

Report to: **LEVELLING-UP SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Relevant Officer: Alan Cavill, Director of Regeneration and Communications
Antony Lockley, Director of Strategy and Assistant Chief Executive

Date of Meeting: 4 October 2023

LEVELLING-UP UPDATE

1.0 Purpose of the report:

1.1 To provide an overview on various activities being undertaken in relation to Levelling-Up in Blackpool.

2.0 Recommendation(s):

2.1 To note the progress being made following the previous updates in June 2023.

3.0 Reasons for recommendation(s):

3.1 To ensure that the Committee are aware of the latest developments.

3.2 Is the recommendation contrary to a plan or strategy adopted or approved by the Council? No

3.3 Is the recommendation in accordance with the Council's approved budget? Yes

4.0 Other alternative options to be considered:

4.1 None.

5.0 Council priority:

5.1 The relevant Council priority is

- "Communities: Creating stronger communities and increasing resilience"
- "The economy: Maximising growth and opportunity across Blackpool"

6.0 Background information

Economy and Growth - Blackpool Regeneration Projects Update

In the period since the previous update in June 2023, there has been notable progress on several key regeneration projects, which have benefited from Blackpool's designation as a Levelling Up Pilot.

Enterprise Zone

The Masterplan for the Eastern Gateway development is progressing, with the detailed technical masterplan for airport infrastructure relocation due to be finalised by October 2023. This follows the relocation of sports pitch provision with the opening of a new £6m state of art facility on 30th June, including 3G sports pitches and associated changing facilities, with a new floodlit Rugby League pitch to follow in October pending the pitch being ready. We are engaging with a contractor from the STAR framework and statutory undertakers to look at the diversion of existing services and provision of new connections. This £23 m project, which includes £7.5 Towns Fund money, will release 10.5 hectares of land for further development, enabling the support of additional jobs on top of the 2400+ supported to date. Works are behind schedule but will complete before the Towns Fund deadline of March 2026.

The Enterprise Zone is home to innovative businesses which are already taking advantage of the environment to grow and expand, with enquiries from others looking to do so. Recently, Multi-ply shared their intention to invest £5m in world-leading carbon fibre supporting the Medi-tech sector.

A review of the masterplan for Silicon Sands has commenced, and will be completed by December 2023, in parallel with an ongoing study into future utility requirements. This project seeks to capitalise on space created by the relocation of the airport infrastructure and the advantages provided by the location of the transatlantic internet traffic cable at Starr Gate. In particular, this is also looking at impacts and opportunities presented by the proposed routing of Morecambe and Morgan Windfarm transmission routes via the airport and confirmation by Electricity North West of their provision of the new 32MVA Primary substation. The plan retains flexibility to respond as new opportunities arise, particularly from the data energy and aviation sectors. Funding has also been awarded from InnovateUK for the Council and its partners CBN to undertake the preliminary stages of exploring a co-operative model heat network, which uses the latest technology to gain thermal benefit from the heat generated in data processing. This would ultimately be a town-wide model.

Blackpool Central

Construction of the new multi-storey car park is in the enabling phase and is expected to be completed early next year. The developer is currently conducting site investigations and surveys for the remaining areas of the site. Detailed plans for the upcoming leisure phases on the project are being drafted by the developers, with detailed planning applications expected in early 2024 and construction commencing next year.

Additionally, plans for relocating Blackpool Courts from either existing facilities to the Devonshire Road site are being managed by His Majesty's Courts and Tribunal Services. The proposed start on site is anticipated for late spring/early summer 2024. This area forms Phase 3 of the Blackpool Central proposals, with additional leisure attractions to be introduced in due course.

Talbot Gateway Phase 2

Work on the hotel is approaching completion, with both the hotel and tram scheduled to open in the upcoming spring.

Talbot Gateway Phase 3

The development of the Civil Service Hub is progressing rapidly and is currently running approximately two months ahead of the initial schedule, with an expected completion date in early 2025.

Houndshill Phase 2

In September 2017, planning permission was granted for an extension to the Houndshill Shopping Centre, which includes a multi-screen cinema complex, restaurant, and retail accommodation. Blackpool Council, serving as both owner and developer, have successfully overseen this development, which is nearing completion. It will soon be handed over to Backlot Cinema, who will lease the cinema shell and restaurant accommodation. The overall scheme has also been partly funded, with £5m of funding from the Government's Getting Building Fund. The cinema complex will house 9 screens, including one of the largest IMAX screens in the country, standing a massive 19 metres. The Cinema Opening Date is to be confirmed but scheduled for next Spring.

It is anticipated that the completed Phase 2 scheme will deliver:

Over 100 jobs created both directly through the scheme and locally.

0.5 acres of brownfield land developed.

76,500 sq. ft. of new commercial floor space, including 22,500 sq. ft. retail.

Cinema complex, which will house nine screens with a total of 850 seats, including IMAX

Approximately, over 260 construction jobs created over the build period.

Increase of 1.2m shoppers and visitors to the Houndshill Shopping Centre.

The external elevation has been finished with an external white ceramic tile finish, which complements and reflects the Grade II Winter Gardens Building.

Abingdon Street Market

At present, the market consists of 2 bars, 6 food outlets, 1 coffee stall, and 14 retail stalls, which also include provision for a butcher and fish monger.

Hotel Indigo - Former Abingdon Street Post Office - Capital Regeneration Project (CRP)

Since the scheme's approval as a CRP Project, officers have been working with its private sector bid partner, Ashall Projects, to continue with the scheme. Given the delays, a comprehensive review has been undertaken, taking into account rising inflation and interest rates. The delivery model is being revised to mitigate these risks in light of changed market conditions. Grant funding will support the purchase of the building from its current owners.

The transformation of an iconic building with private investment and the branding approach to be adopted by IHG with regard to the interpretation of the Listed Building, in the context of its location (a specialist requirement of their Indigo Brand), mean that the scheme is a strong fit for the town and the location. Ultimately, the scheme aims to create a new 4-star hotel with 144 rooms,

including 48 family suites, targeting both the business and family leisure markets.

Multiversity

Blackpool Council is currently in the process of assembling the required 1ha site at George Street which is currently occupied by 50 poor-quality houses and 17 commercial units. Where necessary, the council will relocate residents and businesses as part of the land assembly activities and is anticipating the use of its Compulsory Purchase Order powers before preparing the site for development through demolitions and infrastructure works.

Recent activities include, the successful procurement of the full Multiversity design team. In addition, a planning strategy has been agreed with the council's authority planning department, and a delivery programme has been developed and governance procedures established. The procurement route for contractors has also been set-out.

6.1 Economy and Growth - Tourism Performance Update

After an exceptional start to the tourism season in May and the first part of June on the back of a prolonged spell of good weather and an additional Bank Holiday, visitor numbers were more volatile as we moved into the main school holiday season. This was predominantly due to the poor weather over most of July which particularly impacted on visitor numbers at outdoor attractions.

The cost-of-living crisis was potentially also a factor, although Blackpool has repeatedly scored extremely well in national surveys on affordability. In a survey carried out by Travelodge at the start of the season, Blackpool was named among the top five staycation destinations alongside Cornwall, Devon, the Isle of Wight and Whitby. In the latest survey, carried out by finance specialists, RIFT, Blackpool and the Lake District came joint top in league table of the UK's most affordable staycation destinations, based on several factors including the cost of family days out, accommodation, fish and chips, and a pint of beer. Blackpool was named most affordable in each of the latter three categories.

Visitor numbers in the final half of June were also likely to have been adversely affected by the significant amount of negative publicity we received over the sewage discharge that resulted in our bathing waters being deemed unsuitable for a period of almost three weeks.

The trend in August was a much more positive one and was undoubtedly boosted by a spell of more settled weather coupled with the start of our major events, all of which are free to attend.

The first of those was the two-day Air Show Weekend. With the Red Arrows and Typhoon display teams performing on both days and with the added bonus of a Spitfire and replica Red Arrow within the Air Show village, the event once again attracted record crowds. Mobile phone data shows that the footfall on the Promenade was more than 350,000 across the two

days, outperforming what was a spectacular turn-out last year.

The Air Show was followed by the annual Ride The Lights and the Switch-On event, which this year included a Nickelodeon float parade along the Golden Mile featuring characters from the world's favourite children's TV channel. That was followed by a free-to-access celebration with family entertainment, fireworks and a light projection show on The Blackpool Tower. Singer Sophie Ellis-Bextor performed live on the headland before switching on the lights to trigger a four-month season.

The Switch-On event, which was held outdoors for the first time in four years, attracted more than 50,000 people to the headland – the biggest turn-out we have seen for many years.

The following week, we staged the first of three World Fireworks events – and that also attracted tens of thousands of people. At a time when affordability is an issue, these large-scale, high-quality free events are clearly proving a significant draw.

The forthcoming autumn and winter season will see the return of World Fireworks, Lightpool Festival and seven weeks of Christmas By The Sea running from November 17 to January 1.

6.2 Does the information submitted include any exempt information? No

7.0 List of Appendices

7.1 None.

8.0 Financial considerations

8.1 None.

9.0 Legal considerations

9.1 None.

10.0 Risk management considerations

10.1 Failure to continue to support our Levelling Up Pilot will jeopardise the chances of securing further investment for the regeneration of Blackpool.

11.0 Equalities considerations and the impact of this decision for our children and young people:

11.1 None.

12.0 Sustainability, climate change and environmental considerations:

12.1 The development of these facilities will incur carbon emissions both in the construction and

operation phases. Following approval of the Council's Climate Emergency Action plan in 2019, consideration is given to balancing the cost of these projects with their impact on the environment. Ultimately the housing work will lead to more energy efficient properties which will reduce the proportion of carbon emissions arising from the domestic sector in Blackpool.

13.0 Internal/external consultation undertaken:

13.1 None.

14.0 Background papers:

14.1 None.