

Report to:	EXECUTIVE
Relevant Officer:	John Blackledge, Director for Community and Environmental Services
Relevant Cabinet Member:	Councillor Jo Farrell, Cabinet Member for Levelling Up - People
Date of Meeting:	22 January 2024

DEVELOPMENT OF THE ‘BE WHO YOU WANT TO BE’ AREA OF THE CLAREMONT WARD

1.0 Purpose of the report:

1.1 The purpose of the report is to highlight the work of the Council, North Shore Business Group (NSBG), LGBTQ+ partners and Police in a consultation exercise in the LGBTQ+ business area sitting on the south-western part of the Claremont Ward, designated as the ‘Be Who You Want To Be’ area, considering the results of the consultation exercise and the ‘Be Who You Want To Be’ Action Plan developed.

2.0 Recommendation(s):

2.1 To note the consultation exercise in the ‘Be Who You Want To Be’ area, to consider the results of the consultation and to approve and agree the ‘Be Who You Want To Be’ Action Plan.

3.0 Reasons for recommendation(s):

3.1 To enable work to begin in terms of delivery of the action plan, including a governance framework, which will ultimately see improvements in the area to benefit businesses, residents and visitors alike.

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 The alternative was the status quo, which potentially would have resulted in the area being left behind in terms of investment.

5.0 Council priority:

5.1 The relevant Council priority is both: “The economy: Maximising growth and opportunity across Blackpool” and “Communities: Creating stronger communities and increasing resilience”.

6.0 Background information

6.1 The LGBTQ+ area sitting on the south-western part of the Claremont Ward, with the proportions of people identifying as LGBTQ+ is amongst the highest in the country alongside areas of Brighton, Manchester, Salford and London and has always been viewed as an important area of the town, and over a period of time it has been the intention of the council to have a focus in relation to economic and social development, which includes health.

6.2 There is a long established LGBTQ+ community and history in the area, with in particular the business community making a huge cultural and economic contribution to the town reflected in terms of the pink pound over the years.

6.3 The area is particularly important to the Council in relation to the Council Plan, in terms of supporting equality, inclusion and celebrating diversity in our town. In particular, ensuring this area is safe for all to be who they want to be, to socialise and celebrate inclusion, difference and diversity without the risks of homophobic or other discriminatory abuse, which will help catalyse the regeneration of the area and also build an inclusive culture in the wider town.

6.4 Discussions and work had started in relation to the focus a few years ago with North Shore Business Group, but COVID halted its progress and as a result it was picked up last year and the Executive are reminded that a Cabinet Member decision (PH52/2024 was agreed on 27 July 2023, which highlighted the potential to support the evolution of an already thriving LGBTQ+ business area sitting on the south-western part of the Claremont ward, and to use this as a foundation for the wider regeneration of the area to the benefit of residents and visitors alike.

6.5 As a result of this, a focus group was established of key representatives of the Council (Cabinet Member for Levelling Up – People, ward councillors, senior officers), North Shore Business Group (NSBG), Renaissance Charity, LGBTQ+ Facebook and Friends, BAGS, Blackpool Pride Festival and the police in order to develop a robust consultation framework, which included a visit to Manchester’s LGBTQ+ area around Canal and Sackville Streets, which had emerged as a ‘gay quarter’ over a significant period of time. The visit was extremely useful,

where 'Friends of the Area', LGBT Foundation, police, Ward Councillors and officers of Manchester City Council Development Team provided extremely useful advice, support and guidance.

- 6.6 As a result of deliberations and discussion the focus group agreed a consultation framework with key themes: Improvement of the Area, Investment in the Area, Day-time Economy, Night-time Economy, Progress through Partnership, Safety and Security, and Health and Wellbeing.
- 6.7 The consultation ran from the beginning of October 2023 to the end of November 2023, however before considering the consultation, the summary of which starts at paragraph 6.11, it is important to remind the Executive of the thinking behind the 'Be Who You Want To Be' concept and also the strategic fit and alignment of this work and the area and town.
- 6.8 The Cabinet Member decision referred to at paragraph 6.4 highlighted the fact that after considerable debate and discussion, it was agreed that the area is very diverse and should be an area for all interests, abilities and backgrounds and not just designated as LGBTQ+ area; 'Be Who You Want To Be', a place to be able to express yourself and who you are.
- 6.9 In terms of the area, it is clear from all feedback and dialogue that a vision of vibrancy and investment, sense of place, diversity, safety, security and quality environments are top of everyone's thoughts and aspirations for the area. In terms of strategic fit and connectivity of Blackpool's wider agenda, the following provides context:
- **The Town Centre Strategy and Action Plan**, refreshed throughout 2022 and 2023 and now approved, is an overarching vehicle which covers activity across the whole of the town centre, and incorporates the area within Claremont and the '**Be Who You Want To Be**' area to the north of Talbot Road as far as Springfield Road (in line with the recognised town centre boundary). The Town Centre Strategy and Action Plan looks to complement the '**Be Who You Want To Be**' project and the Claremont Masterplan by improving gateways and amenities to the south of Claremont, which should be of benefit to both residents and visitors;
 - The **Claremont Masterplan**, completed in June 2020, covers the broader Claremont area and has a series of well-defined outcomes focused on improving the lives of local residents through the provision of better housing, open spaces and amenities. The Masterplan interacts with the Town Centre Strategy and Action Plan in the southern part of Claremont ward. The '**Be Who You Want To Be**' project seeks to create a unique identity for the area and to provide amenities for a range of communities within the Claremont Ward but also serving a range of diverse residents across the town, as well as visitors to the area and the businesses serving them;
 - The **Culture Hub**, currently in development, utilises the need for expanded gallery space at the Grundy Art Gallery and improved facilities at Blackpool Central Library as an opportunity to provide a wider social impact through the provision of enhanced community and cultural spaces located in the Claremont ward, but also looks to attract

- engagement from residents from across the town as well as visitors to Blackpool;
 - The 15 month **High Street Accelerator**, running until March 2025, is aimed at working with the business community and residents on two specific streets (Abingdon Street and Queen Street) to help define what needs to be done to improve the physical environment and tackle anti-social behaviour issues in the area. The High Street Accelerator is supported by a limited amount of seed funding and access to additional funding for greening activity, and investment of this funding will be community-led.
- 6.10 Whilst these projects have slightly different objectives, they are complementary, and all of them provide a range of additional positive outcomes in improving the southern gateway to Claremont and the northern part of the town centre, and all have the potential to deal with existing issues and make the area a more attractive place to live, visit and work within. Interaction and communication across these initiatives will be provided through shared membership on governing bodies and representative organisations, as well as designated updates and individual communication provided through stakeholders.
- 6.11 In relation to the consultation, this has had four key strands as follows:
- Online open access survey led by the Council’s Infusion team, with an additional questionnaire delivered to all businesses in the area and leaflets to residents promoting the survey;
 - Cultural development opportunities for the area have been discussed as part of a wider consultation on a Cultural Strategy for Blackpool being led by a steering group made up of representatives from the creative sector;
 - Renaissance and Public Health LGBTQ+ wellbeing services survey; and
 - Youth Survey and workshops led by the United Youth Alliance.
- 6.12 The online survey and questionnaire was extremely positive, with 269 responses from people who live, work, visit or socialise within the area. Respondents were able to tick more than one option, with the breakdown as follows: Resident – 110 responses; visitor day/staying- 45 responses; work in the area – 53 responses; own a business/prospective business owner – 44 responses; socialise in the area – 128 responses; and other – 22 responses.
- 6.13 A total of 181 respondents identified as members of the LGBTQIA+ community, 72 did not identify and 15 preferred not to say.
- 6.14 In response to the survey 22 business owners/managers highlighted that they were happy to be contacted to undertake further engagement to support business opportunities in the Claremont area, which will be reflected in the action plan.
- 6.15 Over 3,000 comments have been submitted across several questions, which have been categorised into themes for action and as the feedback is shared to a wider audience the plan will continue to evolve.

- 6.16 Arts and Cultural development and activities have featured widely in the responses. Themes that have emerged from the survey feedback such as diversity, vibrancy, sense of place and the need to improve existing cultural facilities in the area such as Central Library and the Grundy Art Gallery have informed the cultural development section of the action plan.
- 6.17 In relation to health and wellbeing, Blackpool Council's Public Health team would continue to work with Renaissance to deliver harm reduction services with the aim of improving health and reducing inequalities particularly targeting good sexual health, reducing the health harm caused by drugs and alcohol, providing wraparound psychosocial support to those who have been diagnosed with HIV and promoting LGBTQ+ community development.
- 6.18 An LGBTQ+ barriers to health and wellbeing services survey has been conducted. The actions in the health and wellbeing section of the action plan respond to the findings from that survey.
- 6.19 A specific trans and gender diverse health needs assessment is currently underway in partnership with Renaissance and Lancashire LGBT. The recommendations from that work will feed into this strategy as additional future actions.
- 6.20 The United Youth Alliance met with one main focus group of young people to help shape and co-design a youth led questionnaire. The young people were aged between 12-15yrs and led on the design based on the 'community questionnaire', as they were keen to keep within the same themed areas, designing a youth specific questionnaire, with a further focus group organised to test the questionnaire.
- 6.21 Schools were accessed through the Personal, Social, Health and Economic group, Blackpool Sixth Form and Blackpool and the Fylde College as well as youth groups including the Magic Club. 49 young people completed the questionnaire with a further 17 young people accessing the focus groups, so a total of 66.
- 6.22 The young people within the focus groups were very keen to be part of the ongoing developments and work alongside other key stakeholder to help shape and design the area. Actions have been identified, with an ambition for the youth voice to be a golden thread across the themes.
- 6.23 Further to consideration of the feedback from the four consultation areas, which interrelate and overlap, the following themes have been identified for the 'Be Who You Want To Be' Action Plan:
- *Public Realm* – centred around streetscape, sense of place, cleanliness, highways, greening up, street lighting and illuminations.
 - *Safety and Security* – centred around CCTV, Street Angels, community policing, premises management, hotel watch, multi-agency workings and operations.

- *Arts, Heritage and Culture* – centred around embedding the area into the Cultural Strategy, public art, development of Grundy Art Gallery and Central Library, working with LGBTQ+ artists and communities, community and visitor events and activities, including street performances and festivals.
- *Young People* – centred around ensuring the Youth Voice is a golden thread through themes, stakeholder meetings inclusive and accessible for young people, walk and talk engagement sessions assessing delivery, ideas and perceptions and explore options for a young people’s LGBTQ+ community space asset within the area.
- *Health and Wellbeing* – centred around accessible health care services to the LGBTQ+ community, particularly mental health, transgender needs assessment, sexual health clinics, NHS talking therapies and social care strategy and policy.
- *Business Community* – centred around establishing channels to market and promote improvement and business achievements, promoting evening and night-time economy, creating the condition for dialogue and development.
- *Marketing and Communication* – centred around review of actions and development of the area in order to develop a meaningful marketing and communication plan;
- *Governance* – centred around developing an overarching ‘Friends Group’ of the area, sub-groups of the action plan, High Street Accelerator Board, LGBTQ+ Forum and enforcement activity in the area related to Public Protection and Housing Options service areas.

- 6.24 It should be noted, that as a result of the LGBTQ+ health survey Renaissance will submit a bid in January for Reaching Communities funding. Renaissance will be applying for funding to provide specialist Health and Wellbeing services to the LGBTQ+ community. It is hoped the base/building for this service can be located either on or around Queen Street so is at the heart of the ‘Be Who You Want To Be’ area.
- 6.25 The main aims of the service will be to provide specialist paid Health and Wellbeing workers and build a team of LGBTQ+ Peer supporters. The team will support existing services to be more accessible, providing training, advice and information on the needs of the community and ensuring their policies and procedures are equitable to all. The service will provide one to one and group support such as meaningful activities to reduce loneliness and isolation and also support individuals to navigate existing services without fear of discrimination or stigma.
- 6.26 If a suitably sized building can be identified, it could be used as a multi-purpose building, a safe space for hate crime reporting, linkage with Safer Streets and potentially look at an additional opportunity to provide the previous Night Safe Haven Provision which will alleviate some of the safety concerns for the night time economy.
- 6.27 There is also commitment from NHS health care services, particularly mental health services to deliver the actions within this plan.
- 6.28 If this bid is not successful collectively partners would look at other sources of funding.

- 6.29 Appendix 4a provides the consultation report, which will be used to further develop the Action Plan, with Appendix 4b being the 'Be Who You Want To Be' Action Plan.
- 6.30 Subject to the Executive approving the 'Be Who You Want To Be' Action Plan, North Shore Business Group and partners intend to launch the plan within the community on Thursday 8 February 2024, which is within LGBTQ+ history month.
- 6.31 Does the information submitted include any exempt information? No

7.0 List of Appendices:

- 7.1 Appendix 4a: Consultation report
- 7.2 Appendix 4b: Action Plan

8.0 Financial considerations:

- 8.1 Any actions that required additional external funding would only be progressed subject to successful funding bids or acceptable and agreed business cases to support delivery.

9.0 Legal considerations:

- 9.1 Consideration of the Council's duty under the Equality Act 2010.

10.0 Risk management considerations:

- 10.1 To not have worked with the North Shore Business Group and LGBTQ+ community to carry-out a consultation exercise and action plan, potentially would have resulted in the area being left behind in terms of focus and investment.

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

- 11.1 Supporting and affirming the development of this area of Claremont on the basis of the vision and action plan outlined in this report is entirely complementary to the Council's policy to support equality, inclusion and celebrate diversity in our town. This will also contribute to our overarching statutory responsibility under the Equality Act 2010 Section 149 to:
- Tackle discrimination
 - Advance equality of opportunity; and
 - Foster good relations (community cohesion).

Ensuring this area is safe for all to be, to socialise and celebrate inclusion, difference and

diversity without the risks of homophobic or other discriminatory abuse will help catalyse the regeneration of the area, and also we believe build an inclusive culture in the wider town.

As the Council and partners move forward to deliver on the action plan, and develop specific governance arrangements within the area, they will continue to have regard to our wider Equality duties. These will relate to all protected characteristics and further community engagement/consultation when/if appropriate.

12.0 Sustainability, climate change and environmental considerations:

12.1 All actions will be mindful of sustainability, climate change and environmental considerations, particularly public realm.

13.0 Internal/external consultation undertaken:

13.1 Cross-departmental of the Council, North Shore Business Group, Renaissance, LGBT+ Facebook and Friends, BAGS, Blackpool Pride Festival, Police, cultural groups and businesses, young people, health and various groups and representatives of LGBTQ+ in Manchester.

14.0 Background papers:

14.1 None.

15.0 Key decision information:

15.1 Is this a key decision? Yes

15.2 If so, Forward Plan reference number: 34/2023

15.3 If a key decision, is the decision required in less than five days? No

15.4 If **yes**, please describe the reason for urgency:

16.0 Call-in information:

16.1 Are there any grounds for urgency, which would cause this decision to be exempt from the call-in process? No

16.2 If **yes**, please give reason:

TO BE COMPLETED BY THE HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE

17.0 Scrutiny Committee Chairman (where appropriate):

Date informed: 12 January 2024 Date approved:

18.0 Declarations of interest (if applicable):

18.1

19.0 Summary of Discussion:

19.1

20.0 Executive decision:

20.1

21.0 Date of Decision:

21.1

22.0 Reason(s) for decision:

22.1

23.0 Date Decision published:

23.1

24.0 Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:

24.1

25.0 Executive Members in attendance:

25.1

26.0 Call-in:

26.1

27.0 Notes:

27.1