

Action A3. Provide a note clarifying the connection between the Blackburn Growth Axis and Local Plan policy

The Council has provided further details of the rationale behind the Blackburn Growth Axis in its hearing statement in response to Question 4 of Matter 2 (document ref: [EL4.002](#)). In that response, the Council indicated that a Growth Axis framework document (strategy) could be available by February 2023. Whilst work on the strategy has progressed significantly since the Local Plan hearings, it remains in draft form and is not yet ready for publication.

The strategy document, once completed, is expected to set out:

- A clear vision, priorities and objectives for the Growth Axis;
- Blackburn’s growth story (to date);
- Future growth opportunities and key drivers of change to support case-making and engagement with sub-regional and national policy makers and public and private investors;
- Details of key investment projects; and
- The spatial expression of the Growth Axis, based on our functional economic geography, which captures major growth locations, key corridors and cross-boundary links)

The Council has already provided a draft ‘Theory of Change’ document for the Growth Axis (document ref: [BwD034](#)) as part of the examination process into the Local Plan. This is also being further developed, and will be included within the final growth axis strategy to show the key impacts (and outputs) of the implementation of key investment projects.

In its hearing statement, specifically the response to Question 5 of Matter 2 (in document ref: [EL4.002](#)), the Council has also provided further details around the spatial distribution of development sites proposed in the Local Plan and how they will support the economic analysis set out in the Growth Axis framework.

Discussions held during the hearing sessions highlighted the need for some further clarity around the relationship between the Growth Axis and policy within the Local Plan.

Local Plan references to the Growth Axis

References to the Growth Axis are made in four places of the Local Plan. These are set out in the table below, with page and paragraph references referring to the Publication version Local Plan (document ref: [SD1](#)). Underlining is for emphasis in this note only, and not in the Plan itself. The four references are:

Ref	Plan Location	Paragraph/text
1	Foreword (p3)	<i>The planned growth set out in this Local Plan is best summarised by six key ideas:</i> <i>1. <u>The Blackburn Growth Axis</u>: an economic framework linking strategic development sites and key growth corridors across the Borough and beyond;</i>
2	Core Policy 2 (CP2): The Spatial Approach (p22)	In the Introductory text : 3.8 <i>Policy CP2 supports the six key ideas on which the balanced growth strategy of the Plan is based.</i> 3.9 <i>The six key ideas are:</i> <i>1. <u>The Blackburn Growth Axis</u> – an economic framework of strategic and local development sites and opportunities that link the M65, key growth corridors and Salmesbury Enterprise Zone, a future economic driver of the Borough, with Blackburn Town Centre;</i>

3	Core Policy 2 (CP2): The Spatial Approach (p22)	In the Policy text : 2. <i>The focus for future investment decisions and growth in spatial areas will be guided by the following key principles:</i> i. <i>Blackburn urban area – Blackburn will continue to accommodate the majority of the Borough’s strategic development needs including a new strategic housing site, strategic town centre mixed use site and strategic employment allocation. Additional growth sites and infrastructure improvements will support the ‘Blackburn Growth Axis’ to become the key future economic driver of the Borough.</i>
4	Core Policy 2 (CP2): The Spatial Approach (p23)	In the Justification text : 3.10. <i>To ensure an efficient and effective use of land the Local Plan supports a spatial approach that balances regeneration and renewal of the urban areas with urban extensions in the most sustainable locations. Blackburn will be the focus for new strategic development sites (housing, employment and town centre allocations) to support development of the <u>Blackburn Growth Axis</u> economic framework.</i>

Connections between the Growth Axis and Local Plan policy

Paragraph 82 of the NPPF requires that planning policies in Local Plans should ‘set out a clear economic vision and strategy which positively and proactively encourages sustainable economic growth’. It goes on to state that these policies should ‘be flexible enough to accommodate needs not anticipated in the plan, allow for new and flexible working practices ... and to enable a rapid response to changes in economic circumstances’.

As has been stated in the Council’s hearing statement, and is re-iterated in the references in both the Foreword and Introductory text to Policy CP2 (Ref 1 and 2 in the table above), the Growth Axis is fundamentally an economic framework. Its relevance, and the forthcoming strategy, will be to help focus the efforts of public, private and third sectors on delivery of economic growth in the Borough. It will help support targeted investments to bolster the economy of Blackburn, and support the development wider sub-region and regional case-making and policy development, including analysis in support of Lancashire’s emerging Combined Authority and devolution initiatives.

References to the Axis within the policy text itself of CP2 (Ref. 3 in the table above), is made in the context of growth sites (which refer to both allocations and commitments) and infrastructure improvements that are identified in the Plan. Reference in the supporting justification text (Ref. 4) is made in the context of strategic development sites only. The Council has demonstrated through figures provided in its response to Question 5 to Matter 2 (document ref: [EL4.002](#)) already how the growth sites identified in the Plan support the development of the Growth Axis framework.

Blackburn Growth Axis references within the Local Plan are made in a positive way in line with paragraph 82. They are all contained within Core Policy 2 of the Plan which sets the strategic spatial approach, and there is no specific reference to the Growth Axis within Development Management (non-strategic) policies of the Plan. As such the Plan does not place any explicit expectation that windfall development (i.e. future planning applications on non-growth sites) must be located within the Growth Axis corridors. The Policy states that it will be a ‘guiding principle’ for future investment decisions and growth. Policy CP2 is therefore written flexibly to help facilitate economic growth and accommodate needs not presently identified in the Plan, again in line with paragraph 82.