

Report to: Blackpool, Fylde and Wyre Economic Prosperity Board
Report Author: Rob Green, Head of Enterprise Zones, Blackpool Council
Date of Meeting: 10th September 2019
Recommendation: That the Committee notes the report.

1. Blackpool Airport Enterprise Zone: Progress Report

COMMERCIALLY CONFIDENTIAL

a) Masterplan

Whilst we have yet to receive any formal feedback from MHCLG with regard to the masterplan and delivery strategy, a number of significant changes impacting upon the deliverability of the original masterplan, relating to the former Wellington Bomber factory, Highways constraints, changed leisure requirements for the Sports village and greater clarity on airport operational facilities, necessitates that this is substantially reworked. A procurement process is underway to revise the plan and thereafter re-work the delivery plan, which will provide new estimates of cost retained rates revenue, jobs and impact upon GVA over the lifetime of the EZ. It is hoped that the revised plan and delivery plan can be completed and presented for approval by March 2020. The approved Marketing Strategy will continue to be implemented for the Enterprise Zone and where appropriate will be updated upon completion of the Master plan update.

b) Current Activity - Phase One

Although architecture planning and surveying practice Cassidy + Ashton submitted the outline planning application for the phase one development in April 2019, this had been delayed by a number of issues, including those relating to Highways and also objections from Sport England, Natural England and NATS.

The issues raised by the objections have now been substantially resolved and a modified planning application will be resubmitted to reflect revised proposals for the sports facilities, now including a detailed application for the relocated grass playing pitches and a revised location for the eastern gateway access road. Some additional preparatory and design work is required, along with a further informal public consultation, with the estimated resubmission being made in October and a decision in principle, subject to Secretary of State consideration as Greenbelt land, anticipated in January 2020.

c) Eastern Gateway Access Road

Work on the eastern gateway access road design has been delayed whilst wider highway issues were resolved. The position of the access road which will now be a traffic light junction rather than the originally mooted roundabout, will be located to the north of South Shore Cricket Club. A design and build contract will be sought once the phase one planning consent has been confirmed.

d) Common Edge Sports Village

Consultants LK2 continue to work on the proposals for the Sports Village and are preparing a business case to support applications to Sport Governing bodies for grant funding. Initial work will focus on the relocation of existing grass pitches onto former airport land which will take circa 18 months from

completion until they can be fully utilised. At the request of Sport England the Blackpool Council Playing Pitch Strategy is also being updated and the composition of the Common Edge facilities will be adjusted to reflect new requirements.

Initial Work has been completed by agronomists on the design of the relocated grass playing pitches and this will now form part of the revised phase one planning application. Consideration is being given to the possibility of providing temporary changing accommodation to facilitate the early use of the grass pitches which will be a considerable distance from the present changing facilities.

e) Link Road

A number of matters relating to the funding and delivery timetable for the M55 link road remain under discussion and whilst this investment remains outside the direct influence of Blackpool Council as EZ accountable body, it is anticipated that a definitive position will have been established by the time the EPB meets and an oral update will be provided to the meeting. Delays with the M55 link road may have the potential to impact to a small degree upon the scale and pace of delivery of the wider EZ, but it has been agreed that this would not be a factor which would delay the implementation of phase one development progress and is being monitored with a regular dialogue with Lancashire County Council and Fylde Council.

f) Initial Speculative Development

A full planning application has been submitted to Blackpool Council for a 40,000 sq ft B1/B2 unit on a site at Amy Johnson Way with a decision anticipated in September. Negotiations have continued with a prospective occupier and subject to agreement on Heads of Terms and full financial sign off it is expected that a construction contract can be entered into prior to Christmas. Terms have also been agreed for the sale on a long leasehold and subject to planning consent of a small site at Starways for the development of small B1 industrial units. A planning application is anticipated in October.

g) Squires Gate Industrial Estate (Former Wellington Bomber Factory)

The new owners of Squires Gate Industrial Estate have commenced some initial works on the property returning some previously vacant accommodation to use and upgrading site security fencing. At the present time it is considered unlikely that the owner would wish to explore the demolition and redevelopment of the property as initially proposed in the masterplan, although efforts continue to encourage appropriate development to come forward. A number of matters of concern have been identified with aspects of the work to date and the appropriate bodies are looking at the possibility of enforcement action.

h) Communications Infrastructure

Work has continued to support the installation of the new transatlantic optic fibre telecommunications cable, part of the North Atlantic loop which is being developed by Aquacomms. Cable ducting has been laid from the landing point to the base station at Blackpool Airport, planning consent for which has been obtained from Fylde Council and construction commenced. Additional cable ducting has been laid across the EZ estate, with a further expansion of the network under the local Fast Fibre programme at the planning stage. The new Transatlantic cable is due to come ashore in October. Discussions are underway to conclude agreements for the completion of the LFFN link to Hillhouse EZ via the Tramway, but additional funding will be required from Hillhouse EZ to enable this.

Presence of the new optic fibre link will provide fast communication links with timings of less than 64 milliseconds to transmit data from Blackpool Airport to New York, some 11 milliseconds faster than

the best current connections to London and thus providing a competitive advantage. The new connection will open up the possibility of securing investment in the provision of data centre facilities at the EZ and securing investment from data driven industries. A study to confirm the potential for data centre and related development has been commissioned from Danish specialist consultants COWI with their report and recommendations due in late September. This report may well recommend the acceleration in the planned delivery of enhanced EZ utility capacity.

i) Planning Applications

In addition to the Phase One Outline Planning application and the speculative 40,000 sq ft application there are currently two planning applications being considered by Blackpool Council; a proposed development of a 20MW gas fired power generation facility and a 14,000 sq ft development, with two further B1/B2 planning applications expected to be lodged within a few months. Fylde Council have recently granted planning consent for 17,000 of small industrial units on a site off Amy Johnson Way and for the Aquacomms base station at the Airport.

j) Marketing

Work continues in partnership with Marketing Lancashire to develop the content of the Blackpool Airport EZ pages of the LAMEC website. Marketing Lancashire have advised that they are still awaiting approval from the LEP to include additional features such as social media feeds and an interactive property search facility.

Press and promotional activity continue and planned event activity over future months includes attendance at the World Aviation Festival, London, sponsorship and attendance at the ECO-I Conference, Global Innovation Centre, Lancaster University and The Clean Energy Northern Powerhouse Conference, Hull.

We will be looking at producing a more concise version of the promotional brochure, similar to that produced for Salmesbury and additional print runs on existing marketing literature have been re-ordered for use at upcoming conferences and events.

Additional EZ site signage is being designed for location on the airport roadside frontage and initial take up from airport occupiers to display their logos on the boards has been very positive.

The third EZ newsletter is scheduled for distribution to 115 registered recipients in September.

There continues to be a steady stream of enquiries for the EZ, driven by the web site, site signage, and word of mouth. The enquiries remains steady although the volume has declined in recent months in part due to widespread market uncertainty, but also reflecting the relative paucity of immediately available accommodation and serviced development plots on the market.

Many enquiries are for smaller accommodation in the 1-5000 sq ft category, with several live enquiries up to 10,000 sq ft, three in the 30-40,000 sq ft range. A number of enquiries particularly those derived via DIT from the overseas network are for heavier industry users which are better suited to the Hillhouse EZ in Wyre and which are referred on to the Wyre EZ team.

k) Blackpool Airport

Work continues to replace worn out systems and upgrade the airports operational capabilities with the new Instrument landing System (ILS) now commissioned, with work underway to replace failing taxiway lighting and further navigational aids in the process of delivery.

BAOL the council-owned operating company is continuing the process of preparing long and medium term business plans and is in the process of retendering the airport air navigation and operational management contract which was inherited from previous owner Balfour Beatty. Architects are to be instructed to undertake a feasibility study on provision of new aircraft parking, apron, aircraft hangars, a new control tower, fire station and administration facility.

l) Third Party Development

Work has now completed on the 9MW Gas Fired Power generation facility and this is operational, with the Aquacomms base station the only construction presently underway.

To date:

- A total of 189 live enquiries have are currently logged for Blackpool EZ.
- Some 62 businesses have located to the Enterprise Zone since April 2016.
- A total of 1,474 jobs have located to the Enterprise Zone, this figure includes jobs to the area, safeguarded jobs within Blackpool and construction full time equivalent jobs.

m) Project Team

The sixth meeting of the Blackpool Airport EZ Project Team took place on 12th July at Blackpool Airport. The next meeting will take place on Friday 13th September at Blackpool Airport.

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