

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

COUNCILLOR QUESIR MAHMOOD

PORTFOLIO CO-ORDINATING
STRATEGIC DIRECTOR & DEPUTY
CHIEF EXECUTIVE: MARTIN KELLY
DATE: 14 MARCH 2024

ALL PRIORITIES:

Local Plan (2021-2037)

The new Local Plan was formally adopted on the 25th January 2024. As the adopted development plan for the Borough, it is now applied in all planning decision making (delegated decisions and by the planning and highways committee). A variety of training sessions and awareness raising has taken place since adoption, to help ensure that the transition to the new planning policies is made as smoothly as possible. Adoption documents are available to view on the new [Local Plan webpage](#) and hard copies are available to view at the usual deposit points around the Borough (Town Halls, Libraries, and the Barlow Institute).

The Council will report on the outcomes of the new Local Plan through its quarterly monitoring (focused on a small number of key performance indicators) and its annual Authority Monitoring Report (AMR). The AMR is published in the summer of each year and will report on the full range of indicators set out in the monitoring framework section of the plan. Previous reports are available to view on the [AMR webpage](#).

The Council's Executive Board approved adoption of the first of the new Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs) to support the new Local Plan on the 8th February, the Climate Impacts Framework (CIF) SPD. Therefore, since the 15th February, a CIF Assessment is now a validation requirement for all major commercial and residential developments in the Borough. The CIF will be considered and included in officer reports in line with Local Plan Policy CP5. Its purpose is to ensure that the climate emergency is embedded within the decision-making process. Further details are available on the Council's [CIF SPD webpage](#).

A second SPD that brings together all relevant guidance on matters relating to planning obligations and affordable housing in the new Local Plan is still in preparation. An initial consultation period on a draft SPD concluded on the 15th January 2024. The Council is undertaking a further consultation on a revised version of the SPD in March following some significant amendments. A final version of the SPD will be brought to a future Executive Board meeting, along with a Consultation Statement, recommending its adoption. Further details are available within the [Developer Contributions and Affordable Housing SPD](#).

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).

A new national requirement for major developments to demonstrate at least 10% Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) has come into effect from the 12th February 2024. This will extend to small sites from the 2nd April 2024. The definitions of 'major

developments' and 'small sites' are set out in the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 and BNG regulations respectively, however for both there are confirmed exemptions that may apply. The Council has prepared a Planning Advice Note (PAN) to provide further guidance to applicants and developers to help navigate how BNG will be implemented and managed at the local level, which was also approved by Executive Board in March 2024.

Highways and Transport

We have been supporting the Ribble River Trust on two Natural Flood Management (NFM) projects bid to slow the flow and reduce the impact of flooding, the two NFM projects are:

- The peat restoration on Darwen Moor next to Lords Hall estate.
- Formalisation of wetlands at downstream of Blacksnape playing fields.

Lancashire Wildlife Trust will lead the peat restoration and Ribble River Trust will lead the other works such as woodland creation, wetlands and leaky dams. The Council as land owner and the Lead Local Flood Authority will be working closely with both organisations on the delivery of these two projects. The total grant funding which has been allocated for these two projects by the Environment Agency is just less than £500k.

Bus Service Improvement Plan

In October 2021 our bus service improvement plan was approved securing circa £3.7million of funding for capital and revenue improvements to bus service provision across the Borough.

Improvements to bus services have been made across the Borough with additional services operational during the evenings and weekends. The capital funding allocations are being spent on infrastructure improvements that facilitate bus movements across the network.

As part of the Government's commitment to it's National Bus Strategy further BSIP funding has been secured in a further 2 rounds of awards –

BSIP+ - £370,171 allocation for both 23/24 and 24/25
Phase 3 BSIP - £880,000 for 24/25.

Both of these funding allocations are revenue and therefore are to be spent on bus service improvements. All schemes and initiatives have to be approved by the DfT and are monitored quarterly by them. Proposals have been drafted in partnership with the DfT and conversations are ongoing with bus operators through the Enhanced Partnership regarding the delivery of these service improvements.

We are exploring the opportunity to reintroduce a bus service linking sheltered accommodation with Blackburn Town Centre. In addition to this, consideration is being given to reintroducing an orbital service linking into the current network and the retail/business park at Whitebirk, the hospital, Ewood Park and high schools, St Bede's, Pleckgate, Witton Park and Tauheedul Girls High School. The service will

run Monday to Friday 5am to 9.45am and 2pm to 7pm plus an evening provision; Saturday 6.15am – 7pm; and Sunday 7.30am to 4.45pm.

All schemes/initiatives on the BSIP programme have to be approved by the DfT and we are therefore working in partnership with them on the development of these proposals, which means that it may be subject to change.

Highways Capital Programme

We receive funding from the Department for Transport annually to maintain our roads. This year we have £1,782,000 available for the planned maintenance of our roads. This allowance varies each year dependent upon funding received and works carried forward from previous years.

This year we have received an additional £612,000 for road maintenance as part of the Network North Funding Plan from the Department for Transport. This amount is included in the above overall figure.

Network North Plan funding is to be used for local highways maintenance, particularly for the resurfacing of carriageways, cycleways and footways to prevent potholes and other road defects occurring, as well as tackling other asset management priorities, such as keeping local bridges and other highway structures open and safe.

2024-2025 Schemes

Our aim for the 2024-2025 period is to deliver the planned road maintenance works, post approval from executive board on 7th March 2024.

The proposed schemes are currently in the planning and design phase and represent a list of works we aim to deliver at this stage during the 2024-2025 period. As such, the schemes listed, their extents, treatment types and dates for delivery are potentially subject to changes or alterations dependent upon suitability following design and any currently unforeseen circumstances that may arise and alter the viability of the scheme.

PLACE, PRIORITY 4: CONNECTED COMMUNITIES

Venues:

King George's Hall has recently hosted a number of gala award evenings, including the Lancashire Tourism Awards. In early 2024, KGH has had sell-out shows with comedians Sarah Millican, Guz Khan, and Dave Spikey. Darwen Library Theatre's comedy club continues to sell out on a monthly basis. The programme for the rest of 2024 is posting strong sales for the likes of Squeeze, Rhod Gilbert and Alan Carr. For all Venues information check out the website [Home Page - BwD Venues](#)

Write Up North – Aimed at adults with little or no writing experience this free, 6 week writing course, started on 26th January at Blackburn Library. Write Up North is an Arts Council England funded project in association with Lancashire County Council, Blackpool Council and Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council.

Museums

National Portfolio Organisation (NPO) Update: Arts Council England recently announced that all NPOs would have their 3 years funding arrangements extended for an additional year. This is excellent news and takes the current NPO award for Blackburn Museum through to the end of March 2027.

The 150th celebratory year has started well with over 160 pieces by local artists of all ages being submitted for the Art Open exhibition. The opening saw 200 people turn up to celebrate and it has been great to know that some of the artists have been successful in selling their work.

A new activity supported by NPO funding is the National Saturday Club. There are currently 18 members with sessions running through until July, culminating in an exhibition and trip to London.

Another NPO development is Hobby Cave – this commission is a partnership locally with National Festival of Making and nationally with ArtAngel and a wide range other museum and gallery partners. The artist Heitan Patel has made an initial visit to meet hobbyists across the borough and there will be a film and exhibition in London in 2024 leading to a local exhibition in 2025.

The MEND roof project has been completed and the scaffolding removed from around the building; despite the disruption and partial closures towards the end of 2023 visitor figures to the Museum were higher than Q3 the previous year 10,073 v 6,029.

PLACE PRIORITY 5: SAFE & CLEAN ENVIRONMENT

Climate Emergency Action Plan

Since the previous report the Heat Network Development Unit has awarded the Council a grant to assess the feasibility of heat networks in Blackburn and Darwen town centres. Decarbonisation of heat in Council and other buildings is a key objective of the Climate Emergency Action Plan.

A restoration plan for Aushaw Moss in the West Pennine Moors is also being developed, which could lead to the capture of up to 3,000 tonnes of CO₂ over the next 50 years.

The first meeting of the Blackburn with Darwen Climate Community was held in late February. Attended by key stakeholders in the public, private and third sectors the group agreed to meet quarterly to share good practice and work collaboratively on matters of mutual benefit, such as communication of climate messages and decarbonisation of the supply chain.

Tree planting continues at various sites around the borough, including a community orchard in Corporation Park. Park supporter groups and school children have been helping to put the trees in the ground.

The People's Jury 'One Degree Challenge' has been launched on the Council's website, bus shelters and key advertising hoardings around the borough. Residents are being asked to take a closer look at their current heating schedules and what they are spending on their energy bills. A reduction of 1°C cuts gas use by 8%, saving a household around £100 a year.

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 progress. For example:

- Dock St - A new commercial unit has been completed.
- Carl Fogarty Way – New commercial units at Plot 4 are almost complete. A new unit at Plot 1 is also under construction, and works are commencing on a new car centre 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 site that has been brought forward with support from the £100m Darwen Town Deal. 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 Moor Lane Highways Improvement works have started on site, the works will provide improvements to the existing junction at Moor Lane, new off-street car parking spaces for residents and provide a new access to the housing development. Countryside Homes plan to start their development programme over the next few weeks.
- Haslingden Road Housing Site – The Council exchanged contracts with Keepmoat Homes / Great Places for the sale of the site in January, and a licence has been granted to allow commencement on site. Completion of the site sale is expected in the Spring of 2024, and works are taking place to develop 305 new homes, including 148 family homes for sale and 57 keyworker & affordable homes in the first phase. 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, along with new homes for open market sale.
- Development of new housing also continues to progress at Fishmoor Drive, Tower View, Roe Lee and Milking Lane.
- Legal conveyance of Land at Borrowdale Avenue is nearing completion. The site will provide 13 much needed two bed bungalows for affordable rent by Together Housing.

Empty Properties

As per the previous update, at the end of Q3, the empty properties team had 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 had stood empty for over 5 years and 91 had been unoccupied for over 2 years. During this year, 4 successful CPO's have been made on properties blighting their communities.

The next update will be compiled in April.

PLACE, PRIORITY 7: SUPPORTING OUR TOWN CENTRES AND BUSINESSES

Townscape Heritage Project - Blakey Moor

Blakey Moor Terrace is largely watertight with the completion of the roof and installation of 6 large arched windows and new shopfronts. Unfortunately inclement weather over the last few weeks has caused a slight delay pushing completion into April.

Internally, the floors have been poured, first fix and studwork completed and plastering now underway. Work has also started on construction of the feature staircase that will provide access to the first floor mezzanine space. Once installed, viewings with potential tenants will be able to commence.

High Street Accelerator – King William Street

King William Street, Blackburn has been selected by the High Street Task Force as one of the ten High Street Accelerators and awarded £237,000 funding from the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC).

A High Street Accelerator is a pilot project and an opportunity to test and trial new ways of working to revitalise the high street and to tackle vacancies.

Led by the Council, the King William Street Accelerator project had its first meeting with key partners this month, bring together community groups, local businesses, and town centre organisations to start work on a new vision and delivery plan for the high street.

Akbars – King of Curry

The finishing touches are being put to the brand-new Akbar's which will soon open in Blackburn's Cultural Quarter. Akbar's has restaurants in major cities across the UK, including Manchester, Leeds and Birmingham, and so it's a real coup for us to welcome them here. They have invested heavily in transforming the space within King George's Hall with a vibrant décor and will be employing 35 staff. The restaurant, with an extensive menu, will be open seven days a week from 5pm and, due to high demand, will be fully licensed to serve alcohol.