

PLACE PORTFOLIOS

The 'Place' portfolio consists of:

- Councillor Lynn Williams - Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Tourism and Culture
- Councillor Ivan Taylor – Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Partnerships and Performance (Housing)
- Councillor Neal Brookes - Cabinet Member for Enforcement, Public Safety, Highways and Transport
- Councillor Jane Hugo - Cabinet Member for Climate Change
- 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

A Big Step forward for Blackpool Central

I am pleased to report that the scheme has now received outline planning permission for the whole development, which includes the demolition of the buildings on site, three new indoor theme park buildings, a hotel, some new public open space and a new coach station and car park. The first stages of the scheme have also been given detailed permission for the new 1,306 space multi-storey car park and for the Heritage Quarter. This includes the former King Edward VII Picture House for food and beverage use and King Edward Apartments and Public House for use as an apart-hotel, ground floor retail units and food and beverage. The permission includes public realm and vehicular access and related partial demolition and extensions.

Detailed supplementary agreements are now being finalised so that the construction of the Multi Storey Car Park can start early next year, ensuring we have sufficient car parking whilst we deliver future phases of this major leisure development.

Town Deal: Robust schemes to deliver tangible change

Twelve months ago, the Council Executive and Town Deal Board accepted an offer of £39.5m over financial years 2021/22 to 2025/26 for seven projects, with an additional £1m coming from accelerated funding in July 2020 to acquire the former Devonshire Road hospital site as a proposed location for the replacement Courts building:

Project	Funding Allocation
Blackpool Central Development	£6.95m
Land Acquisition for Multiversity Project	£9.0m
Blackpool Airport Enterprise Zone	£7.5m
Blackpool Youth Hub	£0.5m (revenue)
Revoe Community Sports Village	£6.5m
The EDGE (Stanley Buildings)	£4.5m
Illuminations	£4.5m
Total	£39.5m

In line with the grant funding requirements, the Council needed to develop business cases and submit Summary Documents to the Department for Levelling-Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) by 17 November 2021. To provide Government and local partners with assurance that decisions over the allocation of funding are proper, transparent and involve accountable decision-making, we established a Town Deal Investment Panel (TDIP) drawn from partners in the public, private, and community and voluntary sectors to ensure there is sufficient oversight and scrutiny of the business case proposals brought forward. We also appointed independent external appraisers and their assessments of the seven schemes have been a key part of the sign off process. The Panel has regularly reported to the Town Deal Board throughout the process, with the final decisions on schemes being taken by the Executive under the delegation arrangements agreed in November 2020.

The schemes for the Illuminations, Enterprise Zone and Youth Hub were the first to be approved and submitted as Summary Documents to DLUHC on 14 October, alongside a programme-level Monitoring and Evaluation form. Approval of these three schemes is anticipated by December.

The Edge and Blackpool Central Courts Relocation scheme were both approved by the Town Deal Board on 5 November, with the Multiversity and Revoe Community Sports Village gaining approval on 12 November, meaning the remaining four summary documents will be submitted in time for the 17 November deadline. We expect an approval decision on the seven schemes by around March 2022.

It is easy to underestimate the sheer amount of work it has taken to get to this stage, and I would like to again place on record my thanks for the efforts of all involved.

Disappointment over Levelling Up Fund bid

The UK Levelling Up Fund is a capital scheme which will invest in local infrastructure that has a visible impact on people and their communities and will support economic recovery. This includes a range of high value local investment priorities, including transport schemes, urban regeneration projects and cultural assets.

Blackpool submitted three bids with a total value of £20 million, including £7 million to cover a funding gap on the refurbishment and conversion of the former Post Office building for a branded boutique hotel; £9 million towards a scheme to align three major town centre roads to improve capacity, reduce congestion and carbon emissions and deliver associated public transport, public realm and cycling infrastructure improvements; and just over £4 million for redevelopment work and the creation of a new convention space with retail within the Olympia area of the Winter Gardens to complement the new conference centre under construction.

The government assessed and scored bids against published criteria covering strategic fit, deliverability, value for money and the characteristics of place. 305 bids were submitted with 105 approved across Great Britain, a rate of around 1 in 3 bids. Unfortunately, we were notified that the Blackpool bid had been unsuccessful on 28 October and are due to attend a session to provide detailed feedback. I am sure members will share my disappointment that this part of the government's Levelling Up agenda does not appear extend to Blackpool. I hope to be proved wrong if we are successful in round 2, which opens in Spring 2022.

Corporate Issues

Talbot Gateway Phase 2 – Seeing is Believing!

The Council's Development Partner Muse Developments has appointed Robertson Construction Group to carry out the construction works for the Hotel, Underpass & Temporary Car Park. I am sure anyone who has been past Blackpool North station recently will have noticed the tremendous progress made on the structural frame and the building shell also starting to take shape.

Work continues on cinema, restaurants and a new Wilko

Good progress is being made on the £20 million scheme at Houndshell, with ground works underway and utilities diversions being finalised by United Utilities and piling expected to take place before Christmas. Following the closure of one lane on Coronation Street the traffic situation is being monitored and attended provision is currently in place for Saturdays.

When complete the building will house a new cinema, new Wilko retail store and either one large or two smaller restaurants, depending on what operators feel would fit the location. The cinema operator has held discussions with providers of leading cinema technology Dolby and IMAX, and will review both before making a recommendation to us on the best options.

New Abingdon Street Market about to take shape

Preparatory works on the building continue, with the contractors having removed the asbestos and completed the strip out work. The next phase involves partial demolition in two areas which is due to start this month. I understand that the businesses re-located from the market into Victoria Street are doing well and potentially benefitting from the higher footfall in the area, as well as bringing life into some vacant premises.

Blue plaque celebrates special relationship between Blackpool and Hungary

65 years ago, on October 23 1956, the Hungarian people took a bold stance against Soviet repression and started a struggle for their freedom, independence, and dignity, a date still celebrated today. Around 200 refugees sought shelter in Blackpool and in gratitude to the people and leadership of our town, many of the Hungarians who came gave a spectacular performance of theatre, music and opera in the Winter Gardens in 1957 and supported the Mayor of Blackpool's charity fund.

A new blue plaque in the Winter Gardens now commemorates this event. Unveiled in a ceremony on October 22, attendees included Dr. Csaba Balogh, State Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Hungary; Krisztina Kátai-Nagy, Consul General of Hungary, Manchester; the Worshipful the Mayor of Blackpool, Councillor Amy Cross and members of the Hungarian community, some of whom witnessed the events of 1956.

Transforming Services

Lower carbon treatment for highways

Following the successful treatment of our three main north to south routes with preservative, Project Amber is now treating the residential road network using a wide range of the latest innovative road surfacing treatments. These treatments have a substantially lower carbon content than traditional road surfacing techniques, complementing our climate emergency objectives. We will report on the carbon and other savings made early next year.

Affordable low carbon homes for Grange Park

I am pleased to report that preparation work started on site for the construction of the 131 new homes for affordable rent at Grange Park towards the end of October, with the contractor starting on site on 8 November. Funded by the European Social Fund and significant grant funding from Homes England, these new homes will have a number of energy saving measures and technologies, including 30 air source heat pumps, in order to reduce the carbon footprint. We have formed a Stakeholder Group to liaise on the project, the first meeting of which was held on 10 November.

Working with Partners

Shoring up our coast to combat the effects of climate change

We have made a great step forward with work to further protect our coast from the impact of climate change, with the Environment Agency earmarking around £50 million for schemes between 2021-2027. This will deliver two main projects, one from Little Bispham to Bispham and the other a maintenance scheme covering the coast protection between Gynn Square and Cocker Square. Studies to inform the outline business case have started by holding meetings with relevant stakeholders and the outline business cases for the schemes will be submitted to the Environment Agency Large Project review board early in 2022 so that detailed design can commence. We will also start studies leading to an outline business case for a beach nourishment scheme in this financial year, which would build up the beach to combat further erosion. We can only hope that these schemes will not be blighted by the tonnes of raw sewage that continue to be pumped out into the sea under this government's watch.

New money for skills and business from the Community Renewal Fund (CRF)

The Community Renewal Fund was established in March 2021 to provide local areas across the UK with access to £220 million as they prepare for the scheme due to replace EU funding, the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, which should launch in 2022. The priority for the fund is to enable investment in skills, local businesses, communities and place as well as supporting people into employment. Local

Authorities were given the role of inviting proposals and shortlisting potential projects up to a maximum of £3 million by 18 June 2021.

Thanks to a local interest-raising exercise, the funding attracted 27 applications seeking £7,434,520 of UKCRF support, almost 2.5 times the maximum Blackpool bid amount. We engaged an independent consultant Ekosgen to devise a scoring methodology to make recommendations to the Town Deal Investment Panel (TDIP) on which schemes should be considered for inclusion in the final amalgamated bid. The TDIP then met to review the recommendations and agreed to put 12 projects forward across the four themes amounting to a total of £2,684,643 plus a mandated amount of an additional 2% (£53,693) to support the lead applicant in monitoring and evaluation activity, creating a total bid of £2,738,335.

On 3 November, the Council received confirmation that four of its projects had been successful at a total value of £763,370, plus an additional £15,268 towards programme management. The projects must be delivered by June 2022 as part of the funding agreement. Naturally we are further disappointed on behalf of the applicants that the government has deemed some very promising schemes as unworthy of funding, but we will encourage applicants to consider an application for Shared Prosperity Fund money in 2022/23. The successful Blackpool schemes are:

- **Ready for Work scheme (£125,628)** – this bid from Inspira will deliver pre-employment training, advice and practical support for unemployed or economically inactive people, particularly those aged 18-24 years.
- **Piloting Place-based innovation catalysts (£180,579)** - Lancaster University created this bid to pull together businesses, industry experts, public sector bodies and others to explore local goals, challenges and innovation needs, with a focus on open innovation, clean growth and digitalisation.
- **Digital Museums and Archives in Culture-led Regeneration (£13,339)** - this is a feasibility study by UCLAN to look at the role that these may play in enhancing civic pride, including the promotion and economic exploitation of digital culture by local communities, businesses and enterprise partnerships.
- **Blackpool Youth Hub (£443,824)** - a council project funding employment advisors and other support to work in partnership with DWP work coaches and others to determine what works for young job seekers aged 16-24; connect young people to opportunities; and enhance wellbeing, confidence and skills.

Happy 110th birthday to the Grundy!

On 26 October Grundy Art Gallery celebrated its 110th Birthday with the unveiling of a Blue Plaque in partnership with Blackpool Civic Trust. The Grundy continues to provide a mix of exhibitions, with world-class shows by internationally recognised artists sitting alongside high quality contributions from local artists. Partnering with nationally significant visual art organisations such as Hayward Gallery Touring in London and Turner Contemporary in Margate ensures that we can bring large-scale touring exhibitions to Blackpool, with the most recent being Seaside Photographed and Not Without My Ghosts. At a more local level, collaboration with Abingdon Studios, Resilience Revolution in Blackpool and Venture Arts in Manchester has brought artists with neurological differences such as autism together to develop their creativity and careers, culminating at the end of November with their work being presented to up to 7,000 people at The Manchester Contemporary art fair.