

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

COUNCILLOR PHIL RILEY

**PORTFOLIO CO-ORDINATING
DIRECTOR: MARTIN KELLY
DATE: 23 JANUARY 2020**

PLACE PRIORITY 6, Strong, Growing Economy to Enable Social Mobility

This report provides a brief update on progress with key development priorities in this reporting period.

Darwen Update

A strong Christmas programme in Darwen was launched in November with the popular Light Switch On event, which was very well received and enjoyed by all who attended. A range of entertainment including local singers, bands and school choirs have been hosted alongside a successful Christmas pop up market and the first late night for some years. The focus of the programme was to showcase the market and traders to families and new customers and help broaden the town centre shopping catchment.

Darwen has been included in the first phase of the Government's Town Deal Fund programme with the principle objective of the Fund to drive the economic regeneration of towns to deliver long-term economic and productivity growth. Government guidance requires the Darwen Town Deal to be directed and supported by the Council, with an advisory Darwen Deal Board, which is private sector led, supporting the Council on the development of a Darwen Investment Plan by Summer 2020. Both the Council and the Board must agree the Investment Plan. The Council's emerging approach to progressing this initiative was agreed at Executive Board on 9 January.

Blakey Moor / Northgate

The environmental improvements to Blakey Moor and Northgate are largely complete with just some small snagging issues to be resolved in the New Year and cleaning/repair of Gladstone's statue in late February when it's hoped the risk of frost is reduced. Focus has now moved to development of Blakey Moor Terrace. Structural and measured surveys were undertaken in December with a view to developing plans by February. Work to bring forward projects on a number of other properties on Northgate is also progressing and a meeting to showcase proposals to businesses and property owners is scheduled for 28th January 2020.

Blackburn Cinema & Jubilee Square Public Realm Improvements

Blackburn Cinema construction is progressing, with the planned opening by REEL scheduled in summer 2020.

Our construction contractor, Casey, will commence the second phase of the Jubilee Square and Barton Street works in January with completion scheduled spring 2020.

Blackburn Town Centre Christmas

A strong programme of events and entertainment under the banner of 'Believe in Blackburn' delivered in partnership with the BID has showcased the town centre offer to residents, visitors and shoppers. The Markets have been very busy and the high footfall and existing offer, particularly around food, has attracted four new food traders opening in November and December. Flexibility around lettings to help businesses try out ideas without long commitments is proving a popular approach particularly as retail in general is going through a challenging period. Business feedback in the New Year will help shape next year's BID Business Plan.

Milking Lane Development Site

Barnfield Blackburn Ltd (BBL), a joint venture between Barnfield and the Council, has successfully secured £1.4m in LEP Growth Deal funding to construct a new link road from Greenbank Terrace to Milking Lane, Darwen. A revised hybrid planning application has been submitted seeking full planning permission for the link road and access points, along with outline planning permission for land use. The planning application is scheduled to be presented to the February Planning Committee meeting. Works to the new link road are scheduled to commence in late Spring 2020 and be completed by March 2021.

Housing Developments

Applethwaite Homes has completed the demolition of the former care home (Feniscliffe Bank) building at Tower Road and have commenced ground works for the new 30 home development.

The land at Lomond Gardens residential development opportunity is currently out to Informal Tender with a development partner scheduled to be selected early 2020.

A planning application has been submitted for the first phase of the Griffin clearance site to provide 56 new homes, the application will be presented to the February Planning Committee meeting. A planning application is planned to be submitted in March for the second phase. Works to phase one are scheduled to commence in spring 2020.

Growth Deal Transport Schemes:

The Council's "Pennine Gateways" transport schemes, funded through Local Growth Fund 3 and the Northern Powerhouse, are progressing well through the delivery phase.

North Blackburn:

The second package, North Blackburn, is now substantially complete. The Council has replaced time expired traffic signal and controller equipment at Pleckgate Road, Brownhill Roundabout, Emerald Avenue and Whalley Old Road junctions as part of the project.

The North Blackburn project package has improved traffic conditions on the “Arterial Road” making conditions better for pedestrians and cyclists and will enable and accommodate future housing developments in the area.

South East Blackburn:

The third and final package of “Pennine Gateways”, South East Blackburn, was granted Full Planning Approval by the Council’s Planning Committee in December 2019. The scheme has now been submitted for Full Approval to the Lancashire Enterprise Partnership.

In parallel, a procurement exercise has also taken place, and the Council is working with the scheme’s main contractor, The Casey Group, to get ready to begin construction in April 2020.

The £11.6m package will see the widening of Haslingden Road between Lions Drive and Shadsworth Road, the creation of a new link road at Blackamoor and a new entrance into Royal Blackburn Hospital at Old Bank Lane.

The project will improve congestion, improve air quality and pedestrian facilities, enable further development of employment and housing opportunities in the South East Blackburn area.

Social Integration – Transport Research

The first phase of the Transport Research element of the Council’s Social Integration “Our Community, Our Future” Programme, is nearing completion. Over 1500 people completed the questionnaires, and the Council now has a much more in-depth understanding of where people want to go and the difficulties some residents face in getting from A to B. A series of face-to-face events have also taken place in Community and Children Centres, Leisure Centres, Markets and Places of Worship, which have helped better inform the research activities.

The Council’s Research Officers are now inputting responses to questionnaires for analysis. Early emerging themes are:

- Connecting young people through transport
- Better communicating available transport options
- Widening the use of community transport for all
- The promotion of active transport.

Research will inform the next stage of the project which will identify opportunities for innovative transport options and solutions within the Borough.

One Public Estate

The launch of the next One Public Estate funding round (OPE 8) was delayed due to Brexit negotiations and the General Election. We now understand the launch will be in early February 2020, with bids to be submitted sometime in March and funding awards in April/May 2020. There is likely to be a focus on housing delivery, with revenue funding to support the development of project concepts and feasibility studies; and a further round of Housing Land Release Funding providing capital funding for site preparation, remediation and infrastructure works. The OPE Programme Team is developing a pipeline of projects to submit for funding, including potential Blackburn with Darwen projects.

Brexit Co-ordination

Every Council is required to identify a “Brexit Co-ordinator” to support the Government’s preparations for the UK’s departure from the EU on 31 January 2020.

The Director of Growth and Development is currently performing this role and supporting the Chief Executive in managing the Council’s preparations, while linking with broader strands of risk management work involving local partners and regional and national bodies.

The Council is working hard to better understand and mitigate any potential local impacts on service delivery, and working with local business bodies to signpost local businesses to available support on trade, contracting and workforce development issues.

PLACE, PRIORITY 5 – SAFE AND CLEAN ENVIRONMENT

SEVERE WEATHER

During the period July to November, we were in a heightened level of response due to the significant high levels of rainfall experienced. Over this period, we responded to 17 severe weather warnings resulting in flooding, which impacted residents, businesses and local transport infrastructure leading to a significant budgetary pressure on our revenue drainage and severe weather budgets. In recognition of the resulting damage to our roads and bridges, we wrote to the Department of Transport in December 2019, requesting additional funding to undertake essential repairs required at 22 locations across the borough.

POTHLES

We are experiencing a substantial increase in the numbers of actionable defect repairs being identified on our network, the most significant of which

are within our unclassified urban and rural roads. We will continue to repair actionable defects recorded in line with our section 58 defence for slips and trip claims, but this trend is concerning and will place additional pressure on already overstretched budgets year on year to fund, unless the Council can secure additional external investment from the Department for Transport to improve the condition of the roads.

PLACE, PRIORITY 4 – CONNECTED COMMUNITIES

BwD ROADS FACEBOOK PAGE

A critical element of our communications strategy is our BwD Roads Facebook page and popularity continues to grow with the number of followers currently at 17,875. Performance can be broken down by impressions (the number of times any content associated with your page was displayed to a user during the reporting period) and engagements (the total number of times users reacted to, commented on, shared, or clicked on your messages, as well as the number of times users clicked on page's links during the reporting period).

The BwD Roads statistics are featured below:

April to October 2019:

- Average of 205,123 impressions per month
- Average of 18,370 engagements per month

BwD Roads has a review score of 4.9 out of 5 and the current number of likes is 17,046 which is a 60% increase since October 2017, when the page was changed to BwD Roads.