

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

COUNCILLOR QUESIR MAHMOOD

PORTFOLIO CO-ORDINATING
CHIEF OFFICER: STRATEGIC
DIRECTOR & DEPUTY CHIEF
EXECUTIVE: MARTIN KELLY
DATE: 25 JANUARY 2024

ALL PRIORITIES:

New Local Plan to 2037

Our ambitious new Local Plan (2021-2037) has now completed its Examination in Public (EiP) process. The Planning Inspectors appointed to conduct the EiP have issued their report, advising that the Plan is considered to be legal and sound subject to the main modifications presented in the appendix to the report. Further details, along with the recommendation to adopt the new Local Plan, is presented to the Council Forum under a separate agenda item and the Leader's Update report.

Two key Supplementary Planning Documents (SPD) that support the new Local Plan are also underway, as these were advised to be in place by the Planning Inspectors as soon as possible following adoption. These are:

1. The [Climate Impacts Framework SPD](#) – a public consultation on a draft of this SPD concluded on 24th November 2023. A report is expected to be brought to February's Executive Board setting out the outcomes of the consultation, amendments to the SPD where relevant, and recommending its adoption; and
2. The [Developer Contributions and Affordable Housing SPD](#) – a public consultation on a draft of this SPD concludes on 15th January 2024, following which responses will be considered. Outcomes of the consultation, along with amendments to the SPD where relevant, and a recommendation to adopt, is expected to be brought to April's Executive Board meeting.

Further SPDs that the Council has committed to preparing through 2024 and 2025 to support the new Local Plan are set out in the [Local Development Scheme](#) (adopted in September 2023).

PLACE, PRIORITY 4: CONNECTED COMMUNITIES

Cultural Services - Venues

Darwen Library Theatre has recently enjoyed sell-out shows, including Abbamania, Rachel Fairburn, Dan Nightingale and two Afternoon Variety Shows.

King George's Hall has hosted sell-out shows from Tom Allen, Paul Smith, Tom Stade, Romesh Ranganathan and The Lancashire Hot Pots. Aladdin was our second highest box office grossing pantomime ever. Paul Weller and Scouting For Girls are already sold out for 2024, with further big names being announced soon, see [Home Page - BwD Venues](#)

Our annual **Children's Literature Festival**, started in 2018 is a real highlight in the libraries' event calendars. The 2023 Festival extended over 7 days in October and included activities and workshops in each of the Borough's libraries and local SEND

schools. Supported by Arts Council England, celebrated authors, poets, illustrators and performers and entertained over 3,700 visitors from school classes and weekend family audiences.

The **Rekindle** arts development programme, funded over 3-years by Arts Council England, was launched with a mix of performances and creative activities for adults and family audiences in our libraries. The programme is one of 5 partnerships between library services and touring arts schemes across the country and is coordinated locally by Sport On Lancashire. More information about future events in BwD's libraries can be found on [this link](#)

Through the latter part of 2023 there has been extensive work undertaken on the Museum roof. Predominantly funded through funding from Arts Council England. The closure at the end of last year enabled the entrance hall and galleries to be redecorated and painting rehung ready to welcome visitors back into the building.

2024 is going to be an exciting year for Blackburn Museum not only is it one of Arts Council England's National Portfolio Organisations, which will see exciting opportunities for the Borough's young people to get involved and shape how the story of Blackburn's past is told, but the Museum is also celebrating its **150th anniversary**. Blackburn Museum and Art Gallery was the first free to visit museum to open outside London. To mark this historic milestone there will be an exciting year-long celebration with events and activities focussed on community involvement and will also include a special Birthday Party on 11 June, the date the Museum first opened.

PLACE PRIORITY 5: SAFE & CLEAN ENVIRONMENT

Climate Emergency Action Plan

Delivery of the Climate Emergency Action Plan continues apace. Key activities underway since the last Council Forum update include:

- a natural flood management study which will help identify interventions to slow the flow of water from our moors to reduce flooding, aid peatland restoration and improve biodiversity.
- Planting of 50 tree standards this year at four locations and a Miyawaki-style micro-wood created at Queen's Park. A further 12 sites are currently being assessed for tree planting, including creation of community orchards, in 2024/25.
- New electric vehicles have been introduced to the Council's fleet, reducing reliance on diesel. Trial sites for EV charge points to serve residential areas have been identified and will be rolled out in early 2024.
- A communications campaign led by the People's Jury will be rolled out early in 2024. A Climate Community comprising key stakeholders from the public, private and third sectors in the Borough is to be brought together early in 2024 to share information on our response to the climate crisis and identify areas where joint working might be beneficial.

The Council has also received an "A" grade rating by the global Corporate Disclosure Project, in recognition of our environmental leadership, action on climate change, and in demonstrating best practice in strategy and action.

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

Employment Developments

The Council's key employment sites, within the agreed Growth Programme for 2023/24, continue to make good progress. For example:

- Dock St - A new commercial unit was completed in October.
- Carl Fogarty Way – New commercial units at Plot 4 are due to complete in early 2024. A new unit at Plot 1 is also under construction, and works are due to start soon at Plot 3.
- Wainwright Way – Works have commenced at development Plot 1, to provide 6 new commercial units.
- Commercial units at Millbank Business Park (joint venture with the Barnfield Group) continue to be completed and occupied.

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 the Council. Discussions are well advanced with Sheffield University's AMRC to be the anchor tenant – hosting its first-of-its-kind Additive Manufacturing Accelerator.

Housing Developments

Further to the Council's agreed Growth Programme for 2023/24, the following major housing projects involving Council land are continuing to progress:

- Holden Fold Housing Site – sale successfully concluded with Countryside Homes on the 21st of December. Countryside Homes have secured planning approval (Planning & Highways Committee November 2023) to build 477 new homes, including 170 affordable homes for rent and home ownership. The proposal also includes new open spaces and car park for the adjacent sports pavilion. The development also secures developer contributions towards new primary, secondary and special needs school places, highway improvement works, upgrades to the Square Meadow Sports Facility and additional GP capacity. Countryside Homes plan to start on site in early 2024.
- Haslingden Road Housing Site – Keepmoat Homes plan to complete the purchase of the site in January to develop 305 new homes, including 148 family homes for sale and 57 keyworker & affordable homes in the first phase. A revised planning application was approved at Planning & Highways Committee in October 2023. Keepmoat plan to commence on site in early 2024.

Supporting highway works started in early January and will take 16 weeks to complete, including a new entrance and dedicated right turn lane off Haslingden Road. Highway alignment through this section of Haslingden Road will also be improved.

- Whalley Old Road Housing Site – the construction of 165 high quality family homes has commenced; the first site to offer Bovis Homes in Lancashire.
- New affordable homes have recently been completed and occupied at the Ellison Fold Way housing site.

- Development of new housing also continues to progress at Fishmoor Drive, Tower View, Roe Lee and Milking Lane.

Empty Properties

As at the end of Q3, the empty properties team have brought 764 properties back into use, 214 in Q1, 250 in Q2 and 300 in Q3. Properties brought into use included 8 properties that had stood empty for over 10 years and are now refurbished and occupied. 9 that had stood empty for over 5 years and 91 that had been unoccupied for over 2 years. During this year, 4 successful CPO's have been made on properties blighting their communities.

PLACE, PRIORITY 7: SUPPORTING OUR TOWN CENTRES AND BUSINESSES

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

Over the last few years, the Townscape Heritage Project has fully restored and remodelled 35 Northgate in order to secure its future as a landmark heritage building and to bring it back into use as a public house. Blackedge Brewery opened the new Ribblesdale Tap in December and has been trading well in the run up to Christmas, outperforming the company's other two established bars in Westhoughton and Horwich. The Ribblesdale Tap is currently open Wednesday to Sunday. They hope to expand their opening hours, food offer and create an outdoor seating area in 2024.

New signage has been installed at 54-58 Northgate for Rummage Rescuers after their relocation to the former Ladbrokes unit. As part of the works to improve the external façade of the property, the business was rebranded as Books & Blooms.

Work at Blakey Moor Terrace continues to progress at pace and the majority of the external brickwork is now complete. The new arched windows will be installed in the early New Year followed by internal joinery, electrics and plumbing to the new extension. First phase external landscaping works should complete by the end of March.

Morrisons Relocation

Planning submission for the proposed relocation of the existing Morrisons store to the former Thwaites site is expected by the end of January. Following submission of planning, Morrisons will progress the detailed design and tender of the works with an expected start on site late 2024 subject to viability and approvals.

St John's Refurbishment Project

Planning was secured in October with design work completed by February. Procurement will also commence in January with final bids expected by June 2024. The project is on programme to commence on site in late 2024.

South East Blackburn Levelling-Up Project

Project 1 Update – Walking and Cycling Network

The Walking and Cycling project will provide around 18 km of improved walking and cycling routes throughout South East Blackburn, giving residents better access to local

amenities and new developments and opportunities for physical activity. Further resident and stakeholder engagement is planned in the coming months. Detailed design work will then follow on, along with obtaining all necessary approvals including planning approval if required. It is anticipated construction works will commence late 2024. Further reports will be submitted to the Executive Board for consideration and final approval.

Project 2 Update – M65 Junction 5 Improvement Works

This project delivers highway improvement works to the M65 Junction 5 to increase capacity to support growth in South East Blackburn. Balfour Beatty has been appointed through the Scape Civil Engineering Framework as a Design & Build Contractor.

A competitive tender process administered by Balfour Beatty, involving the Council, has selected a lead designer, Ramboll, a major multi-discipline engineering consultancy with expertise in undertaking similar schemes for local authorities and National Highways across the UK.

The Council has also selected WSP as its lead Technical Advisor. WSP are a leading multi-discipline engineering consultancy with expertise in undertaking similar roles for local authorities around the UK.

Preliminary and detailed designs will be developed in 2024 with construction works commencing in early 2025 with completion of the scheme in 2027.