



ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS 2018
WINNER **THE MJ**
 Local Authority of the Year



A GROWING SUCCESS STORY

How The MJ's Local Authority of the Year is harnessing Blackburn with Darwen's strengths to build a prosperous future



Growing into a great place

LIVE

Blackburn with Darwen Council marked the 20th anniversary of its unitary status in style – scooping The MJ’s prestigious Local Authority of the Year title. Success in the face of adversity has been built on forging a more powerful partnership with residents, partners and business that’s helping to deliver prosperity through growth



New housing developments include the Green Hills scheme, designed by Wayne Hemingway

427 HOMES were built in the borough in 2017-18 – the highest number for 14 years



of modular means a number of homes will be designed to cater for disabled adaptations in the future for those who need them.

It’s ‘the last bit of the jigsaw in the regeneration of that area’, says Denise Park, deputy chief executive.

While new housing is vital, the key to any successful area is having high quality local services – especially in a borough like Blackburn with Darwen with significant levels of deprivation.

New integrated neighbourhood teams have brought together social workers, health practitioners, voluntary sector organisations and Lancashire Fire & Rescue to provide coordinated support. It’s part of a wider strategy to bring health, social care and housing closer together and ensure the focus is on prevention and early intervention.

Blackburn with Darwen is one of five areas selected by the Government to be a partner in its Integrated Communities Strategy. It was chosen because of its track record of trying out new ways to build cohesion across its diverse communities.

It’s part of a wider approach to engage residents in forging a more prosperous future for themselves and the borough as a whole, says Harry.

‘Our communities are our greatest asset. We’ve been very successful in creating a brand new relationship with residents – helping them to do more for themselves with our support to achieve better health and quality of life.’

‘We need to grow and be more prosperous in order to sustain local services. For a third year running we’ve seen record housing growth, which would have been unthinkable four years ago. People were succeeding in business here and then leaving because we didn’t have the full offer of housing. That’s now changing.’

The opening of Riverside Heights this year is a good reflection of both the way the council works collaboratively and strategically and also the renewed sense of confidence in the borough.

The £12m extra care housing scheme in Darwen – delivered by a partnership involving the council, Together Housing and Keepmoat Regeneration – has been designed to the highest standards and delivers much-needed specialist homes for people over 50 with health or social care needs.

Just five years ago housing development had all but stopped in Blackburn with Darwen and developers viewed it as simply too ‘hard to do’ due to a slowdown in the market and the complexity of sites. But strong political commitment and leadership from the council have led to a dramatic turnaround. There are currently no fewer than 16 developers working on schemes across the borough encompassing everything from executive

family homes to affordable housing. Success is down to taking a more dynamic and strategic approach to growth, explains Harry Catherall, chief executive.

‘We’ve formed a dedicated growth team that reports to a member-led growth board. It’s a multi-disciplinary team that really understands the market, engages with investors and can supply the board with information they need to make decisions quickly.’

‘We have advanced plans for more facilities and we’re opening the door to innovative provision that, for example, meets the needs of our Asian community.’

Developers are now taking up areas where regeneration had stalled. For example, at Alaska Street in the Infirmary Waterside area of Blackburn, the council is working with Places for People on a scheme involving 73 modular homes. It will be the company’s largest modular development in the country using latest technology to deliver high quality homes much quicker than traditional construction methods. The flexibility

Place to live, work and play

At a time when high streets are struggling, Blackburn town centre has been a beacon of hope and a source of inspiration.

Multimillion pound developments have enhanced its retail offer, public realm and connectivity in recent years and the collaborative way the council, businesses and other organisations work together led to it being crowned Great British High Street of the Year in 2016.

But successful places never stand still and the borough's main centre, together with neighbouring Darwen, have exciting plans for the future. The vision is to create town centres that offer 'something for everyone', says deputy chief executive Denise Park, while driving economic growth and making the borough as a whole attractive to investors.

There are currently more than 200 projects in the council's development programme with 70% led by the private sector. Many of these schemes are focused on six investment areas within the heart of Blackburn and will transform the town centre over the coming years and bring

Award for Enterprise.

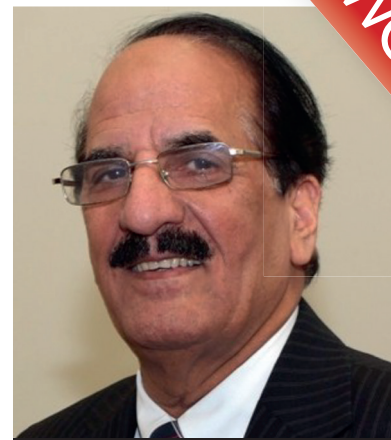
The borough has a strong and highly engaged private sector community who come together via a The Hive Ambassadors Network, a business-led group that boasts more than 250 members.

One of the main priorities for the council and its partners is to ensure local people benefit from the influx of job opportunities created. The borough has seen sustained improvement across its schools with outcomes matching the national average at 16 and exceeding it at 19.

Blackburn with Darwen has high levels of economic inactivity and boosting adult skills remains a key priority. Through its employment and skills strategy, the council is playing an enabling role, says chief executive Harry Catherall, by bringing training and education providers, employers and residents together.

For example, it's formed a strategic alliance with Lancaster University and Blackburn College to use their expertise, networks and facilities to improve skills.

'We have tremendous social capital here in terms of



'We have enjoyed a truly outstanding year with a high level of performance evident across the board. Special things are happening.

This is down to the efforts of our workforce, our many partners and most importantly the residents of Blackburn and Darwen.

Improving prosperity for our people is what drives our bold approach and unwavering determination. Of course we don't have all the answers and we are working in the most unsettling, toughest times in our local government history.

We focus on our assets, quality and creating the right conditions for growth, grasping every opportunity that comes our way and working with anybody who shares our values. That could be anything from a major town centre regeneration scheme right through to supporting an individual resident volunteer to improve their neighbourhood.'

Councillor Mohammed Khan, leader of Blackburn with Darwen Council



The award-winning Festival of Making, first hosted in 2017, is now an annual event fully embraced by the borough. It builds on Blackburn's rich history of manufacturing with the town having twice the national average of people employed in the industry.

forward new employment sites across the borough.

Darwen Market Square is also undergoing a transformation. Using high quality public realm, the area will be divided into three areas – one with the capacity to hold large-scale outdoor events, a green landscaped area and refurbished units that have the potential to be used as retail spaces in the future.

The council's growth team – which reports to a growth board chaired by the leader of the council – employs the personal touch, meeting prospective investors one-to-one to help them bring forward plans that fit in with the borough's overall vision. An innovative new growth framework is helping to accelerate the development of council-owned sites by working with pre-procured delivery partners.

'Feedback from the market to the growth team is "this is different, people understand what the issues are", says Simon Jones, growth programme director. 'The speed of decision making at the council has created a positive buzz in the market.'

Recent successes include the opening of Blackburn's first Grade A offices within the Cathedral Quarter, an area whose transformation is nearing completion. High tech firm Anord Mardix has moved into Sigma 110, part of a new industrial park in the town. The council is also supporting the development of new facilities on brownfield sites for Hippo, a national leader in car leasing, and Pets Choice, whose Tasty Bone product won the 2017 Queen's

entrepreneurial spirit and pride in the area,' says Harry. 'You can see that in the way residents are helping to deliver services and we're connecting with people so that together we can build a skilled workforce.'



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Blackburn with Darwen is the second strongest local authority in the north west for progress at secondary school level. Two of its schools - Tauheedul Islam Girls' High School (pictured above) and Tauheedul Islam Boys' High School - were first and third in the entire country in terms of the progress made by students in the 2017 GCSEs. Children leave both primary and secondary school at or above the national average, in spite of being among the most deprived 10% of top tier local authorities.



The Blakey Moor Townscape Heritage Project is an ambitious £3m project to transform the historic heart of Blackburn. A joint investment by the council and the Heritage Lottery Fund, the project will be delivered over the next four to five years. The project aims to restore and refurbish historic buildings, improve public

spaces and provide local people with opportunities for training in traditional building skills. A modern high-quality cinema building is planned with an outside seating area and improvements to the public realm to bring increased activity in the area during the daytime and evening.

PLAY

One of the key aims of the council's regeneration strategy is to ensure its town centres provide a vibrant and varied offer. In Blackburn plans include a new £6.5m cinema complex, which links through to the Northgate area – home to the grade II listed venue King George's Hall and a focal point for investment

Together with other parts of the town centre, the aim is to improve the night-time economy through a

wider range of attractions, restaurants and bars.

The South Asian community accounts for around 28% of the borough's population, rising to 40% in Blackburn itself, and the council aims to harness this diversity by building the town centre's food and fabrics market – and demand for all things Bollywood.

The borough is continually striving to find different ways to animate its towns. One innovative example is Blackburn Open Walls, a collaboration

with artists from all over the world that's designed to 'bring communities together in conversation and creative inspiration, through street art' on the town's 'forgotten walls'. Over the last three years a total of 41 pieces of work have been created.

One of the borough's great strengths is its abundance of open spaces and accessible countryside. This is being used to great effect to promote the area as a place to live, work and visit while also tackling local health issues.

For example, the council recently launched the Weavers Wheel, a 26km cycling route that encircles Blackburn town centre. It's just one of many ways it is encouraging residents to get active.

The council led a successful bid on behalf of Pennine Lancashire Accountable Care Partnership to become one of Sport England's 12 Local Delivery Pilots.

This has given it a share of £120m to promote physical activity and prevent avoidable illnesses and conditions.

It builds on the council's long-term commitment to heavily discounted leisure activities and better facilities across the borough which has reduced health inequalities over the last decade.



Blackburn became an official Kindness Community in 2017. The brainchild of local resident John Magee, who started the Kindness Matters movement, and launched by one of the town's most famous sons – Superbike legend Carl Fogarty – it's inspired residents to carry out small acts of kindness and has built on the area's appetite for volunteering.

Social capital is one of the borough's biggest assets and residents are helping the council to deal with cutbacks – it's lost almost half its funding since 2010 – by getting involved

in everything from environmental clean ups to running community centres. It stems from the council's new relationship with residents, Your Community, Your Call, launched in 2011. One of the most recent developments is the army of volunteer litter pickers. It's a true social movement, badged as the Red Bag Revolution thanks to the huge number of red bags seen around the borough. The council works with residents to support and celebrate their effort to help them flourish, including collecting the red bags.

Blackburn with Darwen: facts & figures

180 housing and employment sites are transforming the borough and 9,500 new homes will be built by 2026

700+ volunteers are helping to make Blackburn with Darwen cleaner and greener

60,000 people visited Blackburn town centre during the two national Festival of Making festivals, generating almost £1m for the local economy

25% of the population is under 15, making it one of the youngest places in Europe

4,000 new jobs have been created since 2009

Major employers include homegrown international success stories Euro Garages and Crown Paints