revised plan for delivery in 2015/16. As an early indicator of 2014 Christmas trading, car park use in the 6 weeks leading up to and including the Christmas period in Blackburn Town Centre increased significantly with Feilden Street recording a 15% increase in pay on foot users compared with 2013.

MARKETS REDEVELOPMENT SITE

Land assembly in connection with the Markets redevelopment site is now complete and planning is underway for demolition of the Exchange offices, although demolition cannot start until the temporary bus station has closed and the new bus station is operational. The Markets site developer is expected to submit a planning application for redevelopment within the first 6 months of the New Year.

EMPLOYMENT AND SKILLS

The Council, Blackburn College and Via Partnership are organising an event on Thursday 5 March 2015 at the new Blackburn Leisure Centre. This is titled Myfirstjob@blackburnanddarwen and coincides with National Careers Week. Hive members and national employers will be present to promote apprenticeships/employment opportunities as well as offering placements for those seeking work experience. Apprenticeship vacancies are now advertised on the Council's website (see A – Z section and the jobs page).

HIVE AND BUSINESS ENGAGEMENT

220 local organisations are now members of the Hive business leaders' network. The Council has undertaken an annual business survey receiving 129 responses on 2014 performance and prospects for 2015. The inaugural 2015 Hive Blackburn and Darwen Business Awards will open for entries in January, focussing on celebrating the very best of business in the Borough.

BLACKBURN MARKET

Blackburn Market occupancy following the Christmas period stands at 82% of lettable floor space (and 75% in number of stalls). New seating has been introduced in the food court increasing the number of covers and income generated by the café traders. New WiFi will be introduced next month allowing us to capture data and promote individual businesses to shoppers. In advance of the bus station opening automatic doors are to be installed on Ainsworth Street to facilitate footfall.

DARWEN MARKET

Darwen Market occupancy stands at 73%. The Annex is fully occupied with the possibility being explored of providing further units. 6 day occupancy remains at 89% with the 3 day at 54%. On-line interest has picked up over the last month and we are introducing an option to be able to apply for a stall on-line