

REPORT OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

COUNCILLOR PHIL RILEY

Date: 23.3.23

MISSION: A more prosperous borough where no-one is left behind

Business Growth

As Leader of Blackburn with Darwen Council, I am a proud ambassador for our borough – a job made easy given we have so much to celebrate. Let's continue to talk up our towns, we really have a lot to shout about. To that end, we announced recently we're working to complete the purchase of the iconic Imperial Mill in Blackburn, home to the successful Lancashire Saw Company Limited. The owners are offering it for sale to the Council to help safeguard its future and opening it up to future restoration. This landmark building is an important part of the borough's and wider Lancashire's heritage. As a Council, it's important that we do all we can to safeguard buildings like these and use them to help create jobs for the future while also looking at improving our place and making the most of cultural and environmental opportunities.

A big part of the £100m Darwen Town Deal plans are those for the town centre. While still in the very early days, Darwen Market is set to benefit from millions of pounds worth of investment. Modern markets focused around food, are proving hugely successful in towns and cities across the North West and that's something we are looking at. Detailed designs are starting to be developed by Blackburn with Darwen Council, working with the Darwen Town Deal Board, with a view to submitting the necessary planning applications later in the year.

Other plans for Darwen revolve around refurbishing other key heritage buildings including the town's beautiful Carnegie library and theatre, safeguarding and creating new jobs in the town and new employment growth sites too – quickly creating new business and job opportunities. We are working on a detailed process to secure a development partner to support the delivery of the major town centre projects with an aim for contractors to be on site in early 2024. Over the coming year, there will be opportunities for businesses and residents to engage with these plans.

Events round-up

National Festival of Making

We're delighted to welcome the fantastic National Festival of Making back for another year on Saturday 8 and Sunday 9 July 2023 - particularly following their recently achieved status as National Portfolio Organisation from Arts Council England. This is one of the main events in the calendar that really shows what a hotbed of creativity Blackburn with Darwen is. It's a big deal and we're incredibly proud to host it and play an integral part as strategic partner too. The Festival celebrates the unique making heritage of our borough and always brings a distinctive vibrancy to Blackburn, drawing visitors from far and wide – including overseas – with world-class art installations, workshops and performances. Beyond being a great weekend of activities it helps us to create a distinctive sense of place while boosting the town's tourism profile and supporting local businesses.

One Voice Awards

The exciting 1V Awards 2023 were held at King George's Hall on Saturday, 25th February. And linked to the NfoM, among the very worthy winners was Chair of the Board of Directors for the Festival, Jamie Holman, who picked up the prestigious One Voice Leader's Award. The award – supported by

the Council - acknowledged individuals or an organisation that has shown strong leadership, enhanced the reputation of the town and shown a strong cohesion ethos. Jamie's name stood out. He is at the centre of all that's good with our efforts to drive growth through culture, showing the leadership we value and need. He acts as an ambassador for Blackburn at every opportunity, his passion for the place and people is clearly genuine and has lasting impact. He was a very worthy winner as were all who were successful on the night.

I'm so delighted to see Blackburn with Darwen continuing to be synonymous with arts and culture. This has been the culmination of a series of consistent decisions by the Council over the past half a decade to fund arts projects and build culture at heart of what we do.

Shuttle

The annual Shuttle Extra Magazine is now out. The 72 page publication is delivered directly to homes and costs 34p per copy. For this edition, the content has been developed as a celebration of the very best of the borough as part of our wider place promotion activity along with keeping residents informed about Council services and projects. The magazine includes high quality features about individuals and businesses who are ambassadors for our borough – offering support for our towns too. This year, we'll also be looking to make it available in cafés, hotels and at tourist attractions to widen the reach and promote all there is to offer in Blackburn with Darwen. My 'Letter from the Leader' is about talking up our towns and this publication does that in abundance.

MISSION: Healthier, happier and safer communities

Partnership conference

This month sees us hosting a Partnership Conference at Ewood Park. The event – the first of its kind we've held for some time - brings together over 100 partners from different sectors across Blackburn with Darwen to hear from myself and Denise on the Council's plans for the next four years and get their feedback on them. For the main part of the event, partners break off into working groups to attend sessions themed around the core priorities in our new corporate plan. I'm sure that, at our meeting, I will be able to feedback that the event was positive and energetic providing space for us all to discuss some shared objectives as we all work together for a better future for Blackburn with Darwen.

Coronation

The Government has announced that the nation will have the opportunity to join a weekend of celebrations to mark the Coronation of His Majesty The King and Her Majesty The Queen Consort on Saturday May 6th. Coronation Big Lunches, street parties, and The Big Help Out will bring communities together over a special Bank Holiday Coronation weekend.

Locally we are making plans to engage in the events and activities around all of this – including planning road closures and using our digital screens to promote the occasion. We will also have a big role to play around the Big Help Out on Monday, May 8th. This event will encourage people to get involved with activities run by local community groups, organisations and charities and highlight the impact of volunteering - which we know Blackburn with Darwen is very much renowned for. Further details and ways to take part will be announced shortly which we will promote on our channels.

Ukraine/Holocaust Memorial Day/Turkey and Syria

In Blackburn with Darwen we wear the diversity of our communities with pride. All the evidence is that the successful cities of the future will be diverse so, in that respect, we are leading the way. As a diverse community though we get a wider view of the world and that's why it hurts us all when we see the disasters and emergencies and human suffering taking place across the world.

It's hard to believe that a year has passed since the invasion of Ukraine. We still can't control what's happening though we can reflect on the solidarity and the kindness that residents in the borough have brought to those families who are staying with us. I was proud that as a Council that we responded to the humanitarian crisis. Under the Homes for Ukraine scheme we worked with the families to make them feel welcome and supported. I would like to thank colleagues and residents who have shown support during this turbulent time.

In Blackburn with Darwen Holocaust Memorial Day is an important date in our community calendar. It provides the perfect opportunity to reflect on the Holocaust and other atrocities and understand why is it so important that we learn from them, so that they are never repeated. For this year's event on Friday, January 27th we were able to gather together in person as a community for the first time since the pandemic. The ceremony brought our local community together, including schools, to remember and pay respects to victims of genocide, oppression and torture. It was three years since the last in-person event so it was extra impactful to be standing together with around 70 people from all walks of life including young people from all our secondary schools who feel strongly about uniting to reject hatred in all its ugly forms.

I also recently led a one minute silence outside Blackburn Town Hall for all the victims of the earthquake in Turkey and Syria. This is a truly horrifying situation and I'd urge people to continue to donate much needed essentials to the excellent local charities working to support the victims of the disaster. Earlier this month I also went to meet a group of Lancashire fire fighters who have been to Turkey with the 'Benefit Mankind' charity to volunteer to be part of the rescue effort. I was proud to present them with a much deserved token of all of our appreciation for their heroic efforts.

Covid-19 Public Inquiry

A request was received from the Association of Directors of Public Health (ADPH) to support their response to a request from the Covid-19 Public Inquiry team. The request centred around examining the resilience and preparedness of the UK for a coronavirus pandemic. We supported this request and submitted a response to the survey we received.