



# EXECUTIVE BOARD DECISION

<b>REPORT OF:</b>	Executive Member for Growth and Development
<b>LEAD OFFICERS:</b>	Strategic Director of Growth and Development
<b>DATE:</b>	August 2023

**PORTFOLIO/S AFFECTED:** Growth & Development

**WARD/S AFFECTED:** All

**KEY DECISION:** YES  NO

**SUBJECT: Growth Programme 2023/24**

## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Blackburn with Darwen Council has an **on-going economic Growth Programme**, which seeks to maximise the economic and financial benefit of Council owned assets, to support the creation of jobs, housing and infrastructure. The Council's Growth Strategy, including the Growth Programme, has helped deliver impressive performance since the current Local Plan was adopted in 2015, underpinned by a strong can-do approach, and the ability to work with key private and public sector partners to deliver shared priorities, as demonstrated by our **Growth Key Performance Indicators** ("KPIs") attached at **Annex A**.

The Growth Programme supports the delivery of all four missions within the Council's Corporate Plan by identifying and managing a pipeline of development projects and initiatives planned to be implemented over the short, medium and longer term. These projects are delivered using a combination of private or public sector land and cover employment, housing and town centre developments in both Blackburn and Darwen. The Growth Programme also aims to maximise public investment opportunities such as the Darwen Town Deal, and opportunities including the Government's Levelling Up Fund ("LUF"), UK Shared Prosperity Funds and Homes England's new housing delivery initiatives. We are also working hard to improve our engagement of National Highways and Department of Transport, which may become easier if we and Lancashire partners are successful in establishing a Combined County Authority with negotiated Devolution Deals.

The Council's Growth & Development Department is also in the final stages of preparing a new Local Plan, with Council adoption expected in early 2024. Once adopted, the new Local Plan, will introduce a **'balanced growth strategy'**, ensuring the project pipeline is developed along with supporting infrastructure and environmental improvements. This will further support the **Council's Climate Emergency Action Plan** (CEAP) which includes projects aimed at progressing towards the ambition of being a carbon neutral Council by 2030.

We have established a new economic / spatial framework, the Blackburn Growth Axis, to demonstrate and capture the economic scale and opportunity available within and adjacent to the Borough – a place with the potential to support over 100,000 jobs over next 10/15 years. Work is also underway with key partners on developing a new Skills and Employment Plan and a new Cultural Investment Framework. These workstreams will help to drive our business case work in these two important areas and better align new activity to our strategic growth priorities. We are also working on a new investor website to promote our key developments and achievements, as well as new opportunities with developers and investors.

Delivery of the Growth Programme has many **benefits for the Borough**, including:-

- Generating additional tax revenues to support the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan;
- Supporting growth and vitality in the town centres of Blackburn and Darwen;
- Accelerating economic activity to create employment opportunities;
- Generating financial benefits from strategic land disposals and section 106 contributions;
- Removing localised blight by bringing empty properties back into use;
- Securing essential infrastructure, open space and biodiversity improvements; and
- Improving quality and extending the choice, tenure and range of new family housing to attract and retain residents.

This report provides a summary of progress on growth projects in the year and outlines the **Growth Programme for 2023/24** and is attached as **Annex B**.

## 2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Executive Board:

1. Note the excellent growth performance in the Borough as demonstrated by the Growth KPIs attached as Annex A;
2. Note the continued good progress made by officers in delivering the Darwen Town Deal programme;
3. Note the success in securing, through a competitive bidding process, Government Levelling-Up Funding for projects in Blackburn Town Centre and our South East Blackburn transport corridor;
4. Note the continued good progress made by the Council's two joint venture development companies Barnfield Blackburn Ltd and Maple Grove Blackburn Ltd;
5. Note the Asset Review initiative being progressed by officers to assess the Council's primary buildings to identify opportunities to improve utilisation or to consolidate and rationalise to release potential disposal or redevelopment opportunities;
6. Approve the Growth Programme for 2023-24 attached as Annex B for officers to progress projects from feasibility stage through to procurement and tender stage as required by project timelines; and
7. Delegate authority to revise the Growth Programme for 2023/24 (by adding, removing or prioritising sites) to the Growth Director in consultation with the Executive Member for Growth & Development.

## 3. BACKGROUND

In order to deliver the Growth Programme the Council continually invests in a Growth & Development Department, which promotes Council-owned sites for development, works with private sector developers to develop new housing and employment schemes and works with Registered Providers to develop affordable homes for rent or shared ownership in key demand areas.

In addition to managing the Growth programme, the Growth & Development Department also manages the Council's Climate Emergency Action Plan; assesses planning and building control applications; secures developer funding towards infrastructure; plans and delivers strategic transport and infrastructure schemes; manages the Council's land and property holdings; maintains, manages and ensures compliance of all Council buildings; delivers major projects and developments; and pro-actively brings empty homes and other commercial properties back into use.

The Growth & Development Department has also been preparing a new Local Plan which will guide and shape development in Blackburn with Darwen for the next 15 years, to 2037. The evidence-based Plan sets the policies and allocates sites to deliver our '**balanced growth**' strategy, to ensure that the area is open for business providing jobs and economic growth for future prosperity; that the climate emergency is tackled through new development (the Council's ambition is to be carbon neutral by 2030); and that inequalities in health and deprivation across the Borough are addressed. This will ensure that all proposals for new development give due consideration to their impact on 'people', 'place' and the 'economy'. The expectation is for planning applications to demonstrate net gains against the social, environmental and economic objectives of the plan.

Our long term planned growth is set out in our new Local Plan and is best summarised by **six key initiatives** or programmes:-

- The **Blackburn Growth Axis**: an investment framework linking strategic growth sites across the Borough and beyond;
- The **Darwen Town Investment Plan**: a series of major improvements for Darwen supported by the Darwen Town Deal;
- A **North East Blackburn Strategic Housing Site**: a new neighbourhood on the edge of the town;
- A **South East Blackburn Strategic Employment Site**: to attract jobs and investment at a key motorway location;
- **Blackburn Town Centre Major Development Sites**: a unique opportunity to boost the vitality of Blackburn town centre; and
- The **Infrastructure Delivery Plan**: an important series of interventions to improve infrastructure for all, such as roads, schools and health facilities.

Our **Growth KPIs** attached at Annex A evidence the growth in the Borough since the current Local Plan was adopted in 2015 together with the performance of the Growth & Development Team, with a few selected highlights noted below;

- **High performing planning service**, with Blackburn with Darwen Council in the top 18% of all England local authorities, placing 59<sup>th</sup> out of 322 councils for determining major planning applications, which means the planning team is officially in the top 4 of North West unitary authorities, as well as the best performing across Lancashire<sup>1</sup>;
- Housing delivery continues to perform well and in line with expectations, with 569 housing completions delivered in 2022/23 which is the highest ever recorded in the Borough, and includes new build homes as well as re-purposing existing buildings;
- Since 2015/16 there have been over 2,750 new homes built across the Borough, **with around 25% of those new homes being affordable**, which is above our 20% target;
- Over 51% of the 2,776 new homes completed to date **have been constructed on brownfield land**;
- The draft new Local Plan identifies a pipeline of circa 7,000 homes over the next 15 years, **with over 50% of the homes already benefiting from planning permission**;
- In 2015/16 the Council forecasted a total section 106 income of £1.4million for infrastructure investment as a result of development - the **current section 106 forecast is £11million** and growing;
- The number of annual empty properties brought back into use across the Borough has increased from 167 in 2016/17 to **860 in 2022/23**;
- The number of long-term empty properties (over 6 months) is maintained below 1,000 which is approximately 1.5% of housing stock, **representing a reduction of 0.5% since 2015** and the lowest recorded in the Borough since records began; and
- Reduction of around 650,000 kWh of grid electricity demand from the Council's estate in 2022/23 (around 11%), through installation of a significant programme of energy efficiency measures and renewable energy installations across 13 buildings. These were implemented following a successful bid to the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme (PSDS) in 2021/22.

<sup>1</sup> [Live tables on planning application statistics - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk)

The **programme success is due to a range of initiatives** and enhanced services which have been implemented to support and accelerate delivery and include:-

- Creation of our first joint venture (“JV”) partnership with Barnfield, incorporated as **Barnfield Blackburn Ltd**, which acquired the former Lower Darwen Paper Mill site in 2018. Work has progressed since 2018 with the construction of a new link road, Millbank Road, which opened during the summer of 2021. Completion of industrial units at Plots 1, 2 and 3 is expected by the end of 2023 together with the commencement of plot 4. Elan homes acquired two residential plots from Barnfield Blackburn Ltd and commenced construction in 2022 with new homes expected late 2023.

The Council is pleased to see its first JV development performing so well, especially given the significant site challenges, and delivering much needed new employment space, jobs and business rates for the Borough. The Council is also expected to see a significant return on its investment which it proposes to reinvest in future developments in Darwen.

- Creation of our second joint venture partnership with Maple Grove (part of the Eric Wright Group) and incorporated as **Maple Grove Blackburn Ltd**. The joint venture acquired the former Thwaites site in 2021 and has since been supporting the Council developing plans for a new masterplan for Blackburn Town Centre. The JV is preparing plans to relocate Morrisons to the former Thwaites site and to refurbish the existing Morrisons multi-storey car park for Council acquisition. The JV will also demolish the existing Morrisons and landscape ready for future residential development.
- Using the Growth Developer Framework to appoint framework partners to deliver a wide variety of projects covering construction, civil engineering and developments.
- Implementation of robust monitoring of the Council’s section 106 procedures to test developer’s viability appraisals to ensure the Council receives the correct amount of funding to support infrastructure such as education, affordable homes, green infrastructure and highways.
- A programme for disposing key strategic sites for housing and employment uses; including land at Whalley Old Road, Holden Fold and Issa Way.
- Applying for public sector investment through preparing business cases and funding bids with success in the year in securing Government Town Deal funding for Darwen, Levelling-Up Funding for projects in Blackburn Town Centre and our South East Blackburn transport corridor and M65 Junction 5 improvements.
- Developing key infrastructure to support the delivery of Growth in the Borough, including education, active travel and highway schemes; including new schemes planned for example at Moor Lane, Darwen and Bog Height Link Road, Blackburn, supporting planned housing developments.
- During 2022/23, we identified a further 10 properties for CPO, of which we submitted four CPOs to Government Office. The Empty Properties Team continue to monitor and work with the owners of the remaining properties to ensure they are brought back into use by their owners.

#### **4. KEY ISSUES & RISKS**

The progress of the Growth Programme to date is detailed below with updates on key sites and overall planned delivery numbers.

The **key programmes** are divided into 12 programme themes under the Place and Thematic work streams as identified below:

##### **Place**

- Blackburn Town Centre Developments
- Darwen Town Deal Developments
- Darwen East Development Corridor
- North Blackburn Development Corridor

- South East Blackburn Growth Corridor
- Carl Fogarty Way Commercial Units
- Wainwright Way Commercial Units
- West Blackburn Development Corridor

#### **Thematic**

- Affordable Housing
- Empty Properties
- Infill Commercial Sites
- Infill Housing Sites

#### **Key Housing schemes completed or under construction in 2022/23:**

- 1) Gib Lane, Blackburn – 800 dwellings being delivered by Kingswood Homes and Story Homes
- 2) Whinney Lane / Yew Tree Drive, Blackburn - 270 dwellings being delivered by Wainhomes
- 3) Pole Lane, Darwen – 260 dwellings being delivered by Tilia and Persimmon Homes
- 4) Roe Lee, Blackburn – 156 dwellings being delivered by Persimmon Homes
- 5) Tower View, Darwen – 17 dwellings being delivered by Lang Estates
- 6) Griffin (Phase 1), Blackburn – 56 affordable homes completed by Seddon and Great Places
- 7) Former SAPPI site (phase 1a) – 450 dwellings being promoted by Black Pearl Capital
- 8) Ellison Fold Way – 343 dwellings being delivered by McDermott Homes, including 67 affordable homes.
- 9) Lomond Gardens – 30 dwellings being delivered by McDermott Homes.
- 10) Ramsgreave Drive – 110 dwellings being promoted by Applethwaite and McDermott Homes.
- 11) Fishmoor Drive – 383 dwellings being promoted by Countryside and Together Housing.
- 12) Davyfield Farm – 19 dwellings being delivered by Applethwaite Homes

#### **Key Employment schemes completed or under construction in 2022/23:**

- 13) Units on site at Millbank Business Park (Plots 1,2,3 and 4) (former Lower Darwen Paper Mill)
- 14) Units at Plot 1 Wainwright Way, Blackburn
- 15) Units at Plot 4 Carl Fogarty Way, Blackburn
- 16) Units at Former Hollins Mill (Prime Point), Darwen
- 17) Units at Dock Street, Blackburn

#### **Council owned development sites coming forward in the next 12 to 24 months:**

- 18) Darwen Chapels South – circa 50,000 sqft commercial plots promoted by Barnfield Blackburn Ltd supporting Darwen Town Deal programme
- 19) Carl Fogarty Way, Blackburn – Plot 2 (opposite Imperial Mill, see below)
- 20) Holden Fold, Darwen – new housing development for 477 dwellings promoted by Countryside Homes
- 21) Whitebirk Industrial Estate - Pets Choice Phase 2 manufacturing facility
- 22) Wainwright Way (Plot 3), Blackburn – new commercial unit
- 23) Salisbury Road, Darwen – 12 new dwellings promoted by Lang Estates
- 24) Issa Way (North) – circa 250,000 sqft of new commercial units
- 25) Haslingden Road – new housing site (opposite the hospital) offering a mix of 160 dwellings and 150 key worker and affordable apartments
- 26) Former Thwaites and markets site, Blackburn – Council moving forward with plans for comprehensive redevelopment as part of the Maple Grove Blackburn Ltd Joint Venture Company
- 27) Comprehensive restoration of St John's Church to create new workspace and innovation hub
- 28) Refurbishment or redevelopment of the Fleece Pub, Blackburn
- 29) Restoration and re-purposing of the former Griffin Lodge to create modern health facilities
- 30) Chapels Park South – new commercial site being promoted by Barnfield Blackburn Ltd and Perspex as part of the Darwen Town Deal programme
- 31) Acquisition of Imperial Mill and subsequent strategy for future uses
- 32) Former Manxman Training Resource Unit and surrounding land – redevelopment of surplus Council building for affordable housing
- 33) Clarendon Road – CPO of unregistered land and site assembly with Council owned land to bring forward a housing development

- 34) Griffin (Phase 2), Blackburn – final phase of development for this clearance site with mixed tenure housing planned with our partner Great Places
- 35) Whalley Old Road – 165 dwellings being delivered by Vistry Partnerships and Together Housing
- 36) Units at Plots 1, 3 and 6 Carl Fogarty Way, Blackburn
- 37) Longshaw Nursery site for development of approx. 20 new homes for affordable rent

### **Market Risk**

It should be acknowledged that the procurement and delivery stages for many of the housing, employment and strategic sites noted above continue to experience delay following the pandemic, the impacts of Brexit and increasing construction and development inflation cost increases and high interest rates. Despite this, the Borough remains committed to maintaining our growth momentum, with very encouraging signs from continued local developer presence and interest together with new high quality entrants to the market.

The delivery programme will be continuously updated, ensuring Growth Programme resources are always directed towards maximising outcomes for the Borough.

It should also be noted that levelling up plans may provide an opportunity for the Council and its partners to seek funding towards strategic development opportunities and other stalled sites.

## **5. POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

Blackburn with Darwen's Corporate Plan has four key missions; for a more prosperous borough where no one is left behind; for every young person to have opportunities to fulfil their potential; to deliver on the Climate Emergency Action Plan; and to build happier, healthier and safer communities. The Growth Programme supports all of these key missions by helping to create good quality jobs and homes for the local population, providing necessary infrastructure and securing positive outcomes from capital investments.

The identified Growth Programme also supports delivery of the strategy and policies set out within the Council's adopted Local Plan, comprising the Core Strategy and the Local Plan Part 2. It ensures that the Council continues to meet its statutory obligations in terms of providing sufficient new homes and jobs for residents, maintaining a deliverable 5 Year Supply of housing sites and passing the Government's annual Housing Delivery Test.

## **6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

Whilst there may be financial implications for individual projects, which are reported separately, there are no financial implications for this progress update report.

## **7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

Whilst there may be legal implications for individual projects, which are reported separately, there are no legal implications for this progress update report.

## **8. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

Whilst there may be resource implications for individual projects, which are reported separately, there are no resource implications for this progress update report.

The Growth & Development Department is working at full capacity, and therefore opportunities to fast-track business casework to support public investment submissions, which may be subject to national competition, may require additional resourcing to enable the Council to access new investment opportunities. Such

opportunities would be the subject of separate reports in due course.

## 9. EQUALITY AND HEALTH IMPLICATIONS

Please select one of the options below. Where appropriate please include the hyperlink to the EIA.

Option 1  Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) not required – the EIA checklist has been completed.

Option 2  In determining this matter the Executive Member needs to consider the EIA associated with this item in advance of making the decision. (*insert EIA link here*)

Option 3  In determining this matter the Executive Board Members need to consider the EIA associated with this item in advance of making the decision. (*insert EIA attachment*)

## 10. CONSULTATIONS

Consultations undertaken for each scheme in accordance with the Council's constitution, the adopted Statement of Community Involvement and other statutory planning legislation.

## 11. STATEMENT OF COMPLIANCE

The recommendations are made further to advice from the Monitoring Officer and the Section 151 Officer has confirmed that they do not incur unlawful expenditure. They are also compliant with equality legislation and an equality analysis and impact assessment has been considered. The recommendations reflect the core principles of good governance set out in the Council's Code of Corporate Governance.

## 12. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

All Declarations of Interest of any Executive Member consulted and note of any dispensation granted by the Chief Executive will be recorded in the Summary of Decisions published on the day following the meeting.

<b>VERSION:</b>	<b>Rev5</b>
<b>CONTACT OFFICER:</b>	<b>Simon Jones, Growth Director, Department of Growth &amp; Development</b>
<b>DATE:</b>	<b>July 2023</b>
<b>BACKGROUND PAPER:</b>	<b>None</b>