

## **REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT**

**COUNCILLOR QUESIR MAHMOOD**

**PORTFOLIO CO-ORDINATING**

**STRATEGIC DIRECTOR: MARTIN KELLY**

**DATE: 5<sup>th</sup> October 2023**

### **ALL PRIORITIES:**

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

Our ambitious new Local Plan for the Borough (2021-2037) continues its progress through its Examination in Public (EiP). The Planning Inspectorate has appointed two Inspectors to conduct the EiP, which began in August 2022 and is now entering its final stages. Following the Public Hearings in February – March 2023, and a post-hearings Inspectors' letter received in June, the Council has now commenced a 6-week public consultation on the 'Main Modifications' that the Planning Inspectors believe are necessary to make the Plan 'sound'. Comments are invited until the 2<sup>nd</sup> October, and details are available on the Council's webpage [Local Plan 2021 to 2037: Draft Main Modifications Consultation | Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council](#).

All comments that are received during the consultation period will be forwarded directly to the Inspectors', who will consider them and whether any further modifications are justified to the Plan. A formal Inspectors' report will be provided in due course which will set out all the Main Modifications required to be made, in order for the Council to adopt the new Local Plan. This remains on track to be brought before 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 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 SE Blackburn. The funding supports the Council's Growth Axis ambitions and will deliver two key projects required to support our ambitions for SE 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 Blackburn town centre). This investment will support the Council's Local Plan, help drive prosperity across the Borough and wider East Lancashire, and reduce emissions and improve the health and wellbeing of residents in the area.

The active travel network across SE Blackburn consists of six priority routes that were identified with the aim to improve conditions for walking, wheeling and cycling. WSP, independent consultants, were commissioned to undertake a feasibility study on all six of these routes. This study has been completed with various options identified for each route. Options are now being considered within the funding available. Active Travel England are supporting the review process and once affordable feasibility designs are available these will be shared with stakeholders. It is anticipated that this will be towards the end of October/November.

#### **Highway Maintenance Programme 2023/24**

The Council's road surfacing programme is underway. The sites listed below are completed:

- Billinge End Road, Blackburn;
- Broadhead Road, West Pennine;
- Cemetery Road, Darwen;
- Downham Street, Blackburn;
- Greens Arms Road, West Pennine; and
- Haslingden Road, Blackburn.

Resurfacing at the following sites started in late September:

- A666 (Cochran Street) Darwen;
- Audley Range, Blackburn;
- Harrison Street, Blackburn;
- Preston Old Road, Blackburn.

Two sites were identified for retexturing to improve their skid resistance performance and are close to completion. These sites are:

- Lower Eccleshill Road Roundabout, Lower Darwen; and
- Stopes Brow; Lower Darwen.

### **Blakewater Lodge Car Park**

All work has been completed, and final site measures are being undertaken. Arrangements are being finalised regarding the opening of the Car Park.

### **Cultural Services**

**Library Summer Activities:** Record numbers of children have been flocking to Blackburn with Darwen libraries to sign up for this year's Summer Reading Challenge, a national initiative which encourages children to keep up with their reading across the 6 week break. In Blackburn Library alone, more than 300 children enrolled on the scheme in the first week of the school holidays – the first time this has ever happened. The children's holiday activity programme has also been well attended so far, with a great variety of activities and events on offer, including Crazy Colin's Library Magic Show and Zoolab animal handling sessions, as well as building tennis rackets, catapults and much more from cardboard and craft materials; there were even indoor Sports Days at Blackburn Library and Darwen Library. Adults weren't forgotten, with two performances of Invisible Ink – a new play about letter writing and lost friendships written and performed by Guy Hargreaves of Beggars Belief Collective, based locally in Darwen.

**Heritage Open Days:** Both Darwen and Blackburn Libraries held exhibitions during September. At Blackburn Central Library the entrance showcased a treasure trove of ad hoc advertisements, posters, flyers, handbills, railway timetables, hymn sheets, poems, political cartoons and squibs, theatre and sporting notices, a rich and fascinating social history collection. Whilst at Darwen Library an exhibition of photographs, news cuttings and memorabilia entitled Discover 'owd' Darwen was drawn from Darwen Library's local history collection.

**Venues:** Over the summer our Venues linked with CBeeBies to offer shows at both KGH & DLT. KGH hosted a hugely prestigious, and sold out, CBeebies Prom to the Classic programme; Ocean Adventure event featuring the BBC Philharmonic Orchestra and was only 1 of 7 CBeeBies proms in 2023. DLT hosted two days of CBeebies' show Sarah & Duck which sold over 300 tickets and was very popular. For

details of what's coming up over the next few months, including this year's pantomime Aladdin visit [www.bwdvenues.com](http://www.bwdvenues.com)

**Casual Recruitment:** To support the busy autumn programme Venues held a casual recruitment fair in early September for roles such as bar staff, technical assistants, and box office staff. It was a really successful event attracting a lot of interest. Nearly 300 people attended on the day and over 60 casuals were recruited during the event.

**Heritage and Arts: Blackburn Museum and Art Gallery:** Over the summer the Museum had a major programme of activities with workshops, crafts and handling sessions which were run by young volunteers. The artist-led sessions including Tote bag printing, clay modelling and tile decorating have been successful with 900 participants making and taking part. The Museum is undergoing roof works and surrounded by scaffolding with only the ground floor open, however, this has not deterred visitors with an increase of over one third in relation to previous years.

**British Textile Biennial:** Throughout October, across Pennine Lancashire there are artists, activities and talks across the area. Blackburn town centre is the main hub of activity with exhibitions across several venues including Blackburn Museum, Tony's Ballroom, Prism Gallery and the Cathedral. There are many drop in workshops including the Spinning and Weaving school at Blackburn Market. For times and more details [Programme Archive - British Textile Biennial](#)

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

### **Climate Emergency Action Plan**

The Executive Board approved an updated Climate Emergency Action Plan in June. Decarbonisation of heat supply to buildings and facilitating the shift to electric vehicles are key priorities for 2023/24. Heat networks are being explored as a solution to the former and a grant application to the Heat Networks Delivery Unit for assistance with feasibility studies is in preparation. Potential locations for electric vehicle (EV) charge points to serve areas with no off-street parking are being assessed and a survey of residents' attitudes to EVs has been launched. 11 new Council EVs will replace old diesel fleet vehicles in October. Work continues with the People's Jury to implement their recommendations and sustain engagement with local people on climate priorities.

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

### **Employment Developments**

The Council's key employment sites are making good progress with more details to be provided in the next update report.

A planning application has also been submitted for a new manufacturing research centre at Chapels. This is a site that has been brought forward with support from the £100m Darwen Town Deal. Barnfield Blackburn Ltd – a joint venture between the Barnfield Group and Blackburn with Darwen Council – has submitted the proposals for the two hectare site. And, initial discussions are well advanced with Sheffield University's AMRC, as anchor tenant – housing its first-of-its-kind Additive Manufacturing Accelerator. Perspex International Ltd, a major employer in the town, is also developing plans to expand its neighbouring Chapels site with a proposed new

£30m national manufacturing centre there – again, with support from the Town Deal. That planning application is expected to be submitted later in the year.

## **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 are developing 300 new homes, including 160 family homes for sale and up to 50 keyworker affordable homes in the first phase. A revised planning application is likely to be determined at Planning & Highways Committee in October.
- Whalley Old Road Housing Site - Vistry Partnerships have completed the purchase of the site to deliver 165 high quality family homes. Blackburn will be the first site to offer Bovis Homes in Lancashire.
- Holden Fold Housing Site - Vistry Partnerships will build around 477 new homes, including 170 affordable homes for rent and home ownership. Vistry plan to deliver their Bovis and Linden Homes brands. A planning application has been submitted and will be determined at Planning & Highways Committee in late 2023.

Despite challenging economic and market conditions, progress continues to be made by 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, which will see new affordable homes for rent come on stream later this year.
- McDermott Homes at Ellison Fold Way, Darwen, will deliver around 340 new family dwellings, including 70 affordable homes plus funding towards more school places, roads and improvements to Blacksnape Play Area.
- McDermott Homes have almost completed a successful build programme at Lomond Gardens, Blackburn.
- 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.

## **Empty Homes**

Empty homes in the Borough continue to be tackled by the team, because they can have negative environmental impacts on neighbourhoods in addition to being a much-needed housing resource. At neighbourhood level, empty properties attract fly tipping, crime, arson and nuisance. It's therefore a priority to tackle these problems through enforcement as part of the wider effort to improve neighbourhoods and prevent blight.

Activity in Quarter 1 of 2023/24 resulted in 214 empty homes being brought back into use, 191 of which were classified as empty and unfurnished for over 6 months. The properties were brought back into occupation following intensive negotiations between the team and the owners, exceeding the quarterly target of 200 homes.

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

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

Works continue to progress well at Blakey Moor Terrace. Internal scaffolding to the original part of the building is being removed and mezzanine floor created. This will be followed by the reinstatement of the shopfronts. The steelwork frame for the new extension has been erected and floors will be installed next. As part of our heritage skills training programme, six Level 2 bricklayers and one joiner from Blackburn College will be gaining onsite work experience in September and October.

Local artist, Alexandra Gallagher, was commissioned to create some new imagery to help promote the building and wider cultural offer. This has now been used to animate the hoardings around the site. This is to be further complemented with lamp post banners that will form part of a creative heritage trail delivered in partnership with Blackburn BID.

We are also working closely with our partners at Blackburn College on the multi-million pound restoration works of the iconic Victoria Building. The flagship project is one of the largest schemes of its kind in the UK, transforming the historic building into a modern hub of learning, skills and community activity – complete with a top floor art space. Once finished, it will become a central feature of Blackburn's Cultural Quarter. Ahead of a new road closure being implemented in August to allow for the works to be carried out safely, detailed stakeholder engagement was undertaken with all surrounding businesses. New hoarding designs are also being developed for this three-year project – again using the striking Alexandra Gallagher artwork – to promote the scheme and affected businesses in the Cultural Quarter.

The refurbishment of 50 Northgate is complete and now occupied by 'Dark Secrets Hair'. The new 'Tipsy' micro bar has also opened at 48 Northgate. 29 Northgate will host a pop-up exhibition through October as part of the British Textile Biennial 2023.

### **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 expected imminently.

### **St John's Refurbishment Project**

A full design team including OMI Architects were appointed in 2022 to prepare a design for the refurbishment of the former St John's Church. Proposals include an ambitious refurbishment and extension to the Grade II listed building, to provide an innovation hub with a range of flexible work spaces. The planning application was submitted in September, and subject to receiving consent, works are anticipated to start on site in the summer of 2024.