

RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL REPORT TO PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

meeting date: THURSDAY 10 MARCH 2022
title: CONSULTATION ON BLACKBURN LOCAL PLAN 2021 - 2037
submitted by: NICOLA HOPKINS – DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT &
PLANNING
principal author: MARK WALECZEK – ASSISTANT PLANNING OFFICER

1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To inform members of the current consultation on the new Blackburn Local Plan and associated cross-boundary matters.
- 1.2 To inform members of the key policies and objectives of the Blackburn Local Plan, highlight any potential cross-boundary issues and the Council's response in compliance with our general duty to co-operate.
- 1.3 Relevance to the Council's ambitions and priorities:
 - Community Objectives – To support our key service centres and protect the viability and vitality of our market towns.
 - Corporate Priorities – The Authority has a legal duty to engage constructively, actively and on an ongoing basis in the context of strategic cross boundary matters.
 - Other Considerations – None

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council covers the primary towns of Blackburn and Darwen in addition to six surrounding rural civil parishes which collectively form the borough. With a total estimated population of 150,000, it is one of the largest boroughs within Lancashire by population and shares a boundary with seven other local authorities including the Ribble Valley.
- 2.2 The proximity of Ribble Valley's south-eastern boundary to the urban centre of Blackburn and a shared green belt area along Blackburn with Darwen's northern boundary places an importance on ensuring aligned strategies are in place for these shared interests. In addition, whilst not explicitly sharing a housing or economic market area, important social and economic relationships exist on a micro scale between the Ribble Valley and Blackburn with Darwen which the Council [Ribble Valley] seeks to improve and protect where possible.
- 2.3 Blackburn with Darwen's Local Plan currently comprises two documents – the Local Plan Part 1: Core Strategy (adopted January 2011) and the Local Plan Part 2: Site Allocations and Development Management Policies (adopted December 2015).

- 2.4 New planning regulations introduced in 2017 made it a requirement for local authorities to review Local Plans at least every five years from their date of adoption. In response to this, Blackburn with Darwen is now undertaking work to produce a new Local Plan covering the period 2021-2037 which will replace both documents in paragraph 2.3. These circumstances are similar to which the Council finds itself and work also is currently underway to produce a new Local Plan for the Ribble Valley which will guide development up to 2033.
- 2.5 Two consultations as part of the Regulation 18 stage of Local Plan preparation have already been undertaken by Blackburn with Darwen, enabling them to test a variety of strategies, issues and options with the public. Notably this included the introduction of ‘growth, renewal and protection’ areas as an interpretation of the zonal land use approach indicated within the Planning White Paper, however, the plan has since been progressed with a more traditional structure in line with existing legislation.
- 2.6 The Council’s views on the publication version of the Blackburn with Darwen Local Plan are now sought as part of a Regulation 19 consultation, allowing the public, neighbouring authorities, and other stakeholders to share their opinion on whether the plan is sound or legally compliant before the plan is submitted. The Plan itself, along with a policies map can be viewed using the links below:

Plan Document –

<https://blackburn-darwen.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Local-Plan-Reg19-Document-wo.pdf>

Policies Map -

[https://blackburn.statmap.co.uk/map/Aurora.svc/run?script=%5cAurora%5cLocal%20Plan%202021%202037%20Reg%2019.AuroraScript\\$&nocache=71c452f7-e01c-d188-721f-82673452d974&resize=always](https://blackburn.statmap.co.uk/map/Aurora.svc/run?script=%5cAurora%5cLocal%20Plan%202021%202037%20Reg%2019.AuroraScript$&nocache=71c452f7-e01c-d188-721f-82673452d974&resize=always)

3 ISSUES

- 3.1 The central concept underpinning the structure of Blackburn with Darwen’s new Local Plan is one of a ‘balanced growth’ strategy. By directing appropriate forms of development to suitable locations which facilitate inward investment, the plan seeks to provide enough opportunity for economic growth whilst balancing the expectations of reducing greenhouse gas emissions as a result of their Climate Emergency declaration in July 2019.
- 3.2 The shared-boundary and proximity of the urban area to the Ribble Valley results in a range of cross boundary matters for consideration which must be demonstrated as part of a duty to co-operate which is placed on the Council and Blackburn with Darwen. These matters are considered below.

Housing

- 3.3 The area of Blackburn with Darwen shares a housing market area with Hyndburn Borough Council. Both authorities prepared a joint Strategic Housing and Economic Needs Assessment which confirmed a minimum housing need figure of 153 dwellings per annum (dpa). However, in line with Planning Practice Guidance, Blackburn with Darwen has opted to use an increased housing need figure of 447 dpa to align with

the growth strategy within the plan. Despite this, the proposed housing requirement is a marked reduction from what the authority has adopted within the existing Core Strategy.

- 3.4 This reduction is indicative of the 'balanced growth' approach which Blackburn with Darwen seeks to deliver. However, it is not expected that the Ribble Valley will experience an increase in demand for housing as a result as it is not significantly linked to the housing market of Blackburn with Darwen and Hyndburn, which are driven by different factors.
- 3.5 To meet the requirement above, a range of housing allocation sites are proposed to provide 2,696 dwellings. In addition to extant permissions and windfall sites, this will provide the total number of houses required over the plan period with a 4% buffer.
- 3.6 A significant proportion of housing delivery is proposed to come from a 97 hectare strategic urban extension in the north-east of Blackburn at Brownhill. With a total delivery anticipated of 1500 dwellings, half of this is planned to be delivered within the plan period 2021 – 2037. This site, including a smaller growth site of 23 dwellings, is shown in Appendix 1.
- 3.7 This site is a significant strategic allocation less than a kilometre from the shared boundary between Blackburn with Darwen and the Ribble Valley, however, its location is unlikely result in detrimental cross-boundary issues. Given the local amenities in nearby Ramsgreave and larger service offering within the rest of Blackburn with Darwen, the site is not deemed to have the potential to create new traffic flows into the Ribble Valley which would be of significance.
- 3.8 It is recognised that despite not formally sharing the same housing market area, a development of this size has the potential to impact on localised housing demand within the Wilpshire area. The Council will monitor this closely, liaising with Blackburn with Darwen where appropriate and reporting to members on matters arising.

Employment

- 3.9 As a result of findings presented within evidence base documents, Blackburn with Darwen intends to deliver a minimum of 46.4 Hectares of new employment land over the plan period, at an annualised requirement of 2.9ha.
- 3.10 Meeting this residual need has required the identification of a combination of sites suitable for either mixed use or employment only use. Significantly, there is insufficient deliverable land available within the urban area to accommodate this requirement, and therefore a new strategic employment site has been identified off Junction 5 of the M65. This site is currently green belt land between the urban areas of Blackburn and Hyndburn and is set to contribute around 43% towards the total requirement outlined above.
- 3.11 Although the plan proposes a significant level of employment land coming forward within a neighbouring authority, the Functional Economic Market Area (FEMA) to which it contributes has been identified as being primarily with Hyndburn. Notwithstanding this, Ribble Valley does derive relevant employment opportunities from Blackburn with Darwen which any growth will provide linked opportunities. As a result, this level of employment land provision is not seen to be of detriment to the Ribble Valley's economy or its own requirements as recently demonstrated within the Employment Land Review but any impacts on inward investment to Ribble Valley need to be kept under review.

- 3.12 Despite this, a guiding principle of Blackburn with Darwen's forthcoming plan includes the concept of a 'Blackburn Growth Axis'. This a key idea forming the spatial approach of the new plan, as an economic framework of development sites and opportunities that link the M65, key growth corridors and Samlesbury Enterprise Zone, a future economic driver of Blackburn with Darwen. A demonstration of this concept can be seen in the key diagram within Appendix 2.
- 3.13 Members will be aware that Samlesbury Enterprise Zone is also of strategic importance to the Ribble Valley through its potential as an economic driver for attracting investment and employment generating developments within our Borough, as well as within Blackburn with Darwen and South Ribble. At this stage, the 'Blackburn Growth Axis' is presented as a strategic concept guiding the overall direction of the plan and is of little material consequence to the Ribble Valley. However, it is recognised that the concept has the potential to change the economic relationships between the south of the Ribble Valley and Blackburn with Darwen. It is important to ensure that appropriate growth in Ribble Valley is not affected and therefore any effects will be closely monitored as an updated economic strategy is prepared for the Ribble Valley as part of the upcoming Local Plan.

Other Matters

- 3.14 An additional pillar of Blackburn with Darwen's 'Balanced Growth' strategy includes further development within Blackburn Town Centre to improve the quality of retail offering. The Ribble Valley traditionally experiences some leakage from its economy in the form of retail spending out of the borough, to centres including Preston, Burnley, and Blackburn. However, the town centre strategy within this draft plan is not a concern to the success of Ribble Valley's service centres and retail economy due to their unique, independent offering and the differing nature of these centres.
- 3.15 As shown in Appendix 1, the Ribble Valley's shared boundary with Blackburn with Darwen also includes an extensive area of Green Belt in the areas of Wilpshire, Mellor and Mellor Brook. Green Belts are afforded great importance within the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) such is their ability to restrict urban sprawl, safeguard countryside from encroachment and prevent the merging of neighbouring authorities.
- 3.16 The new Blackburn with Darwen Local Plan does not propose any new development within the shared area of Green Belt to the west of Mellor. Furthermore, proposed policies to protect this designation remain strong, reflecting the NPPF and the existing policies within the Council's Core Strategy which protect the Green Belt on Ribble Valley's side of the shared boundary. On basis there is common ground and there are no further matters to resolve.

Statement of Common Ground (SoCG)

- 3.17 Local planning authorities are under a duty to cooperate with each other, and with other prescribed bodies, on strategic matters that cross administrative boundaries. Throughout the production of their new plan, Blackburn with Darwen have sought to work with neighbouring authorities including the Ribble Valley to undertake this duty.
- 3.18 A draft Statement of Common Ground has been produced to sit alongside this draft local plan to act as a written record of the progress made during the process of planning for strategic cross-boundary matters. In doing so, the document seeks to

demonstrate that the duty to co-operate has been undertaken in full. This is available to view in the link below:

<https://blackburn-darwen.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/BwD-draft-SoCG-Reg19.pdf>

3.19 The Blackburn with Darwen Local Plan 2021 – 2037 as proposed does not raise any strategic matters at this time which the Council has concern over. Based on this, it is proposed that the Statement of Common Ground is signed according to the following wording:

- *There is common ground on the draft planning policies set out in the emerging Blackburn with Darwen Local Plan (2021-2037); and*
- *That there are no unresolved strategic issues in relation to matters set out in Section 5 of this statement.*

3.20 Given that the Council and Blackburn continue to work together to address cross-boundary matters as evidenced through the statement above, at this time there are no further representations to make on behalf of the Council. On this basis it is not proposed that a response to the Regulation 19 consultation need be made, however, the Council retains the ability to raise concerns where it is felt a further representation is necessary.

4 **RISK ASSESSMENT**

4.1 The approval of this report may have the following implications:

- Resources – There is provision within existing resources to work with neighbouring authorities in preparing and responding to emerging Local Plans.
- Technical, Environmental and Legal – Neighbouring authorities have a legal duty to co-operate on any strategic matters.
- Political – There is significant interest in any potential development pressures upon existing key service centres, villages, and infrastructure within the Borough.
- Reputation – Development within neighbouring authorities can be of some significance in the local community.
- Equality & Diversity – No issues identified.

5 **RECOMMEND THAT COMMITTEE**

5.1 Endorse the comments set out at paragraph 3.19 as part of our legal duty to co-operate and confirm that no objections are necessary in accord with paragraph 3.20 and identify any additional comments members wish to make if appropriate.

- 5.2 Agree that the Local Plan Working Group monitor the Blackburn with Darwen Local Plan and that this Committee be kept informed.



MARK WALECZEK
ASSISTANT PLANNING OFFICER



NICOLA HOPKINS
DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT AND
PLANNING

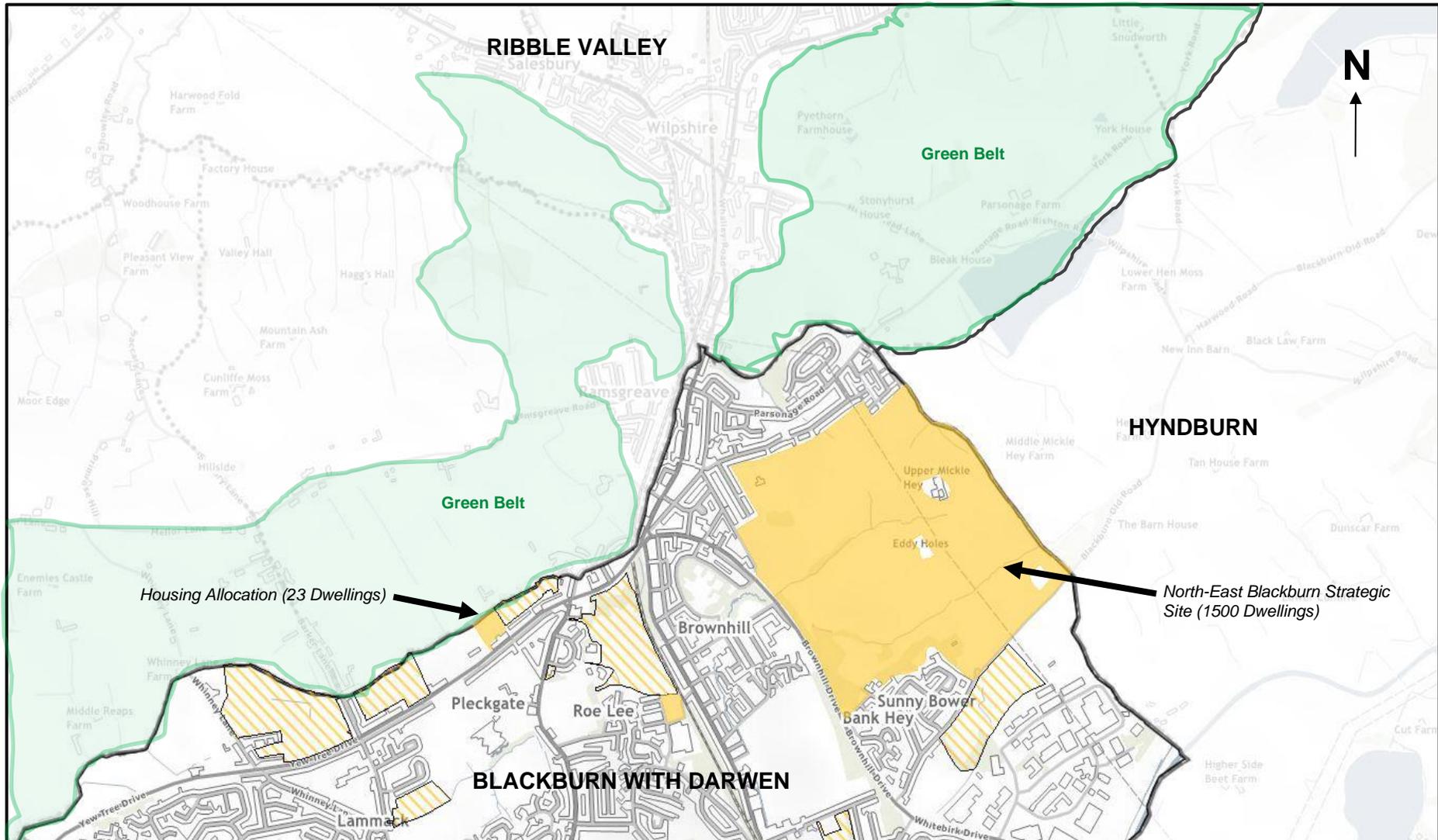
BACKGROUND PAPERS

Blackburn with Darwen Local Plan 2021 – 2037 Publication Plan (Reg 19).

For further information please ask for Mark Waleczek, extension 4581.

APPENDIX 1

Map demonstrating proposals in North-East Blackburn, near the Ribble Valley boundary. **For illustrative purposes only.**



APPENDIX 2

The key diagram of Blackburn with Darwen's new Local Plan.

