

**DRAFT FOR DISCUSSION**  
**Darwen Town Deal Board**  
Communications Strategy 2020

---

The Darwen Town Deal is described as a once in a generation opportunity to make a real difference to the town and surrounding areas.

Up to £25m is available and the Darwen Town Deal Board - which is made up of private and public sector members - is developing a strong Town Investment Plan to secure maximum investment support from Government.

The aim is to develop a robust long-term plan, with Town Deal investment supporting prioritised projects that will shift the dial on economic growth and improve the lives of residents and their life chances.

Board members have been selected with the skills and expertise needed to develop the strongest strategic business case possible to secure and leverage the public and private funding needed – this is fundamental as the full amount of Town Deal funding is not guaranteed.

Experienced consultants have also been appointed to support the board in developing the long-term plan, which is focused on the ambitions for the area over the next 10 to 15 years and beyond.

The key task for the board is to prepare and submit the Darwen Investment Plan, consistent with Government guidance, by no later than 31 January, 2021.

This Communications Strategy aims to support this key task by setting out how the Board will clearly, positively and regularly engage with the key stakeholders who they are working to represent – including residents, businesses partners and community groups.

This approach will be developed further in conjunction with the specialist consultancy team supporting the development of the Board's Investment Plan, as targeted public and business engagement is a key element in developing the Plan.

Given on-going COVID-19 impacts, and the evolving management of the situation, the Board's communication and engagement approach will need to be regularly reviewed and adapted.

**Context**

In September 2019, the Government invited 101 towns to develop proposals for a new Town Deal Fund with more than £3bn being made available across the country.

The Darwen Town Deal Board has been formed to drive forward a Town Investment Plan - a place-focused investment plan with the opportunity to secure up to £25m in Government funding to transform the area.

(By exception, Town Investment Plans can secure up to £50M in investment support from Government but such plans would need to demonstrate their ability to deliver impacts of regional importance).

The plan needs to be ambitious and develop new growth and prosperity opportunities over the next 10/15 years.

It also needs to articulate a vision that reflects the priorities of community and business stakeholders.

Using Government capacity funding to support the development of the plan, the Board has now appointed highly-respected consultants Genecon, Feria Urbanisation and Chase Architecture.

The consultants are all locally-based with knowledge of the area – indeed architect Philip Thornton was born in the town – and they have been involved in projects involving Darwen so already have a good understanding of the area.

A work plan is being prepared to ensure the submission of the Darwen Investment Plan by the deadline of 31 January, 2021.

Their work will help shape the key themes identified for the Investment Plan and therefore the key messaging for this Communications Strategy, which will remain a working document to complement the work of the Board.

*Early themes highlighted at the first Board meeting of the Darwen Town Deal included:*

- Darwen Town Centre Transformation Programme
- Darwen Employment and Housing Growth Programme
- Connected Town and Communities Programme
- A *Future First* Business Growth Programme
- Darwen Clean Energy Programme
- Greener Darwen Programme
- Darwen Icons and Creativity Programme
- Darwen Youth Programme
- Darwen Social Infrastructure Programme

These initial high level themes will be reviewed and refined in light of the economic and spatial analysis undertaken in support of the plan.

### **Objectives**

The three primary objectives of this Communications Strategy are:

1. To ensure a consistent approach to all external communications activity relating to the work of the Board and the Darwen Town Deal;
2. To effectively engage with all appropriate stakeholder groups; and
3. To raise the profile of the Board and develop and promote an ambitious vision and plan for Darwen.

### **Board Members**

The Darwen Town Deal Board has 13 members who can act as positive Comms Ambassadors.

## Appendix 1

In terms of media relations, a clear protocol has been agreed by all members naming the Chair as key spokesperson for the group as well as lead for signing off all proactive and reactive communications.

It is important that this protocol is strictly adhered to in order to ensure a consistent and cohesive approach to sharing key messages.

The Board will be supported with communications activity and media relations by Blackburn with Darwen Council's Communications Team.

Currently, Natalie Banks, Digital Communications Team Leader, has been assigned as the lead and primary contact.

A copy of the full protocol is included as **Appendix 2**.

*Full list of members:*

Name	Board Position	Role/Organisation
Wayne Wild	Chair	Group Commercial Director of WEC Group Ltd
Cllr Phil Riley	Vice Chair	Executive Member for Growth and Development for Blackburn with Darwen Council
Jake Berry		MP for Rossendale and Darwen
Cllr John Slater		Leader of the Conservative Group for Blackburn with Darwen Council
Cllr John East		Leader of Darwen Town Council
John Sturgess		Chair of Darwen Town Centre Partnership
Gary Aspden		Adidas Global Brand and Design Consultant
Miranda Barker		Chief Executive of East Lancashire Chamber and Lancashire Enterprise Partnership Board Director
John Wilkinson		Regional Director of Suez Recycling and Recovery UK
Janet Pearce		Chair of Keep Darwen Tidy
Glenda Brindle		Chair of Governors at Aldridge Academy
Dr Fazal Dad		Principal at Blackburn College

Steve Waggott		Chief Executive of Blackburn Rovers
---------------	--	-------------------------------------

A new email address is to be created as a single point of contact for board members to forward on any contacts from stakeholders.

This will be closely monitored by the lead officers at Blackburn with Darwen Council to ensure consistency in responses.

**Audience**

The revised boundary for the Darwen Town Deal includes Darwen, Lower Darwen, Darwen Tower, Tockholes, Belmont, Hoddlesden, Edgworth and Turton.

The current area is home to an estimated population of 32,000 people with almost 800 businesses providing 8,000 jobs.

Audience	Channels
Residents (inc. interested community groups)	<p>Dedicated website – with contact form – this could be developed to include latest news section <b>TBC</b></p> <p>Social media – dedicated Darwen Town Deal Board page on Facebook/Twitter – <b>TBC</b></p> <p>Email bulletin – directly updating residents who have registered their interest</p> <p>Prominent signage – if budget allows.</p> <p>BwD Council channels (including Shuttle news page, website and established social media pages).</p> <p>Channels available to Board members – please see <b>Appendix 2.</b></p> <p>Local media outlets – including Lancashire Telegraph, Lancashire Live and BBC Radio Lancashire. Close links already established through BwD Council Comms Team.</p> <p>Regional media – including BBC North West Tonight and Granada Reports for major announcements.</p> <p>Shuttle magazine – annual publication distributed by Blackburn with Darwen Council.</p>

Audience	Channels
	<p>Local social media forums – including Darwen Then and Now.</p> <p>Notice boards in the market and town centre.</p>
Businesses	<p>Full list of local businesses to be compiled using Business Rates data.</p> <p>The dedicated Darwen Town Deal website – this could be developed to include a section specific to businesses <b>TBC</b></p> <p>Social media content targeted at the business audience</p> <p>Business email bulletin – directly updating businesses which have registered their interest</p> <p>Prominent signage – if budget allows.</p> <p>BwD Council channels (including Shuttle news page, website, established social media pages – particularly Twitter and The Hive network).</p> <p>Channels available to Board members – please see <b>Appendix 3</b> – particular focus on the East Lancashire Chamber audience.</p> <p>Local business media outlets – including Lancashire Business View, business pages in the Lancashire Telegraph, Lancashire Live and BBC Radio Lancashire. Close links already established through BwD Council Comms Team.</p> <p>Regional media – including BBC North West Tonight and Granada Reports for major announcements.</p> <p>Business networking events – local and regional.</p>
Community partners	To be developed further with the Board and project consultants.

Audience	Channels
Investors and developers	Again, to be fully developed further with Board and project consultants in-line with the proposed Town Investment Plan.

As the key themes of the Darwen Investment Plan are agreed, a more detailed work plan for how to best communicate and engage with each stakeholder will be drafted and agreed with the Board.

Initially, the updates will be generated from the outcomes of the regular Board meetings – in a bid to be open and transparent the agenda and minutes will be available online at [blackburn.gov.uk](http://blackburn.gov.uk).

Where possible, reports should be made available to the Comms Lead to be able to prepare updates that can be signed off and shared in a timely manner.

The focus should always be on proactive rather than reactive.

### **Key Messages**

The primary task of the Board is to develop and submit an ambitious Darwen Investment Plan by 31 January 2021.

This needs to be consistent with Government guidance - to deliver new growth opportunities for the area.

Darwen can secure up to £25m of Government funding as part of the Town Deal initiative, though the final funding allocation will be subject to the quality of the Darwen Investment Plan.

Town Deal investment alone will not deliver long-term transformational change. It is important the Board align and leverage the investment plans of other key public and private sector partners in support of the Darwen Investment Plan.

The Board is chaired by Wayne Wild – Group Commercial Director of WEC Group – the town’s largest private sector employer.

It is a strategic board made up of business and community leaders,

The Board has the skills and expertise needed to be able to develop a strong Darwen Investment Plan.

The Board will work with residents, businesses and community partners to develop the Darwen investment Plan.

It is one of 101 towns across the country invited to apply for £3.6 billion of Government funding.

An extra £750,000 has been made available to the Board to accelerate projects it has identified. Initial proposals include the restoration of Darwen Tower, investment in the

facilities at AFC Darwen and the development of the Junction4 Skate Park as part of a wider Darwen “sports village” opportunity.

The Darwen Town Deal funding is a once in a generation opportunity to transform the town.

It is for strategic projects that will shift the dial on economic growth and improve the lives of residents and their life chances.

The Board is representing the views of those it serves – including residents, businesses, partners and community groups.

It will actively engage with those groups and listen to their views as it develops the investment plan.

The Plan will articulate an ambitious vision and growth priorities for Darwen for the next 10 to 15 years and beyond.

### **Evaluation**

In order to ensure the Communications Strategy is effective and meeting the proposed objectives, it will be regularly reviewed and the impact evaluated.

Key indicators for success will include:

- The number of residents who know about the Darwen Town Deal and the Darwen Town Deal Board
- The turnout for engagement events where participation is encouraged
- The response to online engagement activity
- The number of interactions with residents – through the dedicated website and those then signing up for regular email updates
- The reach of social media activity across the platforms
- Positive coverage in the local press and regional news outlets

A baseline and target to be achieved will need to be agreed for each indicator.

# Darwen Town Deal Board

## Media Relations Protocol

---

Media relations will play an important role in updating local residents and businesses on the work of the Darwen Town Deal Board and the development of the Darwen Investment Plan for Government.

It will also help inform stakeholders about public consultation events – actively encouraging interested parties to have their say on key themes for potential funding.

The Communications Team at Blackburn with Darwen Council will help provide support to the Board with a communications plan to be developed and agreed with members. It will include a multi-channel approach with media relations forming just one part of the strategy.

This protocol will help to ensure a seamless approach to clearly communicating key messages externally.

### **Media Relations Framework:**

- All media enquiries should be directed to the Blackburn with Darwen Communications Team.
- A response will be drafted with the Chair, who will be the key spokesperson and will have final sign-off on all statements and press releases.
- In the event that the Chair of the Board is unavailable for comment, the Vice Chair will become the nominated key spokesperson.
- Other Board members will be quoted to reflect the theme and expertise within the Board. These statements will be co-ordinated by the Communications Team and signed-off by the Chair.
- A communications plan agreed by the Board will identify milestones and opportunities to share key messaging and information with the media with the option of press briefings, where appropriate.

As part of the framework, Board members are reminded of the need to respect confidential and sensitive information, as outlined in the Darwen Town Deal Board Code of Conduct.