



BLACKPOOL BUSINESS LEADERSHIP GROUP

Business Partnerships Report – March 27, 2015

Section 1: Visitor Economy

DESTINATION MANAGEMENT PLAN



A three-year place-making plan has been produced to continue the revitalisation of Blackpool.

The plan, Destination Blackpool, seeks to build on the substantial investment that has been made in Blackpool over the past decade.

It strives to create a place where visitors can enjoy an experience that matches their expectation of a modern resort destination.

A key outcome is to increase tourism numbers and target the high-spending visitors that other destinations enjoy without having Blackpool's range of attractions, and also change some of the deep-rooted negative perceptions of the town.

The plan charts the hundreds of millions of public sector investment in the promenade, tramway and in the acquisition of key leisure assets including the Tower and Winter Gardens, suggesting that this investment has provided a platform to change the resort's fortunes.

Destination Blackpool is underpinned by an aspirational 'City Life On The Beach' brand positioning aimed at changing negative views of Blackpool by creating a high-quality, year-round family destination that is capable of supporting a wider economic regeneration.

The report suggests that this can be best achieved by:

- Retention of the resort’s “golden core” comprising world-famous visitor assets and attractions, building on the positive perceptions of Blackpool as a place that evokes warmth, nostalgia and a strong emotional link to people’s family experiences.
- Gradual elimination of poor-quality, sub-standard accommodation and facilities, combined with a shift away from a low-budget stag and hen culture that reinforces some of the negative perceptions of Blackpool.
- Securing of a range of market-leading entertainment, attractions, branded hotels, restaurants and leisure facilities, and improved conference facilities. All of this to be complemented by greatly-enhanced customer service, a secure and clean environment, and effective, proactive marketing of the resort.

Note: Copies of the Destination Blackpool plan will be made available at the March 27 meeting of the Blackpool Business Leadership Group.

SWITCH-ON FESTIVAL

Blackpool’s Illuminations season will be launched with a spectacular three-day festival this year.

The annual Switch-On weekend will be rebranded as Blackpool iFest and will be produced in partnership with leading TV channels, including Sky Vintage music channel which will host the Saturday night event.

The festival will take place on the Tower Festival Headland on Friday 4, Saturday 5 and Sunday 6 September and will comprise three nights of high-quality entertainment.

Friday, the biggest night in the town’s calendar, will see chart-topping stars entertaining the crowd before the Blackpool Illuminations are switched on by a celebrity guest. This concert will be completely free with a proportion of tickets allocated for local residents.

Last year, 18,000 people enjoyed a star-studded night of entertainment featuring some of the most popular names in British music.

On Saturday, the arena will be taken over by Sky’s Vintage TV channel hosting a live concert with a raft of stars performing their chart-topping hits from the 80s.

For Sunday night, the focus will turn to comedy, with the first ever comedy gig to be held on the Tower Festival Headland.

Registration for Switch-On wristbands has now opened. Full details of the line-ups and ticketing details will be revealed over coming weeks. To register for updates regarding the weekend visit www.visitblackpool.com/switchon

TOURIST INFORMATION CENTRE

The VisitBlackpool Tourist Information Centre (TIC) at Festival House on the Tower Festival Headland is to be revamped internally to create a better experience for visitors. The TIC has seen dramatic growth in usage over the past two years, particularly in sales of tickets for shows and attractions in the resort. The work should be completed prior to the end of May Bank Holiday. The TIC has already benefited from improved signage on the outside of the building.

RETURN OF CATS



Andrew Lloyd Webber's record-breaking musical **CATS** is to return to Blackpool direct from its sell-out season at the London Palladium in the West End.

The hit show will run at the Blackpool Opera House for a strictly limited eight-week run from 9 July until 6 September. It will be the only place outside London where people will be able to see **CATS** this year.

CATS has a successful history in Blackpool. It first came to the Opera House in 1989 for an unprecedented six-month run. It then returned to wow audiences in 2003 as part of a national tour.

One of the longest-running shows in West End and Broadway history, **CATS** has been seen by more than 73 million people in 300 cities around the world.

A formal Press launch of the show will take place in Blackpool in mid-April when the celebrity who will perform the lead role will also be confirmed. Tickets, priced from £20, went on sale on March 13. Full details from www.wintergardensblackpool.co.uk

VISITOR PARKING PERMITS

A new hotel parking scheme has been established to help businesses in Blackpool and ease on-street parking problems. This coming season, hotels and guest houses will be entitled to offer their staying guests a new voucher-style pass called the Visitor Accommodation Permit at six different council car parks.

The permit is designed to ease on-street parking problems which often occur near hotels and assist hoteliers with helping their guests to park easily, conveniently and at a reasonable price.

Hoteliers will be able purchase passes from the council and fill them out with the name of their guest, the registration number of their guest's vehicle, the name of the car park and the dates and times of their stay. The guest will then be entitled to half price parking at the selected car parks – Lonsdale Road, Bloomfield Road, Banks Street, Gynn Square, South King Street and South* car parks – a rate of £5 per 24 hours.

Once the scheme is finalised, hoteliers will be contacted directly with details of how to purchase the passes.

PETER KAY PREMIERE



Comedian Peter Kay will be premiering his new BBC TV series, Car Share, at Blackpool Opera House on Saturday 28 March.

Car Share is Peter's first TV series for 11 years and all six episodes will be shown exclusively on the night, with a special introduction by Peter himself.

Proceeds from the night will go to Derian House Children's Hospice.

PIERS FOR SALE

Two of Blackpool's piers have been put up for sale. Owner Cuerden Leisure is selling Blackpool's South and Central Piers and the Grade II listed Llandudno Pier as it seeks to restructure its assets. Central Pier, which stands at 341m long (1,118ft), and South Pier, which is 150m (492ft), do not benefit from listed status, despite opening in 1864 and 1892 respectively. The guide price for Central Pier is £4.8m and £3.3m for South Pier.

NORTH PIER STRUCTURAL SURVEY

Blackpool Council is working with owners of North Pier to commission a major structural survey to help assess the damage caused by the storms of the last 18 months. The Council has agreed to commission a survey which will look at the pier's iron structure below the deck to understand the problems in harder to reach areas.

Blackpool Council has a legal obligation to monitor the condition of listed buildings in the town and the survey will allow the authority to show the pier's owners what work they need to carry out in order to protect the structure in the future.

North Pier is the oldest of architect Eugenius Birch's piers still standing and was the first to use the screw pile system for driving into shoreline sand and mud.

The Council will also be looking at a new funding pot announced by the Department of Communities and Local Government specifically aimed at seaside heritage assets. The Coastal Revival Fund is targeted at assets such as piers, lidos and outdoor pools and how they can be used to regenerate communities and economies in seaside locations.

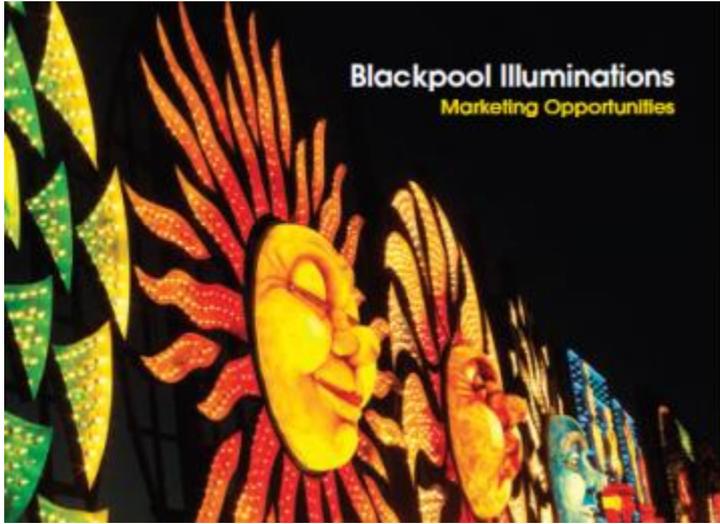
BEST WESTERN CARLTON

Starboard Hotels group has purchased the Best Western Carlton Hotel in Blackpool. It will now be renovated, creating new contemporary family rooms. Starboard owns, develops and operates various branded hotels across the UK including the Holiday Inn Express in Burnley.

TRIP ADVISOR LEAGUE TABLE

Blackpool has been named in the UK's ten best-rated destinations in the annual Travellers' Choice Awards run by TripAdvisor. The resort was placed sixth in the UK, ahead of Belfast, York and Glasgow. London headed the list and the two highest placed seaside destinations were Llandudno and Torquay. Blackpool is praised for the value of its hotel accommodation – with the average summer rate at just over £76, less than half the price of a comparable room in London.

BLACKPOOL ILLUMINATIONS SPONSORSHIP BROCHURE



A new brochure, designed to encourage businesses to support Blackpool's Illuminations, has been launched by the display's creative curator, Laurence Llewellyn-Bowen.

Laurence, who has been helping to design parts of the world famous display for many years, is a huge supporter of the resort.

He launched the new brochure at a business event staged in the new Theatre Bar in St John's Square and attended by more than 50 businesses including major national and multi-national firms.

Although the Illuminations will benefit from a £2m grant from the Coastal Communities Fund over the next two years, there is still an urgent requirement for private sector funding to sustain the annual lights show.

The brochure can be viewed online at www.visitblackpool.com/illuminationsopp

Any business wishing to discuss sponsorship and marketing opportunities should contact Jo Ashton at VisitBlackpool on 01253 478240 or email jo@visitblackpool.com

THE HOFF

Blackpool Opera House is to present the world premiere of the brand new musical *Last Night A DJ Saved My Life* starring David Hasselhoff.

The Hoff, as he is known to millions of fans across the world, will lead the cast in the show when it opens in Blackpool this October.

The world premiere is on Friday 16 October and it will then run from Saturday 17 to Saturday 31 October. Tickets are now on sale.



RESORT FILMING

Feature film "Away" starring Timothy Spall and Juno Temple is filming in resort until the end of March. Most of the production is being filmed in Blackpool although some of the filming that takes place will actually be shown as A N Other town when it appears on screen. The crew are filming at locations across Blackpool with the promenade and many attractions heavily involved.

TOWER LOUNGE

Plans are being developed to turn the Tower Lounge into a branded family restaurant. The proposal includes a complete renovation of the interior of the site together with some modifications to the exterior of the Tower building. The Tower Lounge closed as a bar at the end of the Illuminations.

SHOWZAM!

Blackpool was transformed into 'Circus Town' for five days of the very best of international circus and street performance during the February half-term.

More than 25,000 people saw performers from 11 countries taking to streets and stages throughout Blackpool Winter Gardens, The Blackpool Tower Ballroom, Circus and the town centre. The Tower Circus played host to South American circus troupe Circolombia who performed over six days to capacity crowds.

The economic impact of this year's festival, which was programmed by Left Coast in association with VisitBlackpool, is currently being evaluated.

HIGH ROPES ATTRACTION

Blackpool's new high ropes adventure course at Stanley Park is beginning to take shape.

JMA Adventure are currently building the 11-metre high structure on land next to Blackpool Sports Centre. The course is due to be completed in late April and will open soon afterwards once testing and training is complete.

The facility will include eight-metre and four-metre high ropes courses, a zip wire, rock climbing wall, swinging tyres and various obstacles.

Prices will start from £8 per person and a range of packages will be available, including:

- Team building and corporate packages for local businesses
- Curricular and extra-curricular activities for schools and colleges
- Skill development and team building packages for youth and community groups
- Birthday parties for younger and older people

The facility is suitable for anyone aged 5 years and up.

MICHAEL McINTYRE

Award-winning comedian Michael McIntyre is performing two shows at Blackpool Grand Theatre to showcase new material ahead of his Happy And Glorious arena tour later this year. He will play The Grand on June 24 and 25.

GLENN MILLER STORY

Blackpool Opera House has added another show to its 2015 season with the announcement that Tommy Steele is to take to the stage to narrate The Glenn Miller Story.

In this brand new production, Steele will tell the extraordinary story of the world's most famous big band leader accompanied by a live 16-piece orchestra and a full supporting company of singers, dancers and actors. The Glenn Miller Story runs at the Opera House from October 5–10.

WORLDHOST

Blackpool Tourism Academy is making excellent progress in rolling out the WorldHost international customer service standard across key attractions and smaller businesses in the resort.

The Academy is pioneering improved customer service standards, and four founding members have already secured WorldHost Business Recognition status (meaning they have trained at least 50% of front-line staff). They are: Sandcastle Waterpark, Blackpool Zoo, Blackpool Transport and the Winter Gardens.

More than 1,100 people are expected to have been trained in the standard by the end of March, on track to achieve the resort-wide destination status target of 2,500 people trained by the end of 2015.

J'AIME LA TOUR

A promotional video designed to promote Blackpool has been named as one of the most romantic adverts ever.

J'aime la Tour, first aired in 2011, which charts a French lady's love for Britain's most popular seaside resort, got hundreds of thousands of hits on Youtube as well international coverage for the town.



Now Marketing Magazine readers have declared the advert eighth in the list of the most romantic adverts, just behind the famous Milk Tray advert!

The full top 10 was as follows:

- | | |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. Rolo | 6. Nescafe Gold Blend |
| 2. John Lewis | 7. Milk Tray |
| 3. Google | 8. Blackpool |
| 4. Match.com | 9. De Beers |
| 5. Chanel No 5 Audrey Tatou | 10. Chanel No 5 (Classic) |

To watch the video, go to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6xgxkxqqUH0>

BLACKPOOL'S BACK

The 2015 Blackpool's Back destination marketing campaign is now being developed in readiness for the start of the new tourism season. The campaign will again incorporate TV advertising, digital media and PR campaigns, and media familiarisation visits.

Although the campaign for 2015 is being funded in the main by Blackpool Council and Merlin Entertainments, more private sector funding partners are being sought to ensure its continuation in future years.

A series of packages has been devised for accommodation businesses, venues and attractions, to enable them to capitalise on the marketing campaign. For further information contact Jo Ashton. Email jo@visitblackpool.com

DEEP POOL CARNIVAL!

Blackpool has been given a new name in Mandarin – Deep Pool Carnival!

VisitBritain ran a *Great Names for Great Britain* campaign in China, highlighting 101 points of interest across the UK and asking people to give them a Chinese name and then vote for the best.

Out of three possible naming suggestions chosen by the Chinese public, Blackpool has decided to adopt the new Mandarin name: Shen Chi Jia Nian Hua translated in English as Deep Pool Carnival. This name received 1300 votes.

Now that the winning names have been revealed, VisitBritain has been working together with all of these attractions to decide how they might use these results and the publicity that the campaign has generated.

Blackpool has growing cultural links with China, with the Comedy Carpet artwork replicated at the Shanghai Power Station of Art and through its worldwide reputation as the home of ballroom dancing.

China is now the world's largest outbound travel market, with visitors to Britain already spending £500million. VisitBritain has ambitious plans to double the value of that market by 2020 and to ensure that growth is spread across the regions.

MARTON MERE

Work has begun on a £740,000 project to revitalise the Marton Mere Nature Reserve in Blackpool. The improvements will include a new visitor centre, classrooms for school projects and an elevated bird hide.

The project, which is being funded by various bodies including the Heritage Lottery Fund and the Environment Agency, will help protect the reserve's ecosystems and make it more appealing and accessible.

Entrances will be upgraded and made more welcoming, and the footpath network will be refurbished and developed for wheelchair access.

The reserve is an area of Special Scientific Interest and is recognised for its plant, bird, and mammal life.

Section 2: Town Centre Economy

GRAND THEATRE WORK UNDERWAY

Improvement works at Blackpool Grand Theatre are now underway. The first phase of the programme will result in a new rehearsal space and a refurbishment of the dressing rooms. Future phases will see the development of office spaces and an improved foyer and box office facilities. The project, which will cost around £1m, has been aided by a £700,000 Arts Council grant.

CHARDONNAY OPENING

A new family-owned restaurant and café/bar has opened in St John's Square. Chardonnay Blackpool is on the Winter Gardens side of the square. It is being run by businessman Fraser Gillespie who was supported in the venture by the Council's Get Started team.

COASTAL COMMUNITIES TEAM

Blackpool has been chosen as one of 12 towns to pilot new Coastal Communities teams that will help regenerate the local economy.

The 12 coastal communities stretching from Penzance to North Tyneside have been invited to set up teams to drive forward their long-term plans to revitalise their area and make the most of its potential to create new businesses.

In the case of Blackpool, the team will comprise public, private and community groups, and will support delivery of the Coastal Communities funded Lightpool scheme that will help reinvent the Illuminations and support the retail sector.

Each of the pilot areas will be awarded £10,000 to kick-start their plans and will also be eligible to bid for a share of the new £3m Coastal Revival Fund to support or restore local heritage and facilities that benefit the community and its economy.

A provisional event was held in Blackpool on March 24 to gain expressions of interest from individuals, businesses and other organisations interested in joining the Coastal Communities Team.

It has already been agreed that the team will work closely with the Town Centre BID to ensure that the two groups complement each other.

Blackpool is the only coastal town in the North West to be granted pilot status.

WINTER GARDENS

Theatre Bar

A stunning art nouveau feature of the Winter Gardens, dating back to 1896, has been uncovered as part of work to re-open a bar within the complex.

The Theatre Bar, formerly known as Bar Red, has been closed for five years as part of the extensive refurbishment work taking place to the Winter Gardens building. It re-opened earlier this month.



As part of the work to open up that area of the Winter Gardens, nine ornate panels dating back to just before the turn of the 20th century have been revealed.

The tiled panels feature a range of ladies in costumes set in groups of two separated by a mirror. They are situated in an area of the Empress Buildings which was originally the vaulted entrance hall to the Empress Ballroom from Church Street.

The restoration of the bar and the panels is part of a wider programme to put back many of the Winter Gardens' original features which was set in motion after the building was brought back into public ownership.

Winter Gardens Building Survey

An £80,000 grant is to be used to get a clearer understanding of the Winter Gardens interior. The grant from English Heritage will help Blackpool Council understand more about the building, as well as pulling together more accurate drawings as to its condition/structure.

The building was purchased by the Council in 2010; since then it has been undergoing various repair and improvement works. Recent works have revealed interiors with historical significance that had been covered over.

The programme will complement work for the Stage Two bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund for the Blackpool Museum which is set to be housed in the former Pavilion Theatre.

RETAIL VACANCIES

An updated retail vacancy report has been produced for Blackpool town centre. It shows there has been a net decrease of two vacant units within the main town centre boundaries since November 2014, bringing the total to 115 and reducing the vacancy rate to 17.7%.

Over this same period the vacancy rate in the Principal Retail Core area has increased to 14.1%, whilst the rate in the Periphery Town Centre area has reduced to 24.2% (see chart below). This is largely due to the removal of a number of previously vacant units from the survey, which have recently undergone a change of use to residential. The units at the refurbished Talbot Road multi storey car park are yet to be partitioned and will be included once they are complete.

The newly vacant units include: Sox Box (Church Street); Sayers, The Cooperative Travel (Birley Street); Talbot Express (Talbot Road); Phone Clinic (Bank Hey Street); Baseline Creative Studio (Victoria Street); Vibe (Coronation Street); Shout and Phones 4 You (Houndshell).

Since November 2014 a number of businesses have occupied previously vacant units. These include: African Caribbean Supermarket (King Street); Chequers Gallery, London Accessories Company (Church Street); Achieve Legal Services (Edward Street); The German Sausage House (Cedar Square) and Perfect Nails (Houndshell).

Area	Total Units ¹	Total Vacant Units	Vacancy Rate
Principle Retail Core (Local Plan boundary based around Houndshell, Victoria Street, Bank Hey Street, Church Street, Corporation Street and Adelaide Street West)	163	23	14.1%
Core Retail Area (as above but also including Topping Street, Queen Street, Clifton Street, Birley Street, Market Street, Talbot Road, Abingdon Street and Cedar Square)	466	71	15.2%
Town Centre Boundary (as above but also including the Promenade, Springfield Road, Dickson Road, King Street, Cookson Street, Counce Street and the new Talbot Gateway area)	648	115	17.7%
Periphery Town Centre Area (the Town Centre Boundary area excluding the units contained within the Core Retail Area)	182	44	24.2%

Section 3: Enterprise & Economic Development

AIRPORT ENTERPRISE ZONE

The Chancellor of the Exchequer has given permission for Blackpool Airport to be awarded Enterprise Zone status. The airport was closed to commercial flights by owners Balfour Beatty last October.

The decision was formally announced by George Osborne during his Budget speech and follows an application by the Lancashire Enterprise Partnership, supported by the Blackpool, Fylde and Wyre Economic Development Company.

It is hoped the Enterprise Zone status, which will probably come into effect in early 2016, could support as many as 3,000 new jobs over more than two decades on the key employment site. The zone will be divided into two areas:

One will allow businesses to benefit from rate relief up to a maximum of £275,000 over a five-year period for new businesses locating before May 2018. This is subject to certain qualifying criteria.

The other will allow businesses to benefit from Enhanced Capital Allowances (ECA) for investment in fixed plant and machinery for businesses that take occupation by March 2020.

Where businesses are already located within the Enterprise Zone area, there is no automatic right to rates relief or ECA. However, it can be applied where a significant number of new jobs are being created or significant capital investment is taking place.

A programme board representing all key stakeholders including local councils, the airport owners, Lancashire Local Enterprise Partnership, BFWEDC and the landowners will be established.

That board will report to the Lancashire LEP which will have ultimate responsibility for the delivery of the project.

The airport runway will remain in place in full and there is clear stated intention from both Balfour Beatty and Blackpool Council to pursue commercial passenger flight opportunities.

CITYWING RESUME FLIGHTS

Citywing will be reinstating daily flights between Blackpool and the Isle of Man and Belfast from April 1.

The company suspended commercial flights following the closure of the airport last October, but have since been working with the owners to get them reinstated. There will be 14 return journeys each week, with the "Blackpool Hopper" prices starting from £23.95 each way to the Isle of Man, and from £54.95 each way to Belfast.

PA GENIE

A Blackpool graduate has started her own business to provide a service to other businesses that cannot afford to take on new permanent or part-time administrative staff.

Emma Hindley created PA Genie with the help of Blackpool Council's Get Started service. She has devised an off-the-shelf programme of flexible remote and in-person support which businesses can buy into.

The service offers support with everything from call handling and diary management to every day paperwork, travel booking, invoicing and telemarketing.

She is now looking to expand the concept into Preston and Wigan.

- Blackpool Council has helped almost 1000 people start their own businesses over the last seven years through the Get Started scheme.

COLLEGE PLAN FOR YEADON WAY

Blackpool Council is in talks with Blackpool and The Fylde College over the sale of part of South Car Park (off Yeadon Way) to facilitate the development of the new Lancashire Energy headquarters.

The plan to turn the Fylde Coast into a centre of excellence for training people to work in the energy sector was announced by the Energy Secretary last year.

The proposed new campus would serve as the hub for all forms of energy-related training, supporting the energy industry as it seeks to make the transition from fossil fuels to renewable and low-carbon energy sources.

If the sale of part of South Car Park does go ahead, the Council will retain some parking space to the north and south of the proposed college site.

Section 4: General News

ROAD CLOSURES

Yeadon Way

The extensive programme of repairs on Yeadon Way is expected to be completed by 27 March - on time and ahead of the Easter holidays. Contractors Galliford Try have been working on the project throughout the winter with a view to re-opening the road before the start of the first Bank Holiday weekend of 2015.

United Utilities Project

A major project to refurbish 17km of water pipe that serves around 50,000 homes and businesses across Blackpool is likely to cause disruption across town over the next few months.

The roadworks commenced in early March and will continue over an eight month period. The intention is to complete the town centre part of the work first to ensure that there is no disruption during the main tourist season.

This first phase includes work along Central Drive, Adelaide Street, Alfred Street and Topping Street. Work will then move south towards Rigby Road and north along Dickson Road with a view to completing this phase before the Illuminations begin.

For full details of the works and how they affect different areas of Blackpool, go to: <http://www.unitedutilities.com/cleaner-water-for-Blackpool.aspx>

FUNDING FOR BRIDGE REPAIRS

Blackpool Council has been awarded more than £5.5m to help finance the repair and/or reconstruction of 10 strategic bridges across Blackpool. The funding was announced by Government as part of a £275m roads maintenance pot for the UK.

Eight of the bridges were originally constructed to enable railways into Blackpool.

The bridges are located throughout the town, either under or over live rail lines; on strategic north/south routes; on roads linking the M55 motorway with the town's major car and coach parks; and on local distributor roads feeding traffic from the M55 to the Promenade and resort visitor attractions.

The 10 bridges include Plymouth Road, Devonshire Road, Chapel Street, Princess Street, Rigby Road, Waterloo Road, Watson Road, Harrowside, Squires Gate and the former Gas Works subway.

The entire programme will cost over £11m. A separate bid of £4.23m has been made to the Lancashire Enterprise Partnership with a further £1.5m to be contributed locally.

A programme of works has been created, with on-site works planned to commence from approximately October 2015 continuing through to December 2019.

FESTIVAL PARK

The Festival Leisure Park off Rigby Road in Blackpool has been acquired by investors Valad Europe. They bought the site, which accommodates various national retailers including McDonald's, Spirit Pub Company, Odeon Cinemas and Frankie and Benny's, from Scottish Windows Investment Partnership for £12.5m. Valad say they are already looking to introduce new food and beverage outlets at the park.

BIBAS 2015

The annual BIBAs (Be Inspired Business Awards) ceremony will again be staged in Blackpool. It will be held at the Tower Ballroom on the evening of Friday 11 September. Businesses wishing to enter the awards can still do so – the deadline for entries is April 10.

Full details of the various categories can be viewed at www.thebibas.co.uk. The BBLG will again be supporting the event as the awards evening attracts more than 1,000 people into the resort.

CENTRAL POLICE STATION

Lancashire Constabulary has identified Progress House, the former Blackpool Council office building, as a potential new HQ.

The office complex, next to Tesco on Clifton Road, was declared surplus to requirements following the opening of the new Blackpool Council offices opposite North Station. The buildings have subsequently been demolished.

Lancashire Constabulary are intending to develop the site as one of their main operational centres.

In turn, the Council is now negotiating over the possible purchase of the current Blackpool police HQ at New Bonny Street. Purchase of that site would remove one of the key barriers to the future development of the entire Central Station site for leisure facilities.

SEA WALL TAKES SHAPE

The first section of a new £22m seawall on the Fylde Coast is taking shape. The sea defence work at Anchorsholme will provide enhanced flood protection to 4,500 homes.

The new 1km seawall stretches from Little Bispham to Kingsway and is being developed thanks to funding from the Environment Agency and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

More details on the project are available at www.fyldecoastalprogramme.co.uk

FACELIFT FOR BUS FLEET

Buses in Blackpool are set to be greener and more efficient, thanks to a £500,000 funding award by the Department of Transport.

Blackpool Council made a bid to the Government's Clean Vehicle Technology Fund in partnership with Blackpool Transport Services to make a number of the resort's buses more environmentally friendly.

The project will see selected older buses, mainly double-deckers, fitted with cutting edge technology designed to reduce emissions and save fuel.

ELECTRIC TAXI FLEET

A new fleet of electric Nissan LEAF taxis has gone into service in Blackpool. It has been introduced by Premier Cabs and will operate across the Fylde Coast. The company expects to replace more of its 170-strong fleet in the months ahead.

Each vehicle will cover up to 55,000 miles a year and will be supported by a dedicated network of five rapid chargers that can charge the vehicles from zero to 80% within half an hour.

With running costs of just two pence per mile, the LEAFs will allow Premier Cabs to reduce its biggest single expense – fuel. The savings will be passed on to the drivers who will be between £80 and £120 a week better off. This will, in turn, allow the company to tackle one of its biggest challenges – driver recruitment.

HOUSING ISSUES

Council Housing Company

Blackpool Council is to establish a wholly-owned housing company to address the market failure issues that are blighting the town and its economy.

It is envisaged that the company will enable a more proactive approach to addressing issues of transience and poor quality private rented accommodation across Blackpool.

Despite the steps the Council has already taken through its transience programme and other initiatives, the inner core of Blackpool still has 3,000 Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) and a ready supply of struggling guesthouses for which the next most economically viable step is to enter the private rented sector at the bottom end of the market.

In the recent Growth Deal announcement for Lancashire, provision was made for the Council to develop a proposal for housing market intervention and possibly attract Government funding to assist. In order to do this the Council must create a company along with a business case that satisfies the Treasury. The company will aim to:

- Seek to change the private rented market in Blackpool and increase the supply of good quality housing
- Operate commercially to produce a revenue return that requires little or no Council subsidy over time and is ultimately economically attractive to private sector institutional investors
- Provide supportive management of tenants to ensure they can maintain a tenancy and reduce their need for public sector support over time
- Secure increased and higher quality private sector investment to accelerate the diversification of the town's housing supply
- Enable the delivery of future public and private sector housing development programmes such as Queens Park and Foxhall Village
- Provide a solution for dealing with empty properties
- Create and encourage apprenticeships, training and local employment opportunities through all development initiatives.

Benefit Scheme Rejected

The Government has rejected Blackpool Council's request to be allowed to withhold housing benefit by 30% to landlords renting out poor quality housing. The Council had been in negotiations with Treasury officials to try to get powers to enable it to dock housing benefit for landlords who provide substandard accommodation to tenants.

Housing benefit or local housing allowance (LHA) is sometimes paid directly to private landlords by the Department for Work and Pensions or indirectly through the local authority.

Local authorities cannot determine the LHA rate, but Blackpool put forward a case to gain control over determining the rates on the basis that by reducing a bad landlord's LHA payment by 30%, they would be incentivised to make improvements to their property.

New Homes

The first residents have moved into new housing developments at Foxhall Village and Queens Park.

The first 56 homes on the Queens Park development will be completed by the end of March and it is now possible to see the quality of the homes and the neighbourhood being created.

Plans to complete the redevelopment of the rest of the estate have also been approved and demolition of the remaining tower blocks will start in the spring. This will create a total of 190 new Council houses when the development is finished.

The Foxhall Village development (close to Blackpool Football Club) is also now visibly progressing well. The first 70 homes will be completed by the end of March and the next 50 are already starting to be built.

The developers, Hollinwood Homes, are reporting a strong demand for sales from potential owner-occupiers. This development will create 410 new homes once it is fully developed.

RAIL SERVICES

First TransPennine Contract Extension

First TransPennine Express is to continue operating services across the north of England for another year until April 2016 when three businesses will vie to run the next franchise.

The competition to appoint the next operators for both the TransPennine Express and Northern franchises is currently underway. The bidders are First TransPennine Express, Keolis Go-Ahead and Stagecoach TransPennine Express.

The one-year franchise extension will ensure continuity of services before the new franchise starts in 2016.

Summer Disruption

There is likely to be disruption to rail services in the North West over an extended period that includes the whole of the summer and part of the Illuminations season.

Network Rail has indicated that work on Farnworth Tunnel will take place between May 2 and October 4 to facilitate electrification of the Preston/Bolton/Manchester route.

This will mean that only a single line will remain open on the track, Monday to Friday, reducing the number of Northern Rail and First TransPennine Express services that can run on the route between Preston, Bolton and Manchester. There will also be changes to services at weekends when journeys between Manchester Airport and Blackpool will be diverted via Wigan.

We are awaiting further information from both Northern Rail and TransPennine as to how this might affect rail services connecting to Blackpool and will report back as soon as this information is available.

AFC FYLDE DEVELOPMENT

Work is progressing on a new £18m football stadium and retail park development just off the M55 motorway. The Mill Farm project at Wesham includes a 6,000-seater stadium for AFC Fylde, together with an Aldi supermarket, pub, petrol station and other retail units.

BLACKPOOL TV LICENCE

A Southern-based TV operator has taken a controlling stake in the local TV licence for Blackpool and Preston.

The 12-year licence was originally won by YourTV in February 2013 with plans to launch by the end of that year. As it has not launched within the two-year timeframe given to successful bidders, a new agreement has been reached with That's TV, a Portsmouth-based local TV operator that runs several licences in the south of England.

The move will see YourTV Blackpool and Preston rebranded as That's Lancashire, with a launch now scheduled for June. YourTV will retain a small shareholding in the new channel and will also remain the official licence-holder.

The new station is due to launch on Freeview Channel 8 with a varied schedule of news, sport, lifestyle, entertainment and discussion.

CALL FOR BAN ON LEGAL HIGHS



Blackpool Council has called on businesses to stop selling dangerous “legal highs” which put adults and children at risk.

A whole range of products, purporting to be “legal highs”, have been brought on to the market in recent years and are sold in some shops in the resort and throughout the country.

While the packets often say “not for human consumption”, they are often marketed as “legal highs” and a number of deaths have been linked to them.

Workers from local drug services say they already encountering people with addictions and say many of them can cause severe depression as well as vomiting, foaming at the mouth and heart failure.

Many of those taking legal highs are vulnerable individuals with existing addictions to other substances but children have also been found to have experimented with the drugs.

After an estimated 15 people under the age of 16 were admitted to hospital in the resort having taken so-called “legal highs” in the last year, Blackpool Council is acting to try to prevent sales using new powers recently introduced by the Government.

Having written to shops and warned them to stop selling psychoactive substances because of their damaging effect on people the Council has now issued Community Protection Notices (CPNs) to shops. This prohibits them from selling psychoactive substances. Shops that ignore the notices run the risk of prosecution.

INSULATION DEAL

Blackpool residents could save thousands of pounds on their energy bills and protect themselves against rogue traders thanks to a new deal between Blackpool Council and the private sector.

Although thousands of people in Blackpool are eligible for Government grants to upgrade their home insulation measures and heating through the Government's Energy Company Obligation, many are reluctant to take up the deal because it seems too good to be true.

In order to reassure residents and ensure Blackpool gets the best possible service, Blackpool Council, along with other Lancashire councils, has set up Cosy Homes in Lancashire.

This voluntary code of conduct means that all the companies who have signed up – the vast majority of the suppliers in the market in Blackpool – have agreed not to carry out any practices that are frowned upon such as doorstep selling. It also ensures they will comply with planning regulations.

SOLICITORS' FIRM EXPANDS

A Blackpool legal firm is expanding. Ascroft Whiteside, which is based on Whitegate Drive, has opened a second office on Highfield Road with plans to take on additional staff. The firm, which employs 15 staff, is one of the oldest in Blackpool having been founded in 1876.

Section 5: Requests for private sector support

ILLUMINATIONS BANQUET & BALL

The Friends of The Illuminations are hosting a banquet and ball at Viva Blackpool on Friday 17 April supported by the Blackpool Combined Association. Proceeds will go to the Blackpool Illuminations fund. Tickets are available, price £25, from either shirley.hunt1@btopenworld.com, Clare Taylor on clare@duxburyscommercial.co.uk, or Jill on illuminations.admin@blackpool.gov.uk or for enquiries call 01253 476406.

BUSINESS IN THE COMMUNITY EVENT

Business In The Community (BITC), one of the Prince of Wales' charities, is leading a programme to help recruit trustees to charities across Blackpool, Wyre and Fylde.

BITC is working with the Blackpool Volunteer Centre and CVS (Council for Voluntary Service) to support many charities who have trustee vacancies and would really appreciate help from skilled business people.

Ian Fogg, the BITC Place Coordinator for Blackpool, is holding an information session on Tuesday 31st March at 5.30pm at the CVS office in Blackpool for individuals interested in volunteering.

To find out more or to book in, contact Ian on 07917 270561 or by email to ian.fogg@bitconnect.org

VACANCIES FOR BOARD MEMBERS

Private sector representation is being sought for the boards of two of Blackpool Council's "arms-length" companies.

There is a vacancy for one independent board member for **Blackpool Coastal Housing** (BCH), which is the largest single landlord in Blackpool, responsible for approximately 5,500 properties rented to local people.

The management team of the Chief Executive and two directors report to a board of 12 who hold responsibility for the running and performance of the organisation. The board members are made up of four Councillor nominees, four tenant and four independents with the latter category aiming to be a mix of specialist housing and commercial skills.

Board members serve for a three year period up to a maximum of nine years with any vacancies being the subject of an election at the AGM. The company has a single shareholder which is the Council. There are six board meetings each year.

The board is now seeking an independent member with a passion for Blackpool and with a desire to see its residents prosper. Anyone interested should contact the Chief Executive, John Donnellon. Email: john.donnellon@bch.co.uk

There are also two vacancies for independent private sector board members on the **Blackpool Entertainment Company Ltd**, which has been set up to oversee the Winter Gardens.

The Winter Gardens complex was acquired by Blackpool Council in April 2010 along with Blackpool Tower and a number of buildings on the Golden Mile, and has since seen significant investment including the reintroduction of the summer season in the Opera House and plans to build a Museum for Blackpool in the Pavilion Theatre.

The current Board is made up of Councillors and independent persons with an independent chairman and three councillors appointed. The Board is seeking two private sector board members who are impartial, have no conflict of interest and have an interest in ensuring that the Winter Gardens plays an important role in the revitalisation of Blackpool's cultural and tourism offer.

It is anticipated that board members will be required to attend three to four meetings per year.

Anyone interested in applying should contact Alan Cavill. Email: alan.cavill@blackpool.gov.uk

Philip Welsh
Head of Visitor Economy