

**Report to: Blackpool, Fylde and Wyre Economic Prosperity Board**

**Report Author: Rob Green, Head of Enterprise Zones, Blackpool Council**

**Date of Meeting: 3 June 2020 (via Zoom)**

**Recommendation: To note the report.**

### **Blackpool Airport Enterprise Zone: Progress Report**

#### **a) Masterplan**

Work to revise the Enterprise Zone masterplan and delivery plan is ongoing and will reflect some substantial changes to the physical development around the eastern gateway access, sports field re-provision revised airport proposals and the change of direction for the future of the Squires Gate Industrial Estate (former Wellington Bomber Factory). It is hoped the initial work will be complete by the end of May, but additional financial modelling will continue thereafter. The revised interim delivery plan will be presented to Blackpool Council as Accountable Body in July before submission to Fylde Borough Council, the Local Economic Partnership and Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government.

Early delays in being able to progress provision of enabling infrastructure and the change of direction in respect of the Squires Gate Industrial Estate may impact on some planned outputs particularly the timing of rates growth income, however uncertainty around the impact of Covid-19 makes it difficult to forecast with any level of accuracy at the present time, other than to raise the importance of having the Enterprise Zone as a driver for economic recovery. The approved marketing strategy will continue to be implemented for the Enterprise Zone and where appropriate will be updated upon completion of the masterplan update.

#### **b) Fiscal Incentives**

Work is progressing well in conjunction with the four Enterprise Zones which comprise Lancashire Advanced Manufacturing and Energy Cluster (LAMEC), to contact other Northern Enterprise Zones to formulate and promote a joint proposal for extension of Enterprise Zone fiscal incentives via the LEP network and the NP11 Group. Initial feedback has been extremely positive and the team have now joined forces with a national initiative steered by the LEP Network and the CEO of New Anglia LEP, which all Enterprise Zones contacted seem happy to support. Further detailed work is now underway led by Anglia Enterprise Zone to develop a detailed business case for presentation to Government, central to which will be a request to extend the period in which the 5 year business rates relief is available from expiry in March 2022 to financial year 2025/26.

### **Current Activity Phase One**

The initial planning application for Phase One development submitted in April 2019, has now been withdrawn and the first of three new planning applications, submitted to Fylde Borough Council for the development of new grass playing pitches within the greenbelt on former airport land, was granted by Fylde Borough Council's Planning Committee on 20 May 2020. Subject to discharging planning conditions, work will start on site in the coming weeks to create the new playing pitches and drainage which will enable the new pitches to come into use in September 2021.

A second detailed application, including new changing rooms, car parking and two 3G artificial playing pitches, will be submitted to Blackpool Council in early June. A third outline application for commercial floor-space, the eastern gateway access road, a primary sub-station and works to existing Common Edge highway, will be submitted to Blackpool Council in July 2020 following resolution of three outstanding minor design issues.

A further informal public consultation, will take place either online or as a live event in line with current social distancing guidelines. The outline planning application, will be referred to the Secretary of State for his consideration as it is Green Belt land.

Work on the Phase One playing pitch relocation with provision of new airport fencing, the creation of new airport crash gates, and a security perimeter track to release 4.5ha of former airport Greenbelt land for the playing pitches, was completed in April.

#### **d) Eastern Gateway Access Road**

Highway and transportation studies undertaken to support the phase one planning applications have confirmed that the M55 link road is not critical to the ability to develop out phase one of the Enterprise Zone. Blackpool Highways team are currently refining the road design to ensure the local infrastructure can cope with forecast traffic levels, in light of potential delays with the delivery of the M55 link road.

The position of the access road, which will now be a traffic light junction rather than a roundabout, will be located to the north of South Shore Cricket Club. The existing highway at Common Edge Road will be upgraded with work undertaken via the existing Highways PFI. A separate design and build contract will be awarded for the new link between Common Edge Road and Amy Johnson Way, once the Phase One outline planning consent has been secured. The target date for opening the through route remains first quarter 2022.

#### **f) Link Road**

Work to progress the provision of the M55 link road has been paused temporarily by Lancashire County Council whilst funding issues are finalised, and it is hoped that a revised delivery timetable will be agreed shortly.

### **g) Initial Development**

Full planning consent has been granted by Blackpool Council for the development of a speculative 4,000m<sup>2</sup> B1/B2 unit on a site at Amy Johnson Way. Full design work has now been commissioned with a view to a contractor commencing on site in summer. Heads of Terms with an occupier in the medical technologies sector has been signed and design costs on what was initially a speculative development will be underwritten by the proposed occupier. This will also raise an anticipated £75,000 business rates growth receipt annually.

### **h) Current Planning Applications**

Three live planning applications are being considered by Blackpool Council, the first for a proposed development of a 20MW gas fired power generation facility, which continues to encounter problems related to impact upon aeronautical activity, and a retrospective application for construction of a cement batching plant at the Squires Gate Industrial Estate, which is attracting a degree of local objection. The latest application is for a fibre exchange facility to support a planned roll out of a further telecommunications network for the Fylde Coast.

Work is continuing apace on the construction of a 1400m<sup>2</sup> facility for exhibition designers Love Expo where planning consent was awarded in November 2019. Work is also continuing to bring vacant units at Squires Gate Industrial Estate into use with some 12 small units in an initial phase of conversion of circa 50,000 sq ft.

### **i) Squires Gate Industrial Estate (Former Wellington Bomber Factory)**

The new owners of Squires Gate Industrial Estate continue to carry out improvement works on the property and have filled some of the vacant accommodation with new tenants. At the present time it is most unlikely that the owner would wish to explore the demolition and redevelopment of the property as initially proposed in the masterplan, although efforts continue to encourage appropriate development to come forward. A number of challenges remain in respect of the developer securing planning and building regulation consent which are being worked on. B&M Bargains who have for many years occupied in excess of 300,000 sq ft of accommodation at Squires Gate vacated at the end of March with the loss of 128 jobs.

### **j) Communications Infrastructure**

Work has continued to support the installation of the new transatlantic fibre optic telecommunications cable, part of the North Atlantic loop from New York to Denmark, being developed by Aqua Comms. Cable ducting has been laid from the proposed landing point to the base station constructed at Blackpool Airport with a further expansion of the network under the Local Fast Fibre Network (LFFN) programme at the planning stage. The new transatlantic cable is due to come ashore in Q2 2020, with delays due to difficulties in resolving agreements with Marine Management Organisation, The Crown Estate and Duchy of Lancaster on the agreements to cross the sea bed and beach. A planning application has been made to Fylde BC for the crossing of the sand dunes owned by Blackpool Council which are a designated SSSI and has yet to be approved. Discussions are ongoing to

conclude agreements for the completion of the Local Fast Fibre Network link to Hillhouse Enterprise Zone via the tramway, but additional funding will be required from Hillhouse Enterprise Zone to enable this.

### **k) Fibre Blackpool**

Fibre Blackpool is a project run by a co-operative group from the private and public sectors working together to roll out the extension of a local full fibre network (LFFN) that will give an improved, gigabit capable, broadband internet connection to residents and businesses on the Fylde Coast. Early enquiries have been very positive and the Internet Service Providers involved in the campaign are actively marketing to businesses across the Fylde. Case studies and press releases from ITS Group are awaited for phase 2 promotion and when received, the Enterprise Zone team will share on the various website and social media platforms. ITS Group are also planning to hold an open free event for Enterprise Zone businesses, but this will now be postponed until further notice during the current COVID-19 crisis.

### **l) Marketing**

Marketing Lancashire has now engaged with Richard Barber & Co. to progress Phase 2 of the Enterprise Zone websites, phase 2 of the overarching Invest in Lancashire site and options around the integration of Evolutive. Marketing Lancashire will continue to chase confirmation of a meeting in Q2 2020 to discuss draft proposals and implementation of new website features. The EZ team will look to update brochures and marketing material in line with any new website design over the next 12 months where required and to ensure that all marketing literature is fully accessible and DDA compliant.

The Enterprise Zone Marketing Officer is currently researching key target sector UK-based events to either sponsor or attend throughout the next 12 month communications campaign 2020/2021, continuing to raise the profile of Blackpool to a wider regional and national audience as a place for business and investment. This will also include Covid-19 recovery activity and support for Enterprise Zone businesses.

The team is working with Lancashire County Council to appoint a joint international agent for all four LAMEC sites by Autumn 2020, with a procurement process likely to see an appointment by September 2020. However the four Enterprise Zone teams agree that the need for end product and individual development plots to bring to market will be key to any commercial property sales strategy.

A public consultation is planned in Q2 2020 as part of the planning application requirements for the detailed phase 1 application due for submission in June. The consultation will provide Enterprise Zone existing businesses and neighbouring residents with an opportunity to view and discuss the new plans with the team. This will be hosted online or as a live event depending on the government guidelines on social distancing at that time.



The Fibre Blackpool campaign continues to promote the roll out a local full fibre network for improved, gigabit capable, broadband internet connection to residents and businesses on the Fylde Coast. The dedicated website [www.fibreblackpool.com](http://www.fibreblackpool.com) has received over 230 enquiries registering interest in the scheme and a phase 2 communications campaign and an Enterprise Zone webinar event is planned by one of the co-op group's internet service providers, ITS Group, which the Enterprise Zone marketing officer will support for the benefit of Enterprise Zone businesses.

Regular Enterprise Zone newsletters continue to be circulated delivering up-to-date coronavirus business support information for Enterprise Zone businesses and work continues to engage more people to sign up to the newsletter. Newsletter information also refers back to business support on both the Enterprise Zone website and includes details of both Fylde and Blackpool Council's dedicated business support teams for local help and advice and to BOOST Lancashire resources.

The level of active enquiries for property and land during the current coronavirus crisis has been low with more enquiries coming in based on business rates relief and other associated government coronavirus packages. The team continue to support the economic development/business support team in this respect. Officers are in early stage discussions with an existing Enterprise Zone tenant who is exploring options for a design and build project for new offices c.10 – 15,000 sq ft, and from a party looking for a small scale data centre facility.

The Enterprise Zone Marketing Officer has also offered assistance to Blackpool Airport's operational team to create a LinkedIn company page and profile for the airport team and to bring the Twitter and Facebook accounts up to date to counteract any negative coverage received through local social media group pages e.g. Save Blackpool Airport. Tenants on the airport and Enterprise Zone will be invited to follow the accounts and to share good news stories with the Marketing Officer for publication.

#### **m) Blackpool: The Place for Business**

The online communications campaign has come to the end of the initial 12 months contract with external agency collaboration Clarity/Diva. A tender was advertised on the NW Chest portal for a new 12 month marketing campaign and bid documents are currently being evaluated. Interviews and presentations are due to take place in June with the contract to start soon after although the timing of this is currently being reviewed in light of the Covid-19 crisis.

#### **n) Blackpool Airport**

Work continues to replace worn out systems and upgrade the airports operational capabilities with the new Instrument landing System (ILS) now commissioned and a new RNAV system ordered to serve Runway 10.

Blackpool Airport Operations Limited, the Council-owned operating company, is continuing to review the tender submissions for the renewal of the air navigation (ANSP) and aerodrome management licenses, and has now entered a negotiation phase.

The airport has remained fully operational during the present Covid-19 crisis – primarily to support offshore operations whilst airfields at Barton, Warton and Carlisle have closed, but also hosts a flight of private aviators and BAE staff who are on standby to operate NHS support flights at short notice.

Appropriate short closures, approved by the Civil Aviation Authority have been implemented to minimise risk to Air Traffic Control and Fire service watches enabling overall operations to run from 7.00am and 9.00pm.

Architects Cassidy + Ashton are progressing the initial feasibility/option studies for the replacement of old aircraft hangars and associated aircraft parking aprons as a first step toward opening up the frontage of Squires Gate Lane for new business park development. Their work will also include studies on the provision of a new control tower, fire station and administration facility.

#### **o) Third Party Development**

The only construction presently underway is the development on land to the east of Seneca House off Amy Johnson Way.

To date:

- A total of 178 live enquiries are currently logged for Blackpool Enterprise Zone.
- Some 89 businesses have located to the Enterprise Zone since April 2016.
- A net total of 1476 jobs have located to the Enterprise Zone, this figure includes jobs to the area, safeguarded jobs within Blackpool and construction full time equivalent jobs. The net figure has been adversely affected this last quarter due to B&M Bargains vacating the Squires Gate Industrial Estate with the loss of 128 jobs.

#### **p) Project Team**

The tenth meeting of the Blackpool Airport Enterprise Zone Project Team took the form of a written report and was circulated to the group on 20 March 2020. The next meeting is due to take place on 5th June which will be an online meeting due to current social distancing guidelines.



## r) Risk Register

The Blackpool Airport Enterprise Zone risk register is currently under review with Blackpool Council's corporate risk team given recent events and will be available on request at the next meeting. It is also regularly reviewed by the accountable body's own project board.

### Report Author

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