

## PLACE PORTFOLIOS

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The 'Place' portfolio consists of:

- Councillor Gillian Campbell - Cabinet Member for Tourism and Culture
- Councillor Neal Brookes - Cabinet Member for Housing and Welfare Reform
- Councillor Jim Hobson - Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Environment
- Councillor Mark Smith - Cabinet Member for Business, Enterprise and Job Creation

The full details of the portfolio areas can be found on the Council's website at <https://www.blackpool.gov.uk/Your-Council/Your-councillors/Executive-members.aspx>

## Strategic Issues

### Ensuring the recovery of tourism businesses

In the early stages of the initial lockdown, we established a Tourism Recovery Group comprising key partners and stakeholders in the visitor economy to ensure we had a consistent approach to reopening the resort when conditions allowed. These meetings enabled businesses to discuss their recovery plans and, as different attractions and venues were allowed to open, provided an opportunity to share best practice and customer insights. It also ensured that as a resort we adopted the same key messages to visitors. The group, which includes attractions, theatres and representatives from the accommodation sector continues to meet on a weekly basis and provides an invaluable platform for feedback on the impact of ever-changing rules and restrictions.

As we move towards the end of the year, the group will focus its attention on preparing for the 2021 season. We are already working on a new destination marketing campaign, although the timing of the launch of that activity will be dependent on what restrictions are in place as we move into the New Year. We already have a strong product lined up with a number of high-profile shows booked at The Winter Gardens from March onwards, and the openings of the conference and exhibition centre and two new hotels (Sands Venue Resort and Premier Inn North Pier). In addition, Blackpool Pleasure Beach and the Empress Ballroom will both celebrate 125-year anniversaries in 2021.

Our own major events programme is also due to be reinstated, though along with other event organisers, we await guidance as to when large crowds will be able to gather. In the meantime, we will develop contingency plans should some restrictions still be in place.

### **Support for Businesses in Blackpool**

It is crucial that we prioritise the local economy at this time of crisis and as noted in the Corporate portfolio report, the Council's finance and business support teams are working to deliver a package of measures that will provide financial aid to local businesses affected by pandemic restrictions. The measures are designed to support those required to close due to pandemic lockdown restrictions as well as those that remained open, but suffered serious losses as a result of a dramatic downturn in trade. We have also pledged to use our support services to help businesses access the national support measures announced by the Chancellor, including the extension of the Job Support and Self-Employment Income Support Schemes.

In mid-October, the business community, the local authority and the town's two MPs, sent an open letter to the Prime Minister urging him to intervene and provide bespoke financial support to tourism businesses that saw most of their trade wiped out when the town was moved into Tier 3 status on the eve of the crucial October half-term holiday period. We are at our strongest when we stand together and we are pleased that the spirit of co-operation remains strong across the town.

### **New developments on Blackpool Airport Enterprise Zone**

The development of the Enterprise Zone to date has been a positive story of growth and we are preparing a revised EZ masterplan and financial delivery plan to build on the developments that have occurred since 2016 and incorporate other changes to future work. This will be subject to public consultation, which we will undertake online due to the pandemic.

We are particularly happy to see the continuing physical transformation of the site. The new grass playing pitches have now been now constructed and seeded and will be maintained by the contractor until they come into operation in September 2021. Once these are brought into use, the existing sports pitches at Common Edge can be used for further development and the construction of the eastern gateway access road. A planning application has been submitted for the construction of new changing facilities and car parking to support the operation of the new pitches, which will also be delivered by September 2021.

Work has also commenced on a 3.5 acre site at Amy Johnson Way for the construction of a 40,000 sq. ft. unit for Swedish-owned medical technology company Multiply Components Ltd. This will be completed in October 2021 and provide for 67 jobs. £800,000 of Growth Deal funding was secured from Lancashire LEP to support the project and the Enterprise Zone has also been successful in securing an allocation of funding from the Towns Fund toward the cost of delivering the eastern gateway access road and remodeling of the Highway at Common Edge. Further work has been completed on a 14,000 sq. ft. facility for exhibition stand company Love Expo, whilst the refurbished Squires Gate Industrial Estate continues to attract new occupiers with a very limited supply of industrial and warehouse accommodation currently available.

There remains a good level of interest from business seeking new build accommodation at the EZ with four potential development schemes at the feasibility assessment stage. To date the Enterprise Zone has enabled 1,492 jobs, against a 25-year target of 5,000.

We intend to step up our efforts on marketing the EZ to the data management sector and cloud-based tech companies, following the landing of the Aqua Comms fibre optic subsea transatlantic cable at Starr Gate on 11<sup>th</sup> October. The capacity and speeds offered by this cable to North America and Scandinavia led to Blackpool being dubbed “Silicon Sands” in some very positive media coverage and makes the Enterprise Zone a prime site for data centre and digital business development.

## **Corporate Issues**

### **Future High Street Fund**

The Future High Street Fund aims to provide infrastructure investment to help renew and reshape town centres and high streets to improve experience, drive growth and ensure future sustainability. Members will recall that we made a submission requesting £25m across 11 schemes to support existing public co-funding of £18.3m and £16.1m of private investment.

On 21 September 2020 we were notified that the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) had completed their initial review of applications. They asked applicants to remove projects, which had already been brought forward and awarded Getting Building Fund money, to remove money to be spent on monitoring and evaluation and to review scheme eligibility in light of the criteria. They also highlighted authorities, which had not followed the business template and guidance, although Blackpool’s submission was completed correctly.

In our case, as the Houndshell extension (£5 million) and Abingdon Street Market purchase (£3.63 million) schemes will receive such Getting Building Fund money these were removed, along with the £296,000 evaluation proposal and the Fylde Coast Rail Study (£800,000) as feasibility studies were considered ineligible. Alternative routes are now being explored to fund the Rail Study. The new request for £15.27m was submitted in time for the October deadline, with a decision on the funding now anticipated in late November.

### **Getting Building Fund**

The Getting Building Fund was established in response to the economic crisis caused by COVID-19. On 10 June 2020, the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government invited the Lancashire Enterprise Partnership (LEP) to put forward ideas for accelerating existing Government funded capital projects within local growth programmes, to generate new development activity within 18 months, help create jobs, and raise overall demand in the economy.

As the Houndshell Extension and Abingdon Street Market schemes were sufficiently advanced, they were allocated funding – another tribute to the fantastic work which the Growth and Prosperity Team is doing to speed up the regeneration of Blackpool. The Houndshell scheme includes a nine screen Imax-style cinema, two new restaurants and a relocated Wilko store, whilst the Abingdon Street Market scheme will support the creation of a range of independent

retail and food retail services and office uses, together with performance space. Both schemes should see work start this year.

### **Town Deal**

The Towns Fund invited towns to bid for up to £25 million of funding - £50 million in exceptional circumstances - which could help “unleash the full economic potential of 101 places and level up communities throughout the country”. The development of the bid was overseen by Blackpool’s Town Deal Board, which incorporates public, private and community membership and an independent private sector chair, in its capacity as an advisory board to the Council. The bid process included the development of a wider Town Investment Plan from which a suite of projects were suggested for funding.

Blackpool’s Town Investment Plan was submitted to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) with a request for £49.3m across nine projects on 31 July 2020, as covered in our report to September Council. MHCLG held a challenge session with the Council and the Chair of the Town Deal Board on 29 September, the outcome of which was that the Plan was deemed sufficiently strong to offer the Council a Heads of Terms for £39.5 million across seven projects, with the Innovation Partnership and Grundy Art Gallery feasibility study being deemed out of scope. An additional £1m of “accelerated funding” was made available to support capital elements of Town Deal schemes and discussions are underway to determine how this would best be used.

The Town Deal Board considered these Heads of Terms at a meeting on the 13 November and made recommendations to the Council’s Executive at an extraordinary meeting on 16 November, in order to meet the 17 November deadline. The Executive approved the recommendations.

As there is a funding gap of £7.7 million across the seven remaining projects compared to our original request, the projects will be received over the next two months to assess the impact of the funding reduction. Following this, the next stage of the process involves the development of business cases for each of the seven projects in line with HM Treasury Green Book Business Case guidance. Senior officers in the Growth and Prosperity and Delivery teams will liaise directly with public, private and community stakeholders in developing the business case in accordance with the Stakeholder Engagement Plan, supported by the Town Deal Board Community Engagement Team.

To ensure there is sufficient oversight and scrutiny of the business case proposals brought forward, we will establish a Town Deal Investment Panel (TDIP), drawing from partner agencies across the public, private and community and voluntary sectors) and government. The panel will be chaired by a private sector Towns Fund Board member and will report to the Town Deal Board regarding the allocation of funding and best use of public sector funding. The TDIP will be supported by the Growth and Prosperity Team of Blackpool Council in line with its existing secretariat role to the Town Deal Board and will appoint an independent appraiser to assess Business Cases. If approved by the Board and, if appropriate, the Council’s Executive, the

Council will draw up a funding agreement in its capacity as the accountable body, and put in place appropriate monitoring and evaluation arrangements.

## **Transforming Services**

### **Highways – protecting and upgrading our roads**

We reported at last Council that project amber, the £4.5m investment into our highway network, was at stage 2 of the procurement process. We are now pleased to report that the process is now complete and we will start to see significant protecting and upgrading of our roads from January 2021. We would like to pass on our thanks to the Highways team for their success in attracting this funding from the Department for Transport Challenge Fund.

### **£700,000 for our Supported Housing pilot**

On 20 October 2020, government announced the National Statement of Expectations (NSE) for supported housing. This document sets out the government's vision for ways of working in the sector and recommendations for standards in accommodation. It is intended to ensure that quality support is provided and is part of the government's work to improve oversight and ensure value for money.

The new framework will be tested out in Blackpool, along with four other areas. The Council has been awarded almost £700,000 to support the use of the framework alongside existing local tools and powers, with a view to driving up the quality of supported housing in Blackpool. Throughout the pilot, we will be working closely with central government to create an evidence base of what works and what does not, reporting back on the progress made.

The pilot will involve staff from a wide range of services including enforcement, planning, housing, social care, commissioning and legal. A full supply and demand analysis will also be undertaken as part of the pilot to inform future need.

### **Progress on Council Homes**

As reported to Council previously, we have two major schemes underway. The Troutbeck scheme will deliver 75 new Council Homes by April 2022. Although there was some delay in March due to lockdown, good progress is now being made on site and there have been no additional setbacks. Meanwhile, a design team has now been appointed to work up a full plan for the scheme at Grange Park which will deliver approximately 100 additional homes in this area.

### **Homeless Update**

We have been successful in obtaining a small amount of funding through the Next Steps Accommodation Programme to extend some accommodation and facilitate further move on.

## **Working with Partners**

### **A new Registered Provider for Blackpool**

On 1 October 2020, we successfully registered Lumen Housing Limited as a provider of social housing. The Council has supported the creation of the community benefit society as a subsidiary of Blackpool Housing Company to form a key part of our wider strategic ambition and effort to increase the supply of good quality affordable homes and to help tackle the issue of poor quality housing and management standards that exist in some segments of the market. The new organisation will work in tandem with the Housing Company, allowing us to bring forward the right solutions to deliver a balanced housing market that offers customers affordability and quality homes in some of the most deprived parts of the Town.