

## REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

COUNCILLOR QUESIR MAHMOOD

PORTFOLIO CO-ORDINATING

STRATEGIC DIRECTOR: MARTIN KELLY

DATE: 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2023

### ALL PRIORITIES:

#### **New Local Plan to 2037**

The ambitious new Local Plan for the Borough (2021-2037) continues its progress through its Examination in Public (EiP). The Plan was formally submitted to the Secretary of State in August 2022, and the Planning Inspectorate subsequently appointed two Planning Inspectors to conduct the EiP process. The Inspectors raised a series of Matters, Issues and Questions (MIQs) for the Council and other 3<sup>rd</sup> parties (who had made representations to the final consultation version of the Local Plan) to respond to. All responses to the MIQs are published in the form of 'hearing statements' on the examination webpage at [www.blackburn.gov.uk/localplan](http://www.blackburn.gov.uk/localplan). A series of Public Hearings took place throughout February 2023 to discuss the MIQs and hearing statements in further detail. These have now concluded and a schedule of required Actions and Modifications is being prepared by the Council to be agreed with the Planning Inspectors.

The next steps are: 1) the Council to complete all requested actions and drafting of modifications once agreed, and submit to the Inspectors; 2) the Inspectors will then issue a post-hearings letter which will set out their thoughts formally, and list all the Main Modifications required in their view to make the plan 'sound'; 3) the Council will manage a Main Modifications consultation (for a minimum of 6 weeks, estimated for summer 2023), all responses to be sent direct to the Inspectors; and 4) the Inspectors will review responses and issue their final report recommending all modifications required for the Council to adopt the plan. Further updates will be provided at future Council Forum meetings through 2023.

#### Local Transport Plan

On 9 March 2023, Executive Board approved the Local Transport Plan detailed programme for 2023/24. A total of £8.4m funding from the Department of Transport and Section 106 funds will be spent in 2023/24 to ensure we provide a good, safe and resilient road network to support the travel of residents across the borough providing access to facilities and opportunities for all. The programme also promotes growth and development with section 106 monies being used to support highways improvement schemes to attract business development opportunities.

In order to ensure we achieve value for money from the funding available, the Highways service, with assistance from the council's procurement team is creating a Civils and Surfacing Framework. The framework includes four separate lots, with up to three contractors on each lot, who can clearly demonstrate ability to meet our requirements and who offer the most competitive bid.

The following four lots have been advertised via the Council's e-tendering portal:

- 1) Lot 1: Surfacing (schemes up to £1m pa)
- 2) Lot 2: Civils work (schemes up to £1m pa.)
- 3) Lot 3: Surface Dressing work (schemes up to £250K pa.)
- 4) Lot 4: Specialist Carriageway Treatment work (schemes up to £250K pa.)

The procurement process will be completed in March 2023 and will support the delivery of the local transport plan in 2023/24 and in future years.

### **New lighting scheme – Safer Streets round 4**

The Highways Street Lighting division has recently completed a lighting scheme to Pringle Street Park as part of the Government intervention initiative Safer Streets Round 4 aimed at tackling neighbourhood crime along with anti-social behaviour and improving safety of public spaces for all.

The scheme involved a lighting survey and design to introduce 9 new lighting columns and lanterns strategically placed to illuminate dark or shaded areas of the footways used by pedestrians visiting or passing through the park. Pringle Street Park is a small green space with an all-weather pitch together with a play area and has some history of anti-social behaviour.

The feedback from local residents who walk through the Park has been really positive, with many residents commenting that the areas feels much safer. The lighting has also made a significant and positive difference to those residents who use the all-weather pitch facility, as previously the pitch was generally out of bounds in the darker winter evenings.

Queens Park is also being upgraded as part of the Safer Streets 4 funding and the improved illumination throughout the park is due for completion by the end of March 2023.

## **PLACE, PRIORITY 4: CONNECTED COMMUNITIES**

### **Levelling Up Fund 2 – Blackburn Growth Axis Transport Package (South East)**

In January 2023 the Council secured £20m from round 2 of the Government's Levelling Up Fund (LUF 2) to help bring forward improvements to Junction 5 of the M65, and to deliver a comprehensive, high-quality walking and cycling network in south east Blackburn. The funding supports the Council's strategic Growth Axis ambitions and will deliver two key projects required to support our ambitions for Southeast Blackburn. Together these significant transport interventions (totalling £30.8m) will help tackle congestion, address safety concerns and promote active travel between key origins and destinations (including links to the town centre). This will support the Council's Local Plan and Blackburn Growth Axis ambitions, help drive prosperity across East Lancashire, and reduce emissions and improve the health and wellbeing of residents in the area.

### **Cultural Services:**

**Libraries:** Supporting creativity, learning, social opportunities and wellbeing programmes across all sites have increased via blended delivery from volunteers, partners and staff. The half term author and professional storyteller performances attracted record attendances and the regular weekly rhyme time for early years at Blackburn Library draws in audiences of up to 100 per session, while volunteers at

Cherry Tree Library's Saturday Family Lego Club regularly welcome 60+ creative builders.

**Venues:** The start of the year has been busy for Venues – with a strong mix of music and comedy across both KGH and DLT including 2 sell-out dates for Jon Richardson. It has been fantastic to see so many children, young people and families attending, attracted by the amazing robotic dinosaurs in Jurassic Earth over half term and with 18 performance dates for the popular Lets Go Sing initiative and the Last Choir Singing Competition KGH welcomed 132 different schools into the venue throughout March. The Lancashire Dance Academy also staged a sell-out performance in the main hall, the first of five booking during 2023.

**Heritage & Arts:** Arts Council England funding has been secured to develop the textile story within Blackburn Museum & Art Gallery and ensure that the looms and textile collections can be better preserved and stories from the community told. This year long project will include artist commissions and oral history projects. The Creative Connection, our local cultural education partnership brought the National Theatre's Primary Touring production of Shakespeare's Hamlet to Blackburn with Darwen recently. This specially created production for Years 4 – 7 was hosted by three schools in the borough with over 700 pupils enjoying the shows over three days

**National Festival of Making:** This fantastic festival returns to Blackburn this summer over the weekend of **8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> July**. The festival promises to be bigger and better with even more making opportunities.

## **PLACE, PRIORITY 5: SAFE & CLEAN ENVIRONMENT**

### **Climate Emergency Action Plan**

Work continues on the delivery of a number of different actions set out in the Council's existing Climate Emergency Action Plan (CEAP), including: tree planting (10,000 trees in the 2022/23 season); preparation of heat decarbonisation plans for the Council's largest emitting buildings (to assist the Council to be bid-ready for future rounds of Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme funding); updating of the Council's Climate Change Adaptation Strategy; expansion of carbon literacy training; and procurement of 11 electric vehicles to replace ageing diesel fleet. The People's Climate Jury process has now concluded, with its recommendations being presented to the Council forum in January. The recommendations from this process will feed into an update of the CEAP, which will be presented to June's Executive Board meeting. The Council is also actively investigating options to consider how best to maintain collaboration and momentum between the Council and other relevant organisations/stakeholders following the People's Jury, to help achieve net zero ambitions.

## **PLACE, PRIORITY 6: STRONG, GROWING ECONOMY TO ENABLE SOCIAL MOBILITY**

### **Housing Developments**

Further to the Council's agreed Growth Programme, the following major housing projects involving Council land are continuing to progress:

- Haslingden Road Housing Site - Keepmoat Homes have secured planning permission to develop 300 new homes to include 160 family homes for sale and up to 50 keyworker affordable homes in the first phase. A report was taken to Executive Board on 11<sup>th</sup> March seeking approval to appoint a contractor to build a new access into the site and carry out the next phase of road widening on Haslingden Road. Works are planned to be completed prior to Keepmoat starting on site.
- Whalley Old Road Housing Site - Vistry Partnerships have completed the purchase of the site to deliver 165 high quality family homes. Planning permission was granted in November 2022 for the scheme of new homes which will include Vistry's flagship 'Bovis Homes' brand to the site. Blackburn will be the first site to offer Bovis Homes in Lancashire.
- Holden Fold Housing Site - Executive Board (Dec 2022) approved the appointment of Vistry Partnerships as preferred bidder to build around 477 new homes of mixed tenure to include 2, 3 and 4 bed family homes including 170 affordable homes for rent and home ownership. Vistry plan to build new homes under their 'Bovis' and 'Linden Homes' brands and attended preplanning discussions with the Council in March to prepare and submit a planning application over the coming months. Legal agreements are being finalised to complete the sale of the land which is in multiple ownerships.

Progress on selected other developments on Council land:

- Countryside Homes and Together Housing are making good progress at their development of 390 new homes of mixed tenure on two sites on Fishmoor Drive and one site on Roman Road. Countryside completed sales of 6 new homes by October 2022 which are now occupied by the new owners.
- McDermott Homes at Ellison Fold Way, Darwen, are continuing to make good progress at their development which will deliver a combined total of around 340 new family dwellings including 70 affordable homes plus funding towards more school places, roads and improvements to Blacksnape Play Area. Part of the site was Council-owned.
- McDermott Homes continue with a successful build programme at Lomond Gardens, Blackburn, where residents have started to move in.
- Elan Homes, Milking Lane, Lower Darwen – which the Council owns as part of the Barnfield Blackburn Ltd Joint Venture – have started works on site to build 76 new family homes.

Despite the challenging economic environment, the Council's continued pro-active growth programme has helped to ensure that the completion rates of new homes is being maintained. 450 new home completions were recorded from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2022 – 31<sup>st</sup> Jan 2023, compared to 440 during the whole of the 2021/22 financial year.

## **Employment Developments**

Further to the Council's agreed Growth Programme, the following major commercial projects involving Council land are continuing to progress:

- Barnfield Construction has progressed construction at Dock St / Eden St, where new employment units are to be provided.

- At Carl Fogarty Way, construction of new commercial units has commenced clearance works at Plot 1, with a revised project being considered through planning. The planning application for commercial units at Plot 4 was determined in the Autumn of 2022, and works have commenced on site. A commercial development at Plot 6 is also being assessed in planning, and is expected to commence in 2023. The preferred bidder for Plot 3, Autolab, was selected at Executive Board in October, and a planning application for the site development is expected to be received in the Spring.
- Development of new industrial / commercial units at Millbank Business Park in Lower Darwen, which is owned by the Council's Joint Venture Company with Barnfield Construction, is well under-way.

## **PLACE, PRIORITY 7: SUPPORTING OUR TOWN CENTRES AND BUSINESSES**

### **Townscape Heritage Project - Blakey Moor/Northgate/Lord Street West**

Rebuilding work to gable walls has now started at Blakey Moor and it shouldn't be too long until progress is much more visible. The site was recently visited by a group of MSc Conservation and Adaptation students from UCLan who were keen to learn from the innovative way we responded to structural failures. 10 construction students from Blackburn College will also be starting work experience onsite soon.

Works to 34 (Baileys Jewellers) and 36-40 (Family Bargains) Northgate are now complete and businesses are really pleased with the improvements. The Townscape Heritage Project funded 80% of the works with private property owners contributing 20%.

The Townscape Heritage Project is a joint investment by Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council and the National Heritage Lottery Fund.

### **Morrisons Relocation**

Maple Grove Blackburn (Joint Venture Partnership between the Council and Maple Grove) has agreed heads of terms with Morrisons for purchase of the former Thwaites brewery site for the construction of a new store. The contract is being prepared and design progressed with a planning application scheduled to be submitted in Spring 2023.

### **St Johns Refurbishment Project**

A full design team including OMI Architects have been appointed to prepare the design for the refurbishment of the former St John's Church. Design proposals for an innovation hub are progressing with the aim to provide a range of flexible work spaces to support individuals and help businesses to thrive in Blackburn. A planning application for the refurbishment project is scheduled to be submitted in Spring 2023.

### **Imperial Mill Acquisition and Development**

Following approval to acquire the building at February's Executive Board, legal completion of the sale and leaseback is likely to be complete by April 2023. Following completion, urgent works to make the building wind and watertight will be prioritised over the next 2-3 years.

