

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

COUNCILLOR PHIL RILEY

**PORTFOLIO CO-ORDINATING
DIRECTOR: MARTIN KELLY
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This report provides a brief update on progress with key development priorities in this reporting period.

Place Priority 4: Connected Communities

Growth Deal Transport Schemes

The Council is now into the final year of delivery of Government's "Local Growth Fund 3" transport infrastructure programme. The South East Blackburn package commenced pre-start works in February with ecological surveys, site clearance and set-up, tree felling and hedge removal all undertaken. Progress on diversion and protection of statutory utilities has also been made since February on sections of Haslingden Road.

The scheme has been disrupted by COVID-19 which has effected civil engineering and construction schemes across the Country. Highways construction works have now recommenced with the widening of Haslingden Road and the creation of a new link road between Roman Road and Guide progressing simultaneously. The project will address congestion, improve air quality and pedestrian facilities, and enable further development of employment and housing opportunities in the South East Blackburn area.

Additional Local Transport Plan infrastructure funding

The first tranche of the Department for Transport's £225M COVID-19 Emergency Active Travel Fund has been confirmed, with Blackburn with Darwen receiving the full £77,000 allocation. The project aims to build on the public's desire to get out in the Borough to walk and cycle in order to make sustainable transport journeys as part of healthier lifestyles.

The Witton Park to Blackburn Town Centre "Stride and Ride Corridor" scheme will provide a permanent safe walking and cycling route from Witton Park to Blackburn Town Centre through a mix of permanent cycle lanes, thermoplastic distancing signage, and the use of bolt-down lane separation.

The Council will work with schools along the corridor and Blackburn College to promote the scheme which gives a great opportunity to encourage safer walking and cycling, reduce traffic and increase road safety. The project is supported by the current DfT Access Fund "Connecting East Lancashire" project.

Place Priority 5: Safe and Clean Environment

Highways Capital Improvements

The Highways capital improvement road treatment and resurfacing programme is currently out to tender and we hope to have delivered all sites

by September 2020. We are still finalising our intended programme for delivery of more schemes from the additional Pothole Action Fund and once approved, we plan to have the repairs completed by the end of March 2021.

Flooding

Unfortunately several areas of Blackburn were affected with flooding following very heavy rain on the evening of Tuesday 16th June, leading to 30 residents and businesses suffering from internal flooding. We continue to assist our residents to recover and have commenced investigations working collaboratively with partners from United Utilities and the Environment Agency.

Place Priority 6: Strong, Growing Economy to Enable Social Mobility

Growth Programme

An updated Growth Programme for 2020/21, taking into consideration the impacts of the COVID-19 and focusing on economic recovery, informed by Government's approach which will be set out in the coming weeks, will be taken to a future Executive Board for approval in the Autumn.

Darwen Town Deal Update

The second Darwen Town Deal Board Meeting was held (virtually) on 26 June. The Board, chaired by Wayne Wild, were updated on progress and considered and approved the appointment of consultants to develop the Darwen Town Investment Plan (TIP). The Board agreed the need to develop and submit the strongest possible TIP by January 2021. There are earlier opportunities to submit our TIP, but given the scale of the task and the quality of submission required to maximise Government support, completing this task by the end of this year seems like the right approach.

It should be noted that we are not in competition with other Town Deal areas with regard to securing new Government investment of up to £25M for Darwen and submitting in January will not put us at any detriment.

Government has recently announced that £750,000 will be allocated to our Town Deal to support the early delivery of project priorities that will feature in the Board's TIP. The Board will be required to update Government in the coming weeks and identify early priorities for investment.

Blakey Moor / Northgate

The planning application for Blakey Moor Terrace has been submitted by architects, Group Ginger, on behalf of the Council. The application for conversion of the Terrace to 2 units including new through access and public realm improvements to the rear, included detailed design and new visuals and will come to July Planning Committee. Although COVID-19 has delayed planned works on Northgate and Lord Street West, schemes are still being progressed and it is hoped that designs for a number of properties will be coming forward to planning in the coming months for private sector schemes on Northgate.

Blackburn and Darwen Town Centre Updates

Although our Town Centres have been open for essential services and retail throughout the lockdown period, non-essential retail re-opened on the 15th June. The Mall, markets and other retailers had to comply with COVID-19 safe requirements and undertake risk assessments, as set out by Government. The Town Centres opened safely and although busy in the first week, footfall is at least 50% down on previous years with many customers still not ready to return with footfall significantly affected by employers encouraging staff to work from home.

The hospitality industry opened on Saturday, 4 July with around 50% of bars and restaurants in Blackburn town centre with more re-opening in Darwen. Significant restrictions have been placed on these outlets despite social distancing requirements reducing to “1m plus” though it is expected to take time before all customers have the confidence to return to our Town Centres.

Housing Developments

Following completion of a joint marketing exercise and an Informal Tender, a housing developer has been selected to purchase the Council land at Ellison Fold Way in Darwen, and to take forward a detailed planning application for a residential development in late 2020, which will include the adjacent privately-owned land and deliver a combined total of around 320 new family dwellings.

Seddon are scheduled to commence development in August, for the first phase of the Griffin clearance site to provide 56 new homes. Development has also recently commenced by Great Places, who are building new affordable homes at Bowen Street and Shorrocks Lane (former Laneside Care Home) in Mill Hill.

A new Masterplan for the development of the Bank Hey major housing site in Blackburn was adopted by the Executive Board in June. A planning application for development of the first phase is expected later this year.

The Council’s first online Planning & Highways Committee Meeting took place in June, during which planning permission was granted for 435 new high-quality dwellings at the award-winning Gib Lane major housing site. Planning permission is now in place for the whole Gib Lane Masterplan site, which was allocated for development in the Council’s current Local Plan.

Commercial Developments

Progress is continuing to be made at the Milking Lane development site, which the Council is progressing as part of the Council’s Joint Venture Company – Barnfield Blackburn Ltd. Planning permission has been secured for the new link road through the site (and outline permission for the development plots). Planning conditions are to be discharged next month to enable a start on site in August, with completion of the road in 2021.

Following the success of the Milking Lane Joint Venture in bringing forward a long-term stalled brownfield site, the Council’s July Executive Board has been asked to consider the addition of a new site to the Joint Venture portfolio – the

site at Chapels South in Darwen which is allocated for employment development.

One Public Estate (OPE)

There has been a further delay with the launch of the next OPE funding round (OPE 8) due to COVID-19 and funding is now expected to be considered as part of the next Government Spending Review, although there are no definite timescales. There is likely to be an emphasis on projects which support post COVID-19 economic recovery and Net Zero Carbon initiatives.