



EXECUTIVE BOARD DECISION

REPORT OF:	Executive Member for Growth and Development
LEAD OFFICERS:	Strategic Director of Growth & Development
DATE:	Thursday, 13 June 2024

PORTFOLIO/S AFFECTED:	Growth and Development
WARD/S AFFECTED:	(All Wards);
KEY DECISION:	Y

SUBJECT: Growth Programme 2024/25

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Blackburn with Darwen Council continues to deliver its ambitious Growth Programme to support the creation of new jobs, housing, and infrastructure, which, in turn, underpins the Council's Corporate Plan mission of ensuring *no one is left behind*. The Council's Growth Programme has helped to deliver strategic growth since the previous Local Plan was adopted in 2015 and has been further boosted through the work to prepare a new Local Plan which was adopted in January 2024.

The purpose of this report is to provide an annual update on progress with the Growth Programme. Despite a challenging national economic outlook, the impressive performance to date continues to be achieved through the incredibly strong can-do partnership approach of the Council as demonstrated by our latest Growth Key Performance Indicators ("KPIs") attached at Annex A.

As noted in previous updates; 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 identified in national programmes: including the Government's Town Deal, Long Term Plan for Towns, Levelling Up and UK Shared Prosperity Funds and Homes England's housing delivery initiatives. The Council has secured £125m in new growth funds in the last 2-years. Officers are in continuous dialogue with Government agencies and departments regarding new funding streams, including new Devo and strategic transport opportunities.

As was anticipated in the 2023/24 Growth Programme Update, the Council adopted the new Local Plan in January 2024. This has introduced a 'balanced growth strategy' and allocated additional development sites (or protected sites), ensuring the growth project pipeline can be further developed, along with supporting infrastructure and environmental improvements.

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;
- Improving quality and extending the choice, tenure, and range of new family housing to attract and retain residents; and
- Improved business confidence by providing robust planning and investment framework which help to create greater stability and certainty for investors.

It is important to recognise that the various growth schemes are not viewed only as physical regeneration but are aligned to securing improved outcomes for our residents, and the Borough's wider priorities including health, housing, skills, climate change and business growth.

This report provides a summary of progress on growth projects in the year and outlines the Growth Programme for 2024/25 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 progress made by officers in delivering the Darwen Town Deal programme.
3. Note the progress made by officers in advancing the Government's Levelling-Up projects in Blackburn Town Centre and our South East Blackburn transport corridor;
4. Note the success of officers during the year in securing a further £20m funding for Darwen from the Governments Long Term Plan for Towns Initiative and a £20.3m investment package as part of the Levelling Up Partnership policy and investment programme (one of only 25 places in the Country) with a focus on major cultural investment priorities in Blackburn Town Centre, an acquisition fund, and new skills and innovation opportunities.
5. Note the continued progress made by the Council's two joint venture development companies Barnfield Blackburn Ltd and Maple Grove Blackburn Ltd.
6. Note the completion of Phase 1 of the Asset Review which assessed the Council's primary buildings to identify opportunities to improve utilisation or to consolidate and rationalise to release potential disposal or redevelopment opportunities;
7. Approve the Growth Programme for 2024-25 attached as Annex B for officers to progress projects from feasibility stage through to procurement and tender stage as required by project timelines.
8. Delegate authority to the Growth Director in consultation with the Executive Member for Growth & Development to agree the provision of specialist and affordable homes with the Borough's three key local Registered Providers; Together Housing, Great Places and Places for People to develop affordable housing on Council owned housing sites: and
9. Delegate authority to revise the Growth Programme for 2024-25 (by adding, removing or prioritising sites) to the Growth Director in consultation with the Executive Member for Growth & Development.

3. BACKGROUND

As noted in previous updates; in order to deliver the Growth Programme, the Council 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; develops new economic initiatives, strategies and relationships with sub-regional partners, strategic housing, planning and transport services, strategic transport and infrastructure plans; 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.

Our long term planned growth is set out in our newly adopted 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, and Long Term Plan for Darwen.
- 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 with new investment in commercial, skills and cultural developments; and
- The **Infrastructure Delivery Plan**: an important series of interventions to improve infrastructure for all, such as roads, schools, and health facilities, with emerging opportunities for major investment in strategic transport priorities.

Our Growth KPIs attached at Annex A evidence the growth in the Borough since the previous 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 and building control services, with Blackburn with Darwen Council recently reported as being in the top 3% of all England local authorities for new planning performance measures, the best in the North West¹;
- Housing delivery continues to perform well and in line with expectations, with 598 housing completions delivered in 2023/24 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 3,415 housing completions across the Borough; with 2,934 new homes and 481 conversions.
- Over 21% of the completions being affordable, which is above our 20% target.
- 50% of the new homes delivered on brownfield land.

¹ Planning Resource, 9th April 2024

- The new Local Plan identifies a pipeline of circa 7,000 homes over the next 15 years, with 56% of the homes already benefiting from planning permission.
- In 2015/16 the Council forecasted a total section 106 income of £1.4 million for infrastructure investment as a result of development - the current section 106 forecast is over £12 million and growing.
- The number of annual empty properties brought back into use across the Borough has increased from 167 in 2016/17 to 898 in 2023/24.
- The number of long-term empty properties (over 6 months) is maintained around 1,000 which is approximately 1.7% of housing stock, representing a reduction of 0.5% since 2018; and
- Over 6,000 additional jobs generated since 2017, with the Borough home to nearly 5,000 businesses with one of the highest rates of new business growth in the North West.

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 joint venture (“JV”) partnerships, firstly 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 has taken place in 2023/24, and plot 4 is expected to commence in 2024/25. Elan homes acquired two residential plots from Barnfield Blackburn Ltd and commenced construction in 2022, with families now moving into the new homes.

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.

- 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 supported the Council in developing plans for Blackburn Town Centre. The JV prepared plans to relocate Morrisons to the former Thwaites site, but this element is no longer progressing with alternative site options now being considered.
- Using the Growth Framework to appoint framework partners to deliver a wide variety of projects covering construction, civil engineering and developments.
- Continuing to ensure 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 Mellor Brook.
- Developing much needed specialist and affordable homes on Council owned land through direct negotiation with partner Registered Providers. This has helped deliver adaptive properties for disabled children and their families at Alaska St, affordable homes for rent and shared ownership at Griffin and more recently a new scheme is due to commence for two bed bungalows for older persons at Borrowdale Avenue, Blackburn.
- Developing key infrastructure to support the delivery of growth in the Borough, including education, active travel and highway schemes; including new schemes to be delivered for

example at Moor Lane, Darwen and Bog Height Link Road, supporting planned housing developments.

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 2023/24:

- 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 Wain Homes
- 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) Former SAPPI site (phase 1a) – 450 dwellings being promoted by Black Pearl Capital
- 7) Ellison Fold Way – 343 dwellings being delivered by McDermott Homes, including 67 affordable homes.
- 8) Lomond Gardens – 30 dwellings completed by McDermott Homes.
- 9) Ramsgreave Drive – 110 dwellings being promoted by Applethwaite and McDermott Homes.
- 10) Fishmoor Drive – 383 dwellings being promoted by Countryside and Together Housing.
- 11) Davyfield Farm – 19 dwellings being delivered by Applethwaite Homes
- 12) Brokenstone Road – 450 dwellings being delivered by Taylor Wimpey and Barratt Homes.
- 13) Milking Lane – 76 dwellings being delivered by Elan Homes.
- 14) Whalley Old Road – 165 dwellings being delivered by Vistry Partnerships and Together Housing.

Key Employment schemes completed or under construction in 2023/24:

- 1) Units completed at Millbank Business Park (Plots 1,2,3; and Plot 4 due to commence) (former Lower Darwen Paper Mill)
- 2) Units at Plot 1 Wainwright Way, Blackburn
- 3) Units at Plot 1 Carl Fogarty Way, Blackburn
- 4) Units at Plot 3 Carl Fogarty Way, Blackburn
- 5) Units at Plot 4 Carl Fogarty Way, Blackburn
- 6) Units at Former Hollins Mill (Prime Point), Darwen
- 7) Units at Dock Street, Blackburn

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

- 1) Darwen Chapels South – circa 50,000 sqft commercial plots promoted by Barnfield Blackburn Ltd supporting Darwen Town Deal programme
- 2) Carl Fogarty Way, Blackburn – Plot 2 (opposite Imperial Mill, see below)
- 3) Holden Fold, Darwen – new housing development for 477 dwellings promoted by Countryside Homes
- 4) Whitebirk Industrial Estate - Pets Choice Phase 2 manufacturing facility
- 5) Wainwright Way (Plot 3), Blackburn – new commercial unit
- 6) Salisbury Road, Darwen – 12 new dwellings promoted by Lang Estates
- 7) Issa Way (North) – circa 250,000 sqft of new commercial units
- 8) Haslingden Road – new housing site (opposite the hospital) promoted by Keepmoat Homes offering a mix of 160 family homes for sale and 57 homes and apartments for keyworker/affordable rent
- 9) 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
- 10) Comprehensive restoration of St John's Church and Making Rooms to create new Tech Innovation Quarter adjacent to the new Skills and Employment Campus.
- 11) Restoration and re-purposing of the former Griffin Lodge to create modern health facilities, subject to funding
- 12) Long-term refurbishment of Imperial Mill and subsequent strategy for future uses
- 13) Longshaw Nursery site for development of approx. 30 new homes including adapted bungalows for affordable rent
- 14) Clarendon Road – Land assembly through CPO of unregistered land now offering a development site for around 60 new homes
- 15) Queens Park flats site – development of highly constrained and stalled site to provide mixed tenure family homes
- 16) Griffin (Phase 2), Blackburn – final phase of development for this clearance site with mixed tenure housing
- 17) Former Manxman Training Resource Unit and surrounding land – redevelopment of surplus Council building for affordable housing
- 18) Units at Plot 6 Carl Fogarty Way, Blackburn.

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 impacts of Brexit, global insecurity, increasing construction and development costs, and high interest rates and challenging national economic conditions. 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.

To mitigate some of the risks around delivery of specialist/affordable housing viability challenges. Council officers will negotiate delivery of these much-needed homes for rent directly with Registered Provider partners Together Housing Group, Great Places and Places for People, where development is on Council owned housing sites.

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

5. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Our 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. 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 supply of housing sites and passing the Government's annual Housing Delivery Test.

The development of the Lancashire Combined County Authority (of which the Council is a constituent member with Blackpool and Lancashire County Councils), subject to final Council and Government sign-off in the coming months, will also provide new policy and investment opportunities that will support the delivery of the Borough's growth and infrastructure priorities and initiatives.

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 Team is working at 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 and deliver new growth fund 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 are carried out 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.

VERSION:	Rev 2
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CONTACT OFFICER:	Simon Jones, Growth Director, Growth & Development
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DATE:	May 2024
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BACKGROUND PAPER:	None
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