

## **Darwen Town Deal Board**

### **Update on Town Deal Accelerated Capital Projects**

**Director of Growth & Development, Blackburn with Darwen Council**

**24 July 2020**

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#### **Introduction**

The Board meeting on 10 July considered and approved three project proposals - Darwen Tower, J4 Skate Park and AFC Darwen - to benefit from the Government's early award of an additional £750,000 to accelerate their delivery.

The Government's funding contribution is additional to the final funding allocation the Darwen Deal will secure, which is ultimately dependent on the submission of the strongest possible Town Investment Plan by 31 January, 2021.

This report provides further detail on the three project proposals and an additional request for feasibility funding support for an emerging project proposal - ANCA, Aldridge North Cricket Academy - which complements the emerging development of a Darwen Sports Village opportunity of both scale and quality.

#### **Project Proposals**

The Board recognised the need to move quickly to seize the additional funding opportunity provided by Government. It was also recognised that the three projects considered and agreed by the Board can:

- Meet Government spending requirements;
- Comply with the financial assurance requirements of Blackburn with Darwen Council, as the Board's accountable body;
- Evidence a significant level of commitment from project sponsors, including the ability to secure additional financial support for their project proposal;
- Deliver strategic outcomes that will support the early delivery of the Board's Town Investment Plan - its objectives priorities and outcomes - with the potential for projects to be further developed over the coming years; and
- Signal the ambition and relevance of the Town Deal initiative to improving the long-term prospects of Darwen.

The three project proposals and feasibility analysis are set out in more detail below.

#### **Darwen Tower**

The Tower was built in 1898 by public subscription to celebrate Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee. The Tower is a Grade 2 listed building.

This project would repair the Tower and ensure its long-term sustainability and allow this landmark to remain open to the public. The Tower is currently in very poor

condition and supported by scaffolding. The project sponsor, Blackburn with Darwen Council, would work with volunteers, Lancashire Wildlife Trust, walking groups, and other landowners, including United Utilities and Mr David Livesey, to improve paths and physical access to the Tower and across the Moors.

The project would explore opportunities to illuminate the Tower by using sustainable technologies while ensuring no adverse impacts on wildlife, consistent with planning regulations. CCTV security would also be a feature of this proposal.

This is well-developed project proposal to repair and upgrade the Tower, the emblem of Darwen, and a landmark of regional significance, with strong connectivity to the town centre. The walk to the Tower was named as one of UK's top 10 in the Guardian's Great Winter Walks 2018.

The project proposal is costed at c. £310,000. Community fundraising activities, led by Darwen Rotary, have secured £70,000. Darwen Town Council is intending to contribute £15,000, subject to formal approval.

It is proposed that a maximum contribution of up to £225,000 be provided by the Town Deal's accelerated projects fund.

There is also the opportunity to secure further public funding from national funding bodies, including the Heritage Lottery Fund, for future phases of development.

Given the listed status of the Tower, there is requirement to use Lime Mortar to re-point walls to ensure they are weatherproof and watertight. These works will need to be undertaken in dry weather with ambient temperatures above 5°C, therefore the main works will start in March 2021 and complete September 2021.

The specialist building contractor would be in place by January 2021 with Town Deal funding committed by 31 March 2021.

Work to improve paths and access to the Tower would commence in March 2021 and complete by July 2021. These works would be undertaken by Blackburn with Darwen Council.

Required building consents and planning permissions would be secured by autumn / winter 2020.

The Tower is the responsibility of Blackburn with Darwen Council and they would be the lead project sponsor with the support of community partners.

#### **J4 Skate Park**

The Skate Park is a regional facility, based in Darwen, located next to Darwen Vale School, and serves over 5,000 active BMX, skateboard and scooter users.

The proposal would create a new Urban Sports Village, which would increase the current capacity of the facility by 300% by adding a new outdoor, all-weather arena that meets Olympic (and COVID secure) standards. There is the potential to establish Darwen as the Northern-base of the British Olympic BMX and skateboard teams.

The enhanced venue would have the capability and capacity to host Olympic trials, national and world championships.

The venue and its provision is capable of delivering inclusive and high quality alternative education and apprenticeship / employment opportunities to some of our most disadvantaged young people.

The proposal also intends to deliver new business premises and employment opportunities in support services, and retail and food concessions, located in designer freight containers, pioneered in Box Park, Shoreditch, London, and many leading European cities.

The proposal offers the opportunity for a further phase of development, including the provision of a hotel to support extended training camps of GB teams and provide summer camp / holiday experiences for enthusiasts / new starters and their families and friends.

The project proposal is costed at £500,000. The first development phase of this project requires £250,000 in Town Deal funding which would be matched with a similar level of funding secured from Sports England, British Cycling and business sponsors.

Future phases of development would be set within the emerging Town Investment Plan.

Agreement has been reached in principle with Darwen Vale (Aldridge Academy Group) regarding a lease for the additional land required to support the expansion of the Skate Park. This position will be formalised in the coming weeks.

Required planning permissions would be secured by autumn / winter 2020 with construction works commencing in early 2021.

The new facility would aim to open by the end of summer 2021.

The project sponsor is J4 Skate Park CIC.

### **AFC Darwen – Project Legend**

The AFC Darwen was formed in 1870. The Club is one of the oldest established football teams in the world and has endeavoured to evolve, compete and continue to serve the local community. Unlike most amateur and professional clubs, AFC Darwen is debt free but resources are limited in delivering a step-change in existing facilities.

Project Legend is designed to ensure the Club remains viable and at the heart of the local community. The project proposal would deliver a new two-storey multi-functional building that will include a new function room/bar, offices, and classroom and boardroom facilities. The Club have a 75-year lease and the ground is ultimately owned by BwD Council.

The project proposal is costed at £250,000 and leverage private investments and national competition funding of c. £550,000 that has already helped to deliver a new world class 3G pitch and changing room facilities. As a not-for-profit organisation there is no other funding available from the Club. Other national sport funding schemes do not cover these facility requirements.

The project proposal would be complementary and add significant value to the emerging Darwen Sports Village development opportunity.

Further phases of development and opportunities for co-location with other sporting assets could be considered as part of the emerging Town Investment Plan.

Planning permission would be required in autumn / winter 2020. Once planning has been secured, the design, contracting and construction is estimated to complete within 6/7 months.

The project applicant is AFC Darwen.

### **ANCA - Aldridge North Cricket Academy**

Since the last Board meeting, in developing the Skate Park proposal, it has become clear there is the additional prospect of developing a complementary, high quality, publically accessible new sporting facility at Darwen Vale School – ANCA, the Aldridge North Cricket Academy.

There is potential to develop an elite cricket academy (including state-of-the-art indoor bowling and batting lanes with a Premier League standard square and outfield) for local boys and girls, hosted and operated by the Aldridge Education Multi-Academy Trust (MAT), supported by the coaching and development programmes of Lancashire County Cricket Club and the English Cricket Board, with links to Darwen Cricket Club. There is also the opportunity to make this facility the permanent home of Lancashire County Cricket Club's women's team.

A similar facility (BACA) costing £2M has been recently established by the Aldridge Education MAT in Brighton with Sussex County Cricket Club and the English Cricket Board.

It is proposed the Town Deal provides up to £25,000 to match an in-kind contribution of the Aldridge Education MAT to undertake a feasibility analysis to assess the planning and delivery implications in bringing forward this proposal while setting an overarching vision for ANCA and the Skate Park at the Darwen Vale site.

Subject to Board approval, this feasibility analysis would accelerate consideration of ANCA as a priority project within the Town Investment Plan.

The project sponsor is the Aldridge Education Multi-Academy Trust.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The three projects and the feasibility analysis would fully utilise the £750,000 made available by Government.

The development of the Town Investment Plan will create further opportunities to strengthen these assets and cross-linkages. The Board's Plan will allow other cultural and sporting opportunities to come forward as part of a compelling investment programme that drives new growth opportunities and supports a healthy, creative and dynamic Darwen.

The Board's decision to accelerate the delivery of these three projects and feasibility analysis proposal will be notified to Government by the deadline of 14 August. A letter of assurance will also be provided by Blackburn with Darwen Council, as the Board's accountable body.

Following receipt of the Government's additional funding, Blackburn with Darwen Council, as the Board's accountable body, will finalise funding agreements, including clawback provisions, key milestones and draw-down arrangements with scheme applicants, consistent with Government guidance and the Council's financial assurance framework.

The Board is asked to:

1. Note the contents of this report;
2. Request the Chair confirms to Government by the deadline of 14 August the Board's intention to allocate the additional funding support of £750,000 to accelerate the delivery of three projects (Darwen Tower, J4 Skate Park and AFC Darwen) and undertake a feasibility analysis (ANCA), as outlined in this report;
3. Note the Chief Executive of Blackburn with Darwen Council will provide a letter of assurance to Government in support of the Board's three projects and feasibility analysis;
4. Authorise the Director of Growth and Development and Chief Executive of Blackburn with Darwen Council, the Board's accountable body, to finalise funding agreements with the sponsors of the three projects and feasibility analysis, based on the information set out in this report, consistent with Government guidance and the Council's assurance framework; and
5. Request regular update reports on the progress made by the three projects and the feasibility analysis.