

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR GROWTH & DEVELOPMENT

COUNCILLOR PHIL RILEY

**PORTFOLIO CO-ORDINATING
DIRECTOR: MARTIN KELLY
DATE: 1 OCTOBER 2020**

This report provides a brief update on progress with key development priorities in this reporting period.

PLACE, PRIORITY 4: CONNECTED COMMUNITIES

South East Blackburn Growth Deal Major Transport Scheme

Construction works are well underway in relation to the final Local Growth Fund 3 scheme at South East Blackburn following the restart on site in July. Widening of Haslingden Road is advancing on the section between Lions Drive and Shadsworth Road with works so far focussing on utility diversions and excavations which will enable the construction of the widened carriageway. Hospital Barn buildings at Old Bank Lane have been demolished to enable the construction of the new Royal Blackburn Hospital roundabout entrance, with the original boundary stone wall to be removed. The line of the new link road between Roman Road and Guide is now visible, with drainage and swale construction works progressing well.

The project will improve congestion, improve air quality and pedestrian facilities, and enable further development of employment and housing opportunities in the South East Blackburn area.

Northgate / Sudell Cross / Whalley Range Connectivity Scheme

This £2.9M NPIF supported transport project has recently completed and provides improved links and access from Northgate to through traffic at Sudell Cross, and improved access to King George's Hall and the new Reel cinema development. In addition, direct access has been provided from Barbara Castle Way onto Tontine Street to provide easier access to local businesses and King George's Hall. Pedestrian facilities between the Town Centre and the Whalley Range area have also been significantly improved. The scheme will help to address congestion in the area and improve pedestrian and vehicle movement and access to significant new development sites and leisure and retail facilities.

Local Bus Services

New bus services are set to start on 5 October 2020 in Blackburn with Darwen, funded by the Department for Transport's Supported Bus Service Fund. A new peak time workers bus to Whitebirk Industrial Estate will begin, operated by Blackburn Private Hire. The direct link from Darwen to Royal Blackburn Hospital and Blackburn is being restored and will serve Chapels, Lower Darwen, Guide, North Road and Audley Range, operated by Moving People. Improved and more frequent services for the Darwen and Rural area will also be introduced by the Council and Travel Assist, with the local bus network once again extending to Eccleshill and Waterside. The Council is

working with operators and suppliers to introduce contactless card payments on these improved services, to go-live later in 2020.

PLACE, PRIORITY 5: SAFE AND CLEAN ENVIRONMENT

Highways Update

Surface dressing schemes completed: Hamilton Street / Belmont Road / Broadhead Road / Tockholes Road.

Resurfacing schemes, tender let to Tarmac with completion in October 2020: Higher Eanam / Brandy House Brow / Aqueduct Road / Borough Road, Darwen / Preston New Road / Livesey Branch Road.

PLACE PRIORITY 6: Strong, Growing Economy to Enable Social Mobility

Darwen Town Deal

The Darwen Town Deal Board, supported by the Council and a team of specialists, is working hard to prepare and submit the Darwen Town Investment Plan (TIP) to Government by 31 January 2021. Detailed analysis, engagement and project development is underway with the aim of securing up to £25M in Towns Fund investment for Darwen. However, in advance of submission, Government recently announced that £750,000 in acceleration funding will be provided to the Board. Three projects have been identified for early support, including restoration of the iconic Darwen Tower and expansion plans for AFC Darwen and the J4 Skate Park. The Board is also funding a feasibility study to assess the potential to establish a high performance cricket academy in the grounds of Darwen Vale High School.

Blackburn and Darwen Town Centres

Blackburn and Darwen town centres have worked hard in recent months to re-open, in line with national and local COVID restrictions. Footfall has increased since the early phase of the pandemic but levels are still c.50% below pre-COVID benchmarks. The marketing for both town centres will aim to reassure and attract shoppers, workers and visitors with a launch this Autumn. Marketing will focus on our COVID secure strengths and practices, as well as developing loyalty through competitions and promoting local shopping.

Blakey Moor / Northgate

Work has started on the internal strip-out at Blakey Moor Terrace to facilitate and finalise the detailed design on the redevelopment scheme. Subject to funding approvals, construction work is expected to begin on the terrace in the New Year for 12 months. Work to restore 14 & 20 Lord Street West (Prism Gallery and Studios) is scheduled to start in October/November for 10 weeks and phase 2 internal works to 35 Northgate (former Ribblesdale Hotel) will go out to tender this month. The project team are now working on plans to improve the front and side elevation of King George's Hall, including a new lighting scheme, more appropriate signage and remodelling the DDA entrance to enhance the building's curb appeal and accessibility.

Growth Programme

The Growth Programme for 2020/21, taking into consideration the impacts of the COVID pandemic and focusing on recovery, was approved at Executive Board on 10 September.

Housing Developments

Further to the Growth Programme, the following major housing projects involving Council land are progressing through the planning stages:

- A housing developer has been selected to purchase the Council land at Ellison Fold Way in Darwen and take forward a detailed planning application for residential development in late 2020. This will include the adjacent privately-owned land and deliver a combined total of around 320 new family dwellings.
- A public consultation is underway, until 5 October 2020, regarding a draft Masterplan for the Holden Fold Development Site (former Darwen Moorland High School Site). The site could deliver up to 430 new homes and associated infrastructure, including highway improvements and a contribution towards extending a local primary school.
- Countryside Homes and Together Housing are preparing to submit a planning application to build around 390 new homes around Fishmoor Drive. The application will incorporate two sites on Fishmoor Drive and one on Roman Road and infrastructure works on Fishmoor Drive.
- An outline planning application is currently being assessed for up to 165 new homes at Whalley Old Road, a partially Council owned site.

Other developments of Council land, at a more advanced stage, include the Griffin Redevelopment site, where Seddon Homes will shortly commence first phase delivery of 56 new homes. Two sites in Mill Hill are currently under construction by Great Places at Shorrocks Lane (former Laneside Care Home) and Bowen Street. Places for People are making good progress at their development in Alaska Street - the final clearance site in Infirmary Waterside.

Commercial Developments

Good progress is continuing to be made at the Milking Lane development site, which the Council is bringing forward as part of a Joint Venture Company – Barnfield Blackburn Ltd. Construction of the new link road through the site with associated flood prevention infrastructure began in August, and is to be completed in 2021.

At Wainwright Way, the new Home Bargains store is due to open this month. Disposal of the remaining plots is to be agreed later this year.

Encouragingly, enquiries are continuing to be received regarding the Council's development plots at Carl Fogarty Way. So far, one plot is under offer (for small business units), one plot is open for bids to be received in October, and another plot will be made available later this month. The final two plots will be made available in early 2021.

The new Blackburn cinema is in the final stages of build, with Barnfield Construction due to complete at the end of this month. This will enable Reel to start their internal fit-out in October and open by Christmas.

New Local Plan

Works to prepare a new Local Plan for the Borough are continuing. Public consultation on a draft Plan was due to take place from September, however this has been postponed until January 2021 due to the impacts of COVID-19. Further adjustments to the Local Plan timetable may be required in light of the Government's recent White Paper which set out radical changes to the national planning system.

One Public Estate (OPE)

Government announced the next OPE funding round (OPE 8) on 9 September with £30M of new competitive funding to support initiatives making better use of public land and buildings (£10m) and local authority housing developments via the Land Release Fund (£20m). The scale of funding available is relatively modest, but the Council will work with other Lancashire authorities to consider and prepare a joint submission to Government by the deadline of 12 November.