



## Background

Blackburn BID was established on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2014 with a remit to deliver against four key objectives:

- To market and promote Blackburn as a vibrant town centre;
- To create a safer, more secure town centre;
- To create a sustainable, cleaner and more attractive environment;
- To attract and support businesses.

## Blackburn BID's role in place branding

Blackburn with Darwen Council has taken the lead in a recent place branding exercise. This activity is led by Blackburn and Darwen Business Leaders' Network, *The Hive*, which includes local employers, colleges and the BID. The BID manages the budget and leads on marketing and events in the town centre. In agreement with the Council, and in partnership with key partners like The Mall, King Georges Hall, Visit Blackburn, and Blackburn Market the aim is to raise the profile of the newly regenerated town centre and so drive footfall.

Through the recent place branding work led by the Blackburn with Darwen Hive, the BID has a commitment to working together with all interested parties (from public agencies to individual businesses) to utilise common visuals and adopt a positive common narrative as a means of generating a unified message.

## Blackburn BID's use of heritage in place branding

From the outset, the BID has used heritage as part of a calendar of vibrant events, including the development of the Blackburn Heritage Festival as a grass roots celebration linking to the national Heritage Open Days annual activities.

A place branding tool kit has been developed by Thinking Place, who worked with focus groups in the development phase. Attendees all had different stories to tell, but most could engage with and comment upon heritage. These individual contributions have been used to inform the development of the place brand.

Discussions which led to the development of the place brand focussed on Blackburn's incredible past and local residents' fierce pride in the town and its history. The new place branding which has been launched has a nod towards the town's manufacturing success and continuing expansion, specifically the town's cotton and

textiles industries and global industries now based in the borough. Making and manufacturing came out of the consultations as being a key part of Blackburn's heritage that the BID would like to develop into a narrative for the place brand.

## Benefits of heritage/place branding activities

The BID's Blackburn Heritage festivals have attracted large numbers of people into the town centre and led to further spin off events, such as Steam Sundays and vintage bus rallies. The impact has also helped to lever in additional funding (e.g. HLF grants). Further economic benefit has accrued through sponsorship.

In addition to the economic impact, the Blackburn BID has reported further benefits, such as positive engagement with heritage on social media. Heritage events have been staged at a time when intense redevelopment, demolition, and physical change had created some local concern. The heritage events provided a welcome complement to this and helped to develop a sense of civic pride.

## Challenges to heritage/place branding activities

The BID seeks to continue to develop the success of initiatives which celebrate local heritage and cultural assets. The 'Walk the Walk' guided walks for staff and visitors in the town centre are an example of this. However, Blackburn's cultural attractions such as the museum and art gallery, library and theatre and concert hall are financially-squeezed and currently lack the resources to open for as long as they would like to. Further cuts to funding for marketing, culture and leisure make this difficult. However, recent successful Heritage Lottery applications, such as the 'Gladstone's View' multi-million pound transformation of Northgate and the newly invigorated Cathedral Quarter, continue to breathe new life into old spaces and create new opportunities to showcase heritage and reflect both the aspirational messages of the place branding tool kit.



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