

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR REGENERATION

COUNCILLOR PHIL RILEY

**PORTFOLIO CO-ORDINATING
DIRECTOR: IAN RICHARDSON**

DATE: APRIL 2017

NEW STRUCTURE

A new departmental structure is currently being implemented to ensure that:

- The Council contributes fully to the emerging changes associated with the Combined Authority
- The Council maximises external funding as more and more funding becomes available through competitive initiatives
- The department makes its contribution to the corporate savings targets
- The Council delivers growth in housing and commercial floorspace

This new structure sees Brian Bailey heading up Strategy and Funding and Ian Richardson leading a new department associated with Growth and Development and incorporating the following sections:

- One Public Estate
- Corporate Buildings and Projects
- Development Management
- Building Control
- Highways and Network Management
- Transport Policies and Programmes
- Growth and Infrastructure
- Town Centres

The Growth and Development Department will place a heavy emphasis on creating a “can do” approach to developing and investing in the Borough.

CATHEDRAL QUARTER UPDATE

Office lettings are close to completion with Govnet and Capita now occupying the 1st and 2nd floors and Organic Group recently occupying the 3rd floor. Further announcements for new tenants on the 4th and 5th floors are planned for this quarter once the leases are completed. There is now just half the second floor available and agents are progressing interest. Marketing for the ground floor restaurant and small retail unit has been relaunched at the end of March on the back of a very successful opening for Turtle Bay.

The office building was shortlisted for the British Council of Offices Awards for Excellence 2017 by BDP architects and it has also been shortlisted for the North West RICS Award for best commercial building which will be announced in May. Cathedral Square will also now host a flagship partnership event between the BBC and Festival of Making on May 6th and 7th.

ASSISTANCE TO INDUSTRY- LATEST AWARDS

In Blackburn, grants have recently been awarded for property and signage improvements to 7 businesses in the town centre.

A number of small independent businesses have also come forward to open businesses which add to the development of Blackburn town centre's Food & Beverage offer which, unlike Darwen, has up to now been under represented.

Grants have been awarded to 10 businesses in Northgate, Darwen Street, King Street and King William Street extending life and animation to streets outside the Mall from daytime through to evening.

BUS SERVICES

A number of changes are planned to both the borough's commercial and subsidised bus network. Travel Assist services in Darwen are changing from 24th April to give a more even spread of services to more areas of the Town on more days of the week. Spring Vale and Cranberry Close will get more services as will Darwen Health Centre.

Unfortunately the commercial TA5 and TA6 serving Royal Blackburn Hospital, North Road and Queens Park areas (introduced in January on a 3 month trial period) will be withdrawn from the same date, due to lack of patronage. Demand responsive services operated by Travel Assist and Dial A Ride will still be available to residents in these areas.

Shadsworth Shuttle evening and Sunday services operated by Transdev and serving Royal Blackburn Hospital will be reduced from the 21st May and will follow the daytime route along Haslingden Road. Service 4 evening and Sunday services to Mill Hill and Leyburn Road will be withdrawn. The 39 Pleasington Cemetery service will be withdrawn from 28th May 2017, to be replaced by a Volunteer Driver service operated by the Royal Voluntary Service. Drivers are now being actively recruited by RVS via the Council's Shuttle Newspaper.

HIGHWAY MAINTENANCE

As the Council became Highway Authority back in 1998, claims for "slips and trips" became a major financial burden with around 500 claims per year costing the Council over £1.2m at the peak.

A policy driven highway inspection regime together with capital investment of over £10m through the Network Recovery Programme and a robust defence to all claims has, over the years, seen the desired effect of reducing this burden on the Council's budget. The 2016/17 fiscal year has seen the number of claims and the projected payouts being reduced to the lowest levels since the Council became unitary with only 50 claims being submitted and payouts totalling £140,000.

This highlights that Blackburn with Darwen is now seen as an authority that has a strong defence against third party highway claims.

The Council continues to pursue investment in the Highways Network and has submitted a challenge fund application for around £1.8m to fund investment in areas where full highway reconstruction is required which goes beyond what the Council would normally be expected to fund from mainstream funding.

DARWEN THREE DAY MARKET

Options for the area currently occupied by Darwen three day market are being developed in close collaboration with the Darwen Partnership Board. These options aim to enhance the area and create flexible space that can respond to the varying needs of a busy Town Centre environment. Demolition of the former three day market building can only progress once planning consent has been granted for the future use of the area and this is expected to be in place by the end of the summer with demolition commencing in September 2017.

