

Business Partnerships Report – January 27th, 2012

Section 1: Enterprise & Employment News

Unemployment figures

The number of claimants of Job Seekers' Allowance (JSA) in Blackpool has risen to its highest level in recent history.

December showed a month-on-month increase of just over 400 claimants pushing the unemployment rate to 7%, the highest in the North West region with Liverpool at 6.8% and Knowsley at 6.5%.

The number of JSA claimants in Blackpool stands at just over 6,000 – some 1,115 claimants higher than in December 2010.

Civil Service Review

Blackpool, Fylde & Wyre Economic Development Company (EDC) has undertaken a detailed review of the potential impact of Government spending cuts on the Fylde Coast.

The report outlines the knock-on effect of any cuts within the civil service and other public sector areas.

It also provides a detailed assessment of nine key civil service sites on the Fylde Coast which, collectively, employ more than 8,500 people.

The report sets out various actions including ongoing discussions with Government to limit the number of job losses in the area, and also the redevelopment of any potential surplus office accommodation to create new employment.

There has been some assurance from Government that in spite of any job cuts, Blackpool and the Fylde will remain an important cluster centre, particularly for the Department of Work & Pensions.

South Beach Job Creation

Blackpool Council has been successful in a bid to the Jobcentre Plus *Flexible Support Grant Fund* to undertake a small-scale employment project aiming to assist up to 100 unemployed residents in the South Beach area of Blackpool (Bloomfield and Waterloo wards).

The aim of the fund is to try and prevent out-of-work residents from becoming long-term unemployed. The funding will be matched by the Council to offer a package of advice, motivational training, employability skills, work experience and job search over a 12-week period.

Note: The January meeting will look at various initiatives that are underway to get people back into work in Blackpool.

Get Started!

The *Get Started* initiative assisted the creation of 105 new businesses employing 196 people across the Fylde Coast between April and December 2011.

Of these new businesses, 70 were set up in Blackpool, with 55 across the rest of Fylde and Wyre. North West Development Agency and Lancashire County Council funding for the Fylde Coast-wide initiative ended in December, but Blackpool's provision will continue with financial support from the Council.

It is encouraging to note that business advice, training and start up funding was taken up by 19 former Council staff made redundant due to Spending Review cuts, resulting in 15 new businesses formed in areas such as catering, pest control, youth & community training, early years consultancy, and ICT services.

Discussions are taking place within Lancashire as to whether a County-wide start up support scheme can be developed, utilising available European funds.

Enterprise Zone

The designation of the BAe Systems sites at Warton and Samlesbury as a Government-backed Enterprise Zone is likely to be finalised over the next few weeks.

The EZ status is intended to give an economic boost to the areas, where almost 1400 jobs are under threat.

Consultations with BAe staff at risk have been extended to explore ways of reducing the number of compulsory redundancies. It has been reported that up to 900 staff have opted to take voluntary redundancy or redeployment.

Economic Baseline Study

Cabinet members on Blackpool Council have been working on a series of economic priorities for the town following the economic baseline study carried out in the autumn of 2011.

These will be considered alongside those draft priorities set out by the Blackpool Business Leadership Group at its meeting last November with a view to establishing a shared economic action plan for Blackpool.

Section 2: Town Centre Economy

Central Business District

Further details have emerged about the new Sainsbury's food store development that will co-anchor the new Central Business District scheme (formerly known as Talbot Gateway).

The various planning approvals required to progress phase one of the forthcoming development have now been secured. These include refurbishment of the Talbot Road multi-storey car park, construction of the new Blackpool Council offices and the food store. The only outstanding approval relates to a further application from Sainsbury's for a petrol filling station.

Sainsbury's has stated publically that it hopes the £50m store development will provide "a catalyst for regeneration" in Blackpool.

The company estimates that over 400 full and part-time jobs will be created to staff the store which will be built over four floors with retail on the ground floor.

It will include a mezzanine floor including a cafe and staff facilities, and topped by two levels of car parking with the upper level being on the roof.

The new store will open 24 hours, apart from Sunday evenings, and restrictions are being put on delivery times to minimise disruption.

The supermarket, along with the construction of new council offices, the refurbishment of Talbot Road multi-storey car park, and the resurfacing of the Banks Street car park, make up phase one of the £220m new Central Business District.

It is hoped that further phases around North Station will be completed over a 13-year period.

Talbot Square Improvement Works

Works have commenced on a scheme that will significantly alter the Talbot Square area of the town centre.

The junction is currently dominated by traffic, with a large proportion of the area given over to road space.

Under the new arrangements, there will be much better facilities for pedestrians with traffic being moved to one side of the square and the creation of a much larger public space next to the Travelodge and Town Hall.

The improvements will be sufficiently flexible to allow for the longer-term ambition to connect the tramway from the Promenade to Blackpool North Station in future years.

NOTE: John Donnellon, Service Director (Built Environment) for Blackpool Council will attend the January 27th meeting to provide an update on various town centre projects including private sector involvement in future developments

Hounds Hill Sale

Houndshill Shopping Centre has been purchased by Blackstone and Catalyst Capital has been bought for £85m.

The centre was bought from a subsidiary of Modus Corovest (Blackpool), which was in administration.

Blackstone is already an investor in Blackpool through its investment in Hilton hotels and Merlin Entertainments.

One of the new owners' first tasks will be to assess the potential for future development phases of the shopping centre.

Shop closures

Blackpool Council is working with the Town Centre BID and the Blackpool, Fylde & Wyre Economic Development Company to mitigate the negative impact of vacant shop units.

A number of High Street chains including La Senza, Barratt's, Peacocks, Past Times and Hawkin's Bazaar have all called in administrators over the Christmas and New Year period, putting more units at risk in the Houndshill and town centre.

A joint working group is looking at various initiatives including improvement of key shop frontages, the possible consolidation of neighbouring empty units to create larger, more marketable units, and the use of decals to dress empty shop windows.

Discussions are also ongoing with various agents about the re-letting of high-profile units such as Curry's on the corner of Corporation Street and Church Street.

Vacancy rates are being monitored on a monthly basis.

Section 3: New Investment & Opportunities

Opening of Festival House



The first wedding has been staged at Festival House, Blackpool's new seafront wedding venue. Kelly Goudie and Simon Garrick (both from Blackpool) were chosen to become the first couple to use the new facility.

The wedding venue has two rooms; the main one is the Tower view room which caters for 50 guests, while the sea view room caters for smaller ceremonies for up to 14 people. The building also houses a tourist information centre and café/restaurant.

Meanwhile, the tendering process for the café/restaurant facility alongside the register office is now underway.

It was advertised in early January and an open day staged for interested parties on January 19th. The deadline for receipt of pre-qualification questionnaires (PQQs) is noon on Friday 27th January.

All of the submissions received at that stage will be assessed and scored with the six highest scoring being invited to tender.

It is hoped that the process will be concluded by March and that the café/restaurant will be open for business in time for the start of the school summer holidays.

Winter Gardens

The scaffolding inside the Winter Gardens has been removed following the completion of work on the Floral Hall.

Discussions are now underway with funders about the long-term potential for the various parts of the Winter Gardens complex and how they might fit with the overall Blackpool "offer".

Growing Places Fund

The Lancashire Enterprise Partnership (LEP) has received a paper on various projects that have been put forward to benefit from a £12.9m share of the Government's "Growing Places" fund.

The fund is designed to help kick-start housing and infrastructure development by covering up-front capital costs that are preventing projects getting off the ground.

At its December meeting, Mike Appleton, the chair of Blackpool, Fylde & Wyre Economic Development Company, was nominated by the LEP board to evaluate the various submissions (including one for the Hillhouse site at Thornton) to determine which should receive an allocation.

Tramway

Two more of Blackpool's new trams were delivered to the Starr Gate Depot during December.

Four of the 16-strong tram fleet ordered from Bombardier are now here, and brake and speed tests were successfully carried out during November.

One of the new trams has also made its maiden trip into Fleetwood.

Contractors BAM Nuttall are gearing up to finish the trackworks over the winter period in order to be complete by the end of March 2012.

Better Bus Fund

The Government has set in place another competitive bidding process – this time aimed at increasing bus patronage in busy urban areas and cutting carbon emissions.

The £50m Better Bus Area Fund will provide grants of up to £5m to a minimum of 10 local authorities working in partnership with local bus operators.

Blackpool Council has decided to submit a bid to the fund in partnership with Blackpool Transport Services.

It is proposed that the Blackpool bid will focus on bringing benefits to the town centre and tourism economies by:

- Installing bus priority traffic management controls to improve reliability of services
- Providing contra-flow bus lanes in certain areas to allow key services to bypass one-way systems, again increasing reliability and potentially increasing frequency
- Defining a town centre bus and tramway interchange
- Improving town centre bus accessibility and upgrading passenger facilities

Note: The bid will need to demonstrate significant private sector support, particularly for the economy-based proposals. I will be sending out a request to the business community over the next couple of weeks for expressions of support.

Section 4: Visitor Economy

Illuminations Switch-on Charge

Visitors will pay an entrance fee to attend the Illuminations switch-on ceremony in autumn 2012.

The change of strategy could also see the switch-on celebrity being paid for the first time in the Lights' history.

A total of 20,000 tickets will be sold for the switch-on event, with a further 3,000 free tickets being reserved for residents. The move is part of a broader plan to put the Illuminations on a stronger commercial footing.

The 2012 show – which marks the centenary of the Illuminations – is currently in the planning stage.

Return Of Strictly

The BBC has given a strong hint that Strictly Come Dancing will return to Blackpool later this year.

Following the huge success of the final – beamed live from the Tower Ballroom in December – the BBC said there was “no reason” why the show wouldn't be back.

Around 12 million viewers tuned into watch the show, which was broadcast in 3D for the first time in its history, with cinemas around the country hosting special showings for fans.

A number of businesses benefited from the event including the De Vere Hotel, which hosted a dinner for the celebrities and dancers ahead of the final; Toast which was chosen to provide outside catering for over 300 BBC personnel working in the Tower building; and The Big Blue which accommodated a large number of the celebrities.

Other hotels benefited from stay-over visits by members of the audience who travelled from all parts of the country to watch the live show.

Britain's Got Talent Launches In Blackpool



Ant and Dec took to the streets of Blackpool to launch the 2012 series of Britain's Got Talent.

The celebrity pair made their way along the new Promenade accompanied by various fancy dress characters and inflatable figures including the Royal Family.

The launch marked the start of auditions, which opened in Manchester before moving to the Opera House on January 24th.

A Taste Of Blackpool In London

An exhibition celebrating the renaissance of the Tower and the Winter Gardens is to be staged at the Wellington Arch in London. The exhibition will open at the start of July 2012 and run for two months. It promises to be a high-profile event and is the perfect opportunity to promote Blackpool in the capital during the Olympics.

York Collaboration

Blackpool Council's Built Heritage Service has helped negotiate a collaborative agreement between Blackpool and the City of York. The collaboration will see Blackpool advising on the Illuminating York festival in 2012 and York lending the Council its street markets team to advise on ways to build the markets programme for St John's Square.

Resort Pass

Discussions are underway to roll out the Blackpool Resort Pass in 2012. Partners include Pleasure Beach Resort (including Nickelodeon Land) and all of the Merlin attractions. Sandcastle Waterpark is also looking to participate on a trial basis.

Marketing Blackpool is working on a new digital communications strategy that will, in turn, be used to re-design the visitBlackpool website. This redesign will ensure that the new Resort Pass and resort map are accommodated within the site and that an appropriate online booking system is in place to handle sales.

Destination Guide

The new Blackpool Destination Guide has gone to print and is being distributed outside of Blackpool during January.

Distribution will run alongside a PR campaign encouraging downloads of the e-version of the guide.

Further marketing is being carried out via an e-blast to 1,000 Tourist Information Centres (TICs) in the UK to encourage them to request guides.

Meanwhile, a Comedy Carpet guide has now been produced and is available for sale via Blackpool's TIC.

Lobbying of Tourism Minister

There has been no formal response from the Tourism Minister, John Penrose, to the letter sent by the BBLG chairman, Howard Lewis, following the Minister's visit in November.

The letter set out a series of issues that were discussed during the visit and felt to be worthy of further discussion.

These included the possible designation of Blackpool as a Tourism Development Zone (with some of the same benefits as the new Enterprise Zones); consideration of a pilot scheme that would reduce VAT within the visitor economy and thus facilitate investment and job creation; and a commitment from the Conservative Party to staging conferences in Blackpool again.

Section 5: General Information

Selective Licensing

Blackpool Council has agreed to proceed with the introduction of a selective licensing scheme in the South Beach area.

The scheme, which will commence in March this year, will mean that all private rented properties in the area - around 750 in total - will require a licence.

In order to obtain a licence, property managers are required to meet a number of conditions designed to ensure that all properties are well managed.

A fee is payable that covers the whole five-year licence period, and is used to fund the licensing process, enforcement of licence conditions, and assistance for landlords to address anti-social behaviour by tenants.

Further selective licensing schemes in other areas of Blackpool are likely to be taken forward this year.

Food Hygiene Ratings

Following the successful launch of the first tranche of the Blackpool Food Hygiene Ratings scheme, Blackpool Council officers are now dealing with a wave of appeals and applications to be re-inspected.

The team is working with businesses to improve conditions and ratings, including one prominent town centre eating establishment that has gone from a rating of one to a top rating of five within a month.

GIVE A LITTLE APPEAL



On behalf of Blackpool Council, can I once again thank all those businesses that contributed in some way to the Give A Little Christmas appeal.

More than £50,000 of contributions were received in the form of cash, gifts and vouchers for attractions and events. Other people volunteered time to help wrap and distribute gifts.

As result, more than 1,000 children in Blackpool received presents. The gifts were distributed through Citizen's Advice

Bureaux, children's centres, social services, hostels, young carers and the credit union.

In addition, there was a large quantity of food received which was distributed through Street Life and Sure Start.

Discussions are underway as to how the appeal can be developed in future years.

Philip Welsh
Head of Partnerships & Business Development