

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR REGENERATION

COUNCILLOR MAUREEN BATESON PORTFOLIO CO-ORDINATING
DIRECTOR: Brian Bailey
DATE: 23rd April 2015

CATHEDRAL QUARTER UPDATE

Cathedral Quarter construction works for the office and hotel, public realm and bus interchange are still on track to complete by the end of September 2015. Premier Inn is due to open on 7 November creating 40 jobs. They attended the recent 'My First Job' event and were delighted with the response and the number of young people registering their interest.

The Council arranged a breakfast event in Manchester on 25 March with 25 agents in attendance. This was aimed at raising awareness of the development and highlighting opportunities and feedback has been positive. Enquiries are being followed up with potential occupiers for the office floors and retail unit with site visits being arranged.

RAIL

The Council has been working with the Department for Transport and Rail North on the specification for the next round of rail service franchises which they will be tendering for in the near future. I am delighted that the new franchises will include an enhanced service between Blackburn and Manchester, funded by the Department for Transport, as well as major improvements to the quality of the trains themselves. This is an extremely positive step and is thanks in large part to this Council's sustained involvement in the negotiations over a lengthy period.

More locally we will also be involved in a project to improve the waiting environment at Pleasington Station, working with vulnerable adults, college students and a newly formed local family group called 'Young Weavers'.

HASLINGDEN ROAD IMPROVEMENTS

Work to improve traffic flows at Haslingden Road and the M65 Junction 5 is well under way. Signalisation of the motorway roundabout is complete and an extra lane to take outbound traffic between School Lane and the motorway is open. The next phase of the work, which is now progressing, is the replacement of the roundabout at School Lane with a new controlled junction.

FRECKLETON STREET

Contractors are now on site working on the first phase of the link road which will connect Montague Street with the Wainwright Bridge. This first phase involves an archaeological investigation of former buildings followed by the preparation of the site for the main phase of construction of the road. The Council has also now received tenders for the main road construction contract and intends to appoint a contractor in the near future with a view to work

starting on site later in the spring. As the road work progresses we will be turning our attention to bringing forward the sites for future development that will be created along the route.

EMPLOYMENT AND SKILLS

Over 350 young people attended 'My First Job' on 5 March, one of the largest jobs fairs in the borough. The event was held at the new Blackburn Sports and Leisure Centre sports hall and gave employers and training providers an opportunity to promote over 200 jobs, apprenticeships and work placement opportunities. Employers included members of the Hive Business Leaders Network offering a variety of jobs across different sectors. Advice was also given on setting up in business and becoming a young entrepreneur.

HIVE AND BUSINESS ENGAGEMENT

The Centre for Cities 2015 outlook (released January) identified a net gain of 1,800 private sector jobs between 2012 and 2013, ranking Blackburn 7th best performer out of the 64 largest towns and cities in the UK.

On 3 March a 'Doing Business in Blackburn' session was facilitated by NW Insider and attended by 100 local businesses and partners at Ewood Park. Businesses involved in panel discussions included Chubb, highlighting their announcement of a new £4m Shadsworth campus due for completion in 2016, MDA at Walker Park and Chase Templeton. Overall, business confidence within the borough is improving as evidenced by the 2014 BwD Business Survey. However, in line with the aims and pledges within the Borough's Plan for Prosperity (2014-20) our joint work with business needs to focus on ensuring that residents benefit from a growing economy.

The first Hive Blackburn and Darwen Business Awards to be held at Blackburn Cathedral at the end of April will celebrate the best of business from across the borough. Finalists include Precision Polymer Engineering (International award), WEC Group (Investing in the future award), Woodscape (Manufacturing award) and Prefix Systems (Newcomer award).

At quarter 3, through the Assistance to Industry scheme and programmes delivered in partnership with Regenerate Pennine Lancashire, the Council has helped to create over 200 jobs in the borough, assisted over 60 new businesses to start-up and advised over 60 businesses on their growth plans. Over £800,000 of grant has been awarded to local businesses which has levered in over £3.8m of private sector investment.

BLACKBURN BID

The BID recently held its AGM where actions on future priorities were agreed to promote environmental improvements, safety and security and image. Plans for two keynote events, 'Countryside Comes to Town' on 20 June and the second Heritage Festival on 12/13 September, are progressing well with visitor numbers expected to be in excess of 30,000 for each event.