

PLACE PORTFOLIOS

The 'Place' portfolio consists of:

- Councillor Lynn Williams - Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Tourism, Arts 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 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

Town Deal Scheme update

All seven Town Deal projects have now commenced delivery, and I am pleased to say that “**The Platform**” (formally titled The Youth Hub) has been in operation since 1 October 2022 having successfully completed as a Community Renewal Fund project. Progress on the other strands is as follows:

Blackpool Airport Enterprise Zone Infrastructure (£7.5m Town Deal)

The scheme will create and refurbish highways to open up 10.5 hectares of development sites that will attract jobs and investment within the Blackpool Airport Enterprise Zone, contributing to the gross total of 2,137 jobs facilitated since April 2016.

Designs are still being developed as information is received from various parties relating to statutory requirements, but outline planning consent was secured on 11 October for the development of the former Common Edge sports pitches to provide 10.5 Ha of commercial development land and included the new Eastern Gateway access road and major upgrades to School Road junction and to Common Edge Road. The application has been submitted to the Secretary of State for confirmation as the site sits within the current Blackpool Green belt.

The sports centre car park is complete and building utilities are expected to complete in November 2022, which includes the provision of two Electric Vehicle charging points in line with the Council's forthcoming strategy. Construction has also commenced on the new 3G floodlit football pitch and a new grass Rugby League pitch, which will complete the community sports facilities, with the floodlit facility scheduled to come into operation in April 2023. The contract to build the new Common Edge Sports pavilion will be completed by the year-end, and the facility will be fully open in early 2023, following conclusion of work on the Division Lane Junction in January. There will be a public event in December 2022 to engage with local residents. Further detailed site investigations to assist the highway design are scheduled to commence at the end of November until March, and will unavoidably result in some traffic disruption and delay on the Queensway/ Common Edge route between Blackpool and St Annes.

Revoe Community Sports Village (£6.5m Town Deal)

The project will aid the regeneration of the Revoe area, creating jobs and encouraging over 1,700 people to engage in health and well-being activities through the creation of a new community sports facilities on a cleared and rehabilitated site. The first planning application has now been submitted for the community sports pitches with a second for the new East Stand to be submitted early next year. Letters have been issued to all properties in and around the Henry Street and surrounding area in late October. Later this month, a second letter will be mailed out to properties which need to be acquired for the scheme.

The Edge (£4.5m Town Deal)

The scheme will redevelop/refurbish the historic Stanley Buildings within the town centre, creating 1,200m² of modern office space, where start-up and growing businesses can locate and /or access business advice. The scheme also has £2,278,368 of Council funding. Construction costs continue to be subject to a value engineering process in the light of tender costs received.

The Illuminations (£4.5m Town Deal)

With £8.75m of Council funding together with the Town Deal funds, the scheme will upgrade the Illuminations to attract 1,750,000 additional visitors (by 2026) by improving the associated infrastructure and developing new features using novel and environmentally friendly lighting. The new Odyssey illumination is in place on the promenade and the team are working with artists including Chila Kumari, Singh Burman and also a Canadian artist regarding next year's illuminations.

Multiversity land acquisition (£9m Town Deal)

The Multiversity land acquisition will enable the relocation of Blackpool and the Fylde College's Park Road campus through the assembly of a land parcel close to Blackpool's town centre.

This will create a world-class university learning environment in partnership to help address anticipated local skills shortages. All properties have been written to and negotiations with residents and commercial property owners are well underway with several properties already acquired. The decision on £40m of Levelling Up Fund money is integral to delivering this £65m scheme.

Blackpool Central Courts Relocation (£6.95m Town Deal)

The Town Deal project is for the relocation of the Courts which will allow the demolition, clearing and remediation of the current courts building and plot to further open up 'Blackpool Central', a £300m leisure development, which will create a year-round, world-class visitor attraction. The announcement of funding to relocate the existing court buildings means that the scheme can now bring in exciting new leisure attractions to the resort for both visitors and resident to enjoy. In the meantime the construction of the new multi storey car park is now well underway with much of the foundation works now completed and the contractors shortly moving on to the erection of the steel frame. The car park is planned for completion during August 2023, with the final configuration of electric vehicle chargers now confirmed as including a mix of fast and rapid car chargers. Developers Nikal Limited will then be looking to progress onto the remodelling and refurbishment of the historic King Edwards buildings during Autumn/Winter of 2023, before progressing on with the construction of main leisure attractions in 2024.

Programme Management

The Council's Programme Management Office (PMO) continue to undertake programme monitoring activity based on a quarterly claims process, and comply with Government mandatory financial and monitoring and evaluation requirements. Payment of grant is dependent upon the receipt of satisfactory interim reports, which often require to be signed-off by the Council's statutory Chief Finance Officer.

The Council received a positive response from the Government Assurance and Compliance Team on 30 September regarding the Assurance review process for Town Deals undertaken earlier this year, when they confirmed they had not identified any issues. Blackpool has therefore not been selected for a second "line of defence" "deep dive" review, as the team has sufficient confidence in our governance processes.

It was originally anticipated that the 6 operational schemes would have committed £17,102,135 of spend by the end of March 2023. So far, the government has defrayed costs of £3,523,165.52, indicating that we will not have incurred this spend in line with the original timescales. We are in an ongoing dialogue with Government via returns and our working relationship to keep them informed of the position, and they are currently comfortable with how the project and spend is progressing.

Climate Emergency Update

The COP27 conference has been another urgent reminder of the need for immediate action on climate, but with recent reports casting doubt on our collective will to limit the global average temperature rise to 1.5 degrees, the focus is increasingly on how we adapt to more extreme weather alongside measures we can take to lessen the increase. There is a particular focus on flooding, with an upcoming Community Flood Resilience Policy set for discussion and a response to a recent report on localised flooding also being prepared. Meanwhile, work continues on measures to mitigate the temperature rise, with discussions underway on how the Council can make use of solar panels across our estate, and with the Council's Electric Vehicle Charging Strategy out to public consultation until December. The Council is also at the forefront of thinking about Air Quality, with a new strategy out to internal consultation well in advance of national requirements requiring this, whilst internally a Sustainability Impact Assessment process has been rolled out to make sure that the environment is considered in all of our decision-making.

Corporate Issues

Stanley Park Lake cordoned off amid bird flu outbreak warning

Stanley Park Lake was cordoned off on Wednesday 2 November 2022, as unfortunately the country faces another outbreak of avian flu. Avian flu is highly pathogenic and the decision to close the lake was taken as a number of birds had died and others were showing signs of the flu. Biosecurity measures are in place and the cordoning off the lake helps manage the situation and helps stop the spread and protect people, as in rare cases it has been transferred to humans. The situation will continue to be monitored in liaison with DEFRA and the Animal and Plant Health Agency.

An award-winning noise app!

I am very pleased to report that the Environmental Protection team were highly commended for their "noise app" at the prestigious John Connell Awards, which took place in London at the Palace of Westminster on Wednesday 19 October 2022. The app allows residents who have made a noise complaint to the council to record snap shots of the problem they are experiencing to monitor the situation. In some cases, use of the app will help to resolve the problem of noise nuisance before it escalates to court minimising costs, distress and the use of resources.

Foxhall Village progress

Work continues to complete the stalled development at Foxhall Village and progress continues to be made. In October this year Great Places submitted a revised planning application to deliver 67 new homes on the remainder of the site, which was approved by the Council.

The Council remains committed to ensuring the remainder of the west site of Foxhall Village is built to provide much needed new homes for the town and that while working under the Exclusivity Agreement, the Council has yet to make a decision on the delivery approach but it is hoped that this will lead to a new agreement between the Council and Great Places to complete the development on the West site.

It is anticipated that further discussions with Great Places Housing Association will be held in the next couple of months to understand challenges around scheme viability and the impact on delivery options.

Meanwhile, the temporary greening on Phase 4 (east site) land is almost complete.

Talbot Gateway Phase 2 - Hotel and Tram Infrastructure

Other than some issues with a Cadent Gas pipe installation which has caused some delay, work is proceeding as planned, with the Hotel Contractor moving on to complete the external works to the new Hotel.

Talbot Gateway Phase 3 - New Office Accommodation

Several administrative milestones have been passed, with both outline and reserved matters planning approval has been granted by the Council for the new office block that will accommodate around 3,000 employees on King Street, and reserved matters for these approvals are now being progressed. The refurbishment of the former Hop Inn is complete and will house the King Street Dental surgery as soon as final CQC checks have been completed. Government signed the agreement for lease on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions in September 2021. The new building is being designed and delivered by the Council's Development Partner for the Talbot Gateway (Muse Developments Limited).

The construction work is currently being tendered and is progressing as follows:

- The demolition of the existing buildings (5-29) on King Street has been completed;
- The tendering process is in its final stages and is very close to being concluded by mid-November;
- The enabling works will start as soon as the tender and related matters have been resolved prior to the main construction contract;
- The main construction work will commence shortly after the enabling works. This is currently anticipated for January 2023, with the build taking around two years.

The Queen's Green Canopy 'Tree of Trees'

Blackpool Council and Friends of Stanley Park were delighted to be selected to receive a special tree from The Queen's Green Canopy (QGC) 'Tree of Trees' which stood tall as a message of hope, regeneration and optimism to the nation and the world as part of the Platinum Jubilee weekend celebrations.

Blackpool joins over 300 organisations from across the UK who were recently announced by the QGC as recipients of these special trees in The Queen's name, which are gifted in a pot embossed with Her Majesty's cypher. The tree, a Field Maple, will be planted in Stanley Park in the coming months.

The Queen's Green Canopy (QGC) is a UK-wide tree planting initiative created to mark Her Majesty's Platinum Jubilee. Designed by Thomas Heatherwick, the QGC "Tree of Trees" sculpture sought to put the importance of trees at the heart of this historic milestone to celebrate Her Majesty, who planted over 1,500 trees all over the world throughout her 70-year reign.

Transforming Services

Huge boost for the Arts – National Portfolio Organisation (NPO) Funding

Just days after this year's Lightpool festival ended, the Arts Council made its announcement of which organisations would be supported with National Portfolio Organisation (NPO) funding. This prestigious designation gives organisations greater certainty of future income, meaning they can plan for the future and invest in high quality art, and they are set to invest a total of £9.4 million in Lancashire over three years from 2023-2026.

Lightpool was awarded an investment of £225k for the first time, which will enable new illuminations art and collaborations, a talent development programme for artists and creatives with artists in residence, the development of new work using the expertise of the Illuminations team and the facilities at Lightworks, and the expansion of the work with local cultural partners such as LeftCoast, Old Electric and the Grand Theatre to provide year-round activity for children, young people and local communities to present work to a wider audience during the Illuminations season and as part of Lightpool Festival.

Elsewhere, the Grundy Art Gallery maintained its NPO funding, to support the development and delivery of an exciting year-round programme of relevant, meaningful and high quality contemporary art exhibitions and events that will take place on an off-site. This programme will see Grundy continuing its founding mission to show the best art of the day to the people of Blackpool and beyond and enable the gallery to enact its vision to be a beacon for contemporary art in the North West. An additional uplift of £33k a year will specifically support the development and delivery of a partnership collaboration with The New Langdale (Blackpool Council's daytime service for people with a Learning Disability), Venture Arts in Manchester and Fylde-Coast based artist Tina Dempsey, providing bespoke professional development to artists with a Learning Disability to enable them to develop their own individual creativity.

There was further good news that the Grand Theatre has also retained its NPO status, with an uplift to its funding meaning they will receive just over £1.4M over 3 years. The uplift is for the expansion of the Grand's initiative which strengthens young people's resilience and creative skills.

A number of smaller independent arts organisations in Blackpool made strong applications to the fund, which unfortunately ACE was unable to support from this particular strand of funding this time round. They are vital to the creative development of the town and in providing access to the arts for our communities. The Council will look at how these organisations can be supported in other ways, as part of the partnership working ACE has committed to with Blackpool being a priority place under their 'Let's Create' 10 year Strategy.

Gym refurbishments – Palatine Leisure Centre and Moor Park Health and Leisure Centre

Gym facilities at Palatine and Moor Park Leisure Centres have recently seen an investment of over £200,000 to replace gym equipment, providing state of the art cardiovascular and resistance equipment as well as new group fitness indoor cycles at both sites. All three of the leisure centres, including Blackpool Sports Centre are the only sites in Lancashire to have EGYM Fitness equipment which provides the user with a unique workout experience that is proven to achieve results, by guiding users through each workout and ensuring they exercise at an optimum range suited to their fitness level.

Working with Partners

Libraries

The library service has held a number of cultural events recently, including Libraries Week in October and our second Get It Loud in Libraries Academy. This programme provides young people in Blackpool the opportunity to attend a week of workshops with music industry professionals, and take part in activities such as beat-boxing, social media/marketing, lyric writing, and creating a music video. Young people who attended then obtained work experience at a live gig on Sunday 30 October 2022, helping to manage ticket sales, social media, and even interviewing the bands (Bodega from New York and Regressive Left from London). One Academy participant stated "I feel really proud of myself this week; I have come out of myself so much!" The gig was the most successful yet with 137 attendees, including local residents and people who had travelled from as far away as Wales.

Anchorsholme Library's 'Generation Friends' project has been re-launched post-COVID. Anchorsholme Academy brings Year 1 children to the library to meet up with some older residents, building relationships across the generations as they do crafts, read together or look through memorabilia.

Upcoming events include the launch of the Lancashire Stories project in conjunction with Lancashire and Blackburn with Darwen library services, which aims to promote local writing talent across Lancashire via an anthology to be made available in all libraries across Lancashire very soon. The launch event for Blackpool will be held on Tuesday 6 December 2022 at Central Library and includes a talk from contributing authors Nathan Parker, Antonia Charlesworth-Stack and Michael Davies.

Elsewhere, Palatine Library is hosting a poetry workshop for adults with renowned poet Peter Samson on Saturday 26 November 2022, whilst Layton Library will be a part of the Layton Christmas Lights switch-on again this year, taking part in the best dressed window display, playing host to the Treasure Trail (with free book give away, supported by the National Literacy Trust) and hosting a pre-school theatre event.