

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

COUNCILLOR QUESIR MAHMOOD

**PORTFOLIO CO-ORDINATING
CHIEF OFFICERS: Strategic Director
of Growth & Development
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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. A series of Public Hearings took place in February – March 2023 to discuss the hearing statements in further detail and a schedule of required Actions and Modifications was subsequently prepared by the Council and agreed with the Planning Inspectors.

The Inspectors issued a post-hearings letter in June, which set out their general support for the Growth Strategy. The next step will be for the Council to manage a Main Modifications consultation (for a minimum of 6 weeks starting in August 2023), and all responses are to be sent direct to the Inspectors. The Inspectors will review responses and issue their final report recommending all modifications required for the Council to adopt the plan. It's hoped that the Local Plan will be adopted at Council Forum in early 2024.

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 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 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

Arts Council England Grant Success - The Library Service has been successful in securing a £30,000 grant for the delivery of Blackburn with Darwen's 2023 Children's Literature Festival, a powerful tool which supports literacy development and promotes the joy of reading. This annual event, which began in 2018, has grown each year and is a real highlight in the Library's event calendar and the Council's wider cultural activity programme; last year the Festival engaged over 2,000 children. The festival will take place across National Libraries Week, 2nd – 8th October 2023 and will feature a range of

celebrated children's authors, poets, illustrators and artists performing in each of the Borough's 5 libraries.

E-reading: Blackburn with Darwen Library members can now access additional e-resources free of charge via the easy to use BorrowBox App, downloadable for both Android and Apple devices, giving access to tens of thousands of eBook and eAudio titles accessible from home or on the move 24/7.

Summer Reading Challenge 2023 - In partnership with The Reading Agency, this year's challenge 'Ready, Set, Read!' was launched on 1st July. The free scheme, which runs to the end of September, invites children aged from 4 - 12 years to read 6 library books over the holiday period, receiving a certificate and medal once they've completed the challenge. Schools report that the progress children make in reading during term time can often go into decline during the holidays, so this initiative really makes a difference to reading development.

Venues

Darwen Library Theatre and King George's Hall have enjoyed a great first quarter welcoming performances from lots of household names including Jools Holland, Frankie Boyle, Ocean Colour Scene and The Lathams. Names to look out for in September include the comedian Tom Allen and music from Public Image Limited (PIL) and The Hollies. Looking further ahead - tickets for this year's pantomime, Aladdin are already on sale. For details and bookings visit www.bwdvenues.com

Heritage and Arts

Blackburn Museum: June saw the start of essential work to replace the roof on Blackburn Museum and Art Gallery. The roof is in an extremely poor condition with water leakage causing internal damage to plaster work and galleries and limiting what art work and paintings are able to be displayed. The vital work is primarily being funded via a £365,000 external grant secured through Arts Council England, with the Council contributing £189,700. The Museum remains free and open to the public throughout the roof work, which is expected to be completed ahead of the Museum's celebration of its 150th anniversary next year.

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 Climate Emergency Action Plan (CEAP), which was agreed at June's Executive Board, including: tree planting; 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 the Council's Climate Change Adaptation Strategy; expansion of carbon literacy training; and procurement of 11 electric vehicles to replace our ageing diesel fleet. The People's Climate Jury process has now concluded. The recommendations from this process fed into an update of the CEAP. The Council is also actively investigating options to consider how best to maintain collaboration and momentum between the Council and other relevant external organisations / business leaders 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 secured planning permission in 2022 to develop 300 new homes, including 160 family homes for sale and up to 50 keyworker affordable homes in the first phase. A report was taken to Executive Board on 11th 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. The Casey Group have now been appointed to carry out the works which are planned to commence in August.
- 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, 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 in December 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. A planning application has been submitted and will be assessed 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.
- 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, which is nearing completion.
- 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. To this end, 569 new home completions were recorded from 1st April 2022 – 31st Mar 2023.

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. The development is expected to complete by August 2023.
- At Carl Fogarty Way, construction of new commercial units has started 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. The preferred bidder for Plot 3, Autolab, was selected at Executive Board in October, and a planning application for the site development is under assessment.
- 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

Roof and chimneys have been reinstated to the original section of Blakey Moor Terrace and the historic building structure is now fully stabilised allowing construction to start on the new curved extension. Timber replacement windows have been made by Blackburn joinery company, Ellison & Groom, and colour schemes are being finalised. It is expected the building will be completed to shell by end of February 2024.

Roof repairs are being undertaken at 48 Northgate and 50 Northgate is undergoing shopfront and internal refurbishments ready for a hair dressers to open in July.

An impressive piece of public art celebrating Blackburn film pioneers Mitchell & Kenyon and the first ever western was unveiled in June. The piece, entitled 'Quiver' consists of 40 pewter arrows set into the gable end of the recently refurbished 34 Northgate. Guests attended the launch event at Prism Contemporary Gallery for food, film and an archery sessions before making their way to Northgate to see the work and hear from the artist Jamie Holman and Deputy Mayor, Cllr Syliva Liddle.

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 now scheduled to be submitted in Autumn 2023.

St John's 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 Summer 2023.

Darwen Town Deal

The Darwen Town Centre and employment growth projects are focussing on detailed design, programming and procurement with planning applications for Darwen Market Hall and Arches, Darwen Library Theatre, Chapels South Employment Site and Perspex relocation of manufacturing all expected to be submitted before the end of 2023. All projects will be on site during 2024 with more details to follow later in the year.

Imperial Mill Acquisition and Development

Following approval to acquire the building at February's Executive Board, legal completion of the sale and leaseback will complete this July. Following completion, works to ensure the building is wind and watertight will be prioritised over the next 2-3 years as we start to undertake feasibility studies and develop our long-term plan.