

BLACKPOOL COUNCIL

BLACKPOOL LOCAL PLAN PART 1: CORE STRATEGY – EXAMINATION HEARINGS

OPENING STATEMENT: 11 May 2015

Welcome to Blackpool.

1. Thank you for giving the Council the opportunity to present a brief opening statement, to provide an overview of our Core Strategy to set the context for the examination.

Blackpool context

2. Blackpool is the U.K.s' largest and most popular seaside resort, located in the North West of England on the Fylde Coast peninsula; covering an area of around 35km² with 11.5km of seafront; a resident population of 142,065 and a workforce of around 65,000.
3. Intensely urban and compact in form, it is characterised at its heart with the Resort Core (some 5km²) and adjoining town centre. Behind the seafront lies numerous guest houses and small hotels beyond which are the residential suburbs and thirteen employment areas. Limited areas of countryside lie on the eastern edge of the Borough and at Marton Moss in the south east.
4. Blackpool is surrounded by the neighbouring authorities of Fylde and Wyre and together the 3 authority areas support 326,000 residents and a work force of 152,000. This Fylde Coast sub region demonstrates a high level of self-containment in terms of housing markets, travel to work patterns and economic functionality. As a result of this working together on strategic and cross boundary issues for the three authorities is not new but has been ongoing for many years.

Blackpool's Past

5. Blackpool is a resort with a glorious seaside history which has entertained British Holiday-seekers for generations. The resort played a major part in democratising the family holiday. With the advent of the railway in the 1850's Blackpool grew rapidly into the resort where all classes of society came for seaside pleasure. The working classes in particular flocked to the resort for fun and entertainment that took them to 'another world' beyond the daily grind and the dirt and drudgery of every day urban living.
6. The late nineteenth century heralded an extended period of prodigious development leaving a legacy of high quality late Victorian architecture – the piers and promenades constructed for the better enjoyment of the seafront; a tramway installed to facilitate efficient transport between the new amenities; and the resort's crowning glory and testament to its peerless seaside sovereignty – Blackpool Tower.
7. Successive decades saw more unprecedented growth with music halls, theatres, and amusements including the Winter Gardens, Pleasure Beach, the Golden Mile and famous illuminations along with a plethora of densely built holiday guest houses and small hotels in a grid-iron pattern of terraced streets behind the seafront. During this century long period of growth and evolution, Blackpool developed an open and brash populism that generated great affection and nostalgia.
8. In the 1960's and 70's Blackpool's seven miles of illuminated, larger than life, kiss me quick, saucy seaside experiences attracted more than 17 million visitors per year and supported more than 100,000 holiday bed-spaces. Blackpool was the largest holiday destination in the U.K.

Blackpool's Present

9. Today Blackpool is still the U.K.s' largest and most popular seaside resort and millions of people still visit each year but numbers have declined to around 10 million. Like virtually every English seaside resort, Blackpool has become constrained in terms of its

appeal to visitors.

10. Since the 1980's growing competition of affordable package holidays, cheap flights to European cities and new long haul destinations; enhanced consumer choice at home coupled with a more discerning customer ever more demanding of quality in the experience they encounter has had a significant impact on the town; and more so than any other seaside resort due to the sheer scale of the Blackpool's resort infrastructure.
11. The consequence of three decades of declining tourism spend has led to an under-performing economy and a legacy of acute socio economic and physical deprivation.
12. The Council's understanding of these complex and inter-related issues developed through the 2000's with the work undertaken to support the Blackpool Masterplan and the Regional Casino Bid; and with the demise of the Regional Casino agenda, the subsequent development of the Blackpool Task Force Report. The complex challenges facing Blackpool are well documented and have been acknowledged by Government over the years through funding to support regeneration projects and most recently their support through the Lancashire Growth Deal.

Blackpool's Future

13. Blackpool Council and its partners understand the complex issues and know what needs to be done and what needs to be achieved. We have an ambitious Vision for Blackpool and Planning has an integral role to play in achieving our ambitions; a key part of a wider jigsaw of initiatives targeting and addressing key issues of transience, homelessness, health and well-being and worklessness.
14. The Core Strategy has been developed specifically to address the key challenges facing Blackpool, aligning with the priorities in the Corporate Plan, the Vision seeks to deliver the town we wish to see in 2027 (and I paraphrase) –

Blackpool.....renowned for the quality and innovation of its culture, entertainment and business tourism offer.....the principal centre for business, culture and education on the Fylde coast and firmly established as the sub-regional centre for retail.

15. At the heart of the vision is Blackpool as Britain's favourite seaside resort, offering a high quality visitor experience. Tourism will continue to be the main economic driver with the Resort Core and Town Centre being the focus for expanding the visitor offer. The Town also has an important role as the sub-regional centre for the Fylde Coast with Core Strategy policy strengthen its principal centre role for business , culture, education and retail within the town centre.
16. Regeneration has and is happening with a revitalised promenade and quality public realm with the Comedy Carpet, St. Johns Square and Birley St. Improved gateways, including Central Corridor with Bancroft Park and the first phase of Talbot Gateway with Sainsbury and Bickerstaffe House office development; the improvements to the Blackpool Tower offer with Merlin investments; ongoing refurbishment of the Winter Gardens and the new heritage museum - development opportunities identified in the Core Strategy already happening.
17. To support the economy the important employment lands in the town will be retained to support a good range of local job opportunities. Land in south Blackpool is important to meet the future employment needs and supporting sub-regional employment growth. Additional land made available by Fylde Authority will also support our employment land supply to ensure we have sufficient land to assist in diversifying our economy and capitalising on the economic opportunities that exist within the sub-region.
18. Blackpool's residential neighbourhoods will be places where people choose to live – sustainable communities with a range of new high quality homes in attractive neighbourhoods with fair access to jobs and other local services.

19. I would like to take a few moments here to highlight some key issues around our neighbourhoods as this is one of our biggest challenges. Blackpool's neighbourhoods have a range of different communities living in widely contrasting conditions and circumstances. Our inner area neighbourhoods however present us with a unique and extreme set of housing challenges rooted in the town's changing fortunes. The decline in visitor numbers from our heyday has resulted in a significant oversupply of guest house bed-spaces (estimated to be around 14,000).
20. This accommodation that once housed tourists now functions at least in part as small poor quality privately rented bedsits or HMO's many of which are sustained by housing benefit attracting vulnerable households. This has resulted in significant social, economic and environmental problems and an unbalanced dysfunctional housing market with transient communities experiencing extreme health, social and economic challenges. Blackpool is ranked as the 6th. most deprived local authority in the country and almost one third of small areas within the town are in the 10% most deprived areas nationally. The problems in the inner areas including the poor environment and anti-social behaviour detracts from Blackpool's ability to grow its tourism offer - fundamental to our economy and identity.
21. But the Council is committed to attempting to arrest this decline and to bring much needed regeneration to the inner areas of Blackpool. The Council believes that the housing and neighbourhood policies proposed in the Core Strategy provide a sufficiently flexible approach, striking the right balance in managing the transition from unstable to sustainable mixed neighbourhoods; our part of the jigsaw supporting other local social, economic and environmental initiatives and strategies to realise our vision.
22. And development in the inner areas is already happening more guest houses are being converted to quality homes, empty properties are being brought back into residential use and at Rigby Rd the Council working in partnership with a private housing developer is creating a high quality distinctive neighbourhood of over 400

new homes assisting in changing people's image of Blackpool's inner area as a place to live.

23. In south Blackpool housing development is proposed which will improve the mix and quality of homes complementing the inner area offer enabling families to find their house of choice so they can remain in the Borough.
24. The intensely urban nature of Blackpool and limited areas of open space and countryside increases the importance of balancing the requirement for new development with the need to protect and enhance our valued landscape, biodiversity and green infrastructure. In Blackpool green infrastructure supports regeneration; adds to the attractiveness of the town as a place to live and invest; makes a vital contribution to the health and well-being of residents and visitors as well as playing an important role in mitigating the impacts of climate change. The importance of the remaining lands at Marton Moss in the SE of the Borough with its open semi-rural distinctive character is recognised by the Council supporting a neighbourhood approach to determining the future for the area.
25. The Council believes that the Core Strategy sets out a spatial framework which will deliver the Blackpool we wish to see in 2027. Its sets out a level of growth which will deliver change, responding to the unique and extreme set of challenges facing Blackpool, balancing economic, social and environmental aspects - delivering sustainable development.

The Core Strategy – Soundness and legal compliance

26. The Core Strategy has been developed during a time of change for planning with the abolition of Regional Spatial Strategies and the introduction of the National Planning Policy Framework but we have responded to the changes and incorporated the requirements of the new legislation during the preparation of the Strategy. We

consider the Core Strategy to be consistent with the principles and policies set out in the NPPF and the presumption in favour of sustainable development.

27. The Council considers that it has submitted a Core Strategy which has been prepared in accordance with the Duty to Co-operate and the legal and procedural requirements. We have an evidence base underpinning the Strategy which we consider is comprehensive and robust. Sustainability Appraisal and Habitat Regulation Assessments have been undertaken throughout its preparation.
28. Considerable consultation has been undertaken in the preparation of the Core Strategy with local communities, residents and businesses, neighbouring authorities, statutory bodies and other stakeholders. We believe that we have produced a document that is sound and along with other key local strategies and initiatives will tackle the key issues affecting Blackpool and deliver the changes that residents, businesses and visitors wish to see. That said we have formally invited the Inspector to propose modifications to the Core Strategy if they are considered to be necessary to make the plan sound.
29. Finally I would like to thank the tireless efforts of the Policy Team in developing the Core Strategy under challenging circumstances; the support of our Councillors throughout the process, in particularly Councillor Fred Jackson as Portfolio Holder and I look forward to what I hope is a successful examination and the subsequent adoption of the Blackpool Core Strategy.