

**Business Partnerships Report – July 27<sup>th</sup>, 2012**

**Section 1: Town Centre Economy**

**CENTRAL BUSINESS DISTRICT**

Demolition work is now underway in the north area of Blackpool town centre as the new £220m Central Business District scheme progresses.

The work is the first step towards the transformation of a neglected and under-utilised area of the town into a more attractive gateway, providing a potential catalyst for further investment.

This phase of work involves the clearing of the site at the junction of Cookson Street and Talbot Road to make way for new Blackpool Council offices. It will result in the demolition of the former Tache nightclub, a carpet shop, car sales showroom and other adjoining properties.

Work on the new Council offices is due to start in October and finish in the spring of 2014.

The overall scheme is being developed by Muse Developments in partnership with Blackpool Council. Four sections have been granted planning permission:

- Refurbishment of the Talbot Road multi-storey car park, creating new retail space
- Development of a new office building for both public and private use.
- A flagship 60,000 sq ft Sainsbury's superstore, along with a 600-space car park at the top of the building.
- New petrol filling station

Blackpool Council is negotiating the potential purchase of the Wilkinson's building, which could form an important part of the wider Central Business District scheme.

**TOWN TEAM SET UP**

A "Town Team" has been established to help develop and deliver strategic plans for Blackpool town centre.

The team has been set up in response to recommendations contained within the Government's Portas Review on the future of the High Street.

The private sector-led group includes a range of businesses including Catalyst Capital (new owners of the Hounds Hill); Muse (developers of the Central Business District scheme); Town Centre Securities (owners of the newly-refurbished Abingdon Street Market) as well as a range of national and independent retailers, and representatives from Blackpool Council, Marketing Blackpool and the existing town centre BID.

The team is already looking at ways to bring in further investment into the town centre that will stimulate footfall and boost the retail and early evening economy.

Ilan Goodman from Catalyst Capital has been appointed chair of the group, which will also explore potential funding bids to assist town centre development.

### **HOUNDSHILL: NEW OPENINGS**

Catalyst Capital, the new owner of the Houndshill Shopping Centre, has announced a £1.5m refurbishment of the car park.

The work will take place in two phases and is expected to be completed by spring 2013. Disruption will be kept to a minimum and the centre will remain open throughout.

Phase one, which will be focused on repairing cracked concrete, is due to be completed before the start of the Christmas trading period.

Phase two will include improvements to lighting, decoration and security.

Meanwhile, Catalyst has announced the opening of six new stores within the Houndshill: **Trespass, Duffer, Vision Express, Red Dress, Millie's Cookies** and **The Fragrance Shop**.

### **ABINGDON ST MARKET**

Property investor and developer Town Centre Securities has completed the refurbishment of the Abingdon Street Market in Blackpool.

The work was funded with the help of a grant from the Townscape Heritage Initiative through Blackpool Council and the Heritage Lottery Fund. It included restoring the mock Tudor main frontage with its half timbering and creating new shop fronts.

### **PORTAS PILOTS (provide update on Round 2)**

Two town centres in the North West were among 12 locations across the UK to secure a share of £1.2m of Government funding to revitalise their high streets.

Nelson and Stockport were both selected as Portas Pilots and will receive a share of the funding. The winning towns will also receive a tailored support package from the Government and retail specialist Mary Portas.

Nelson plans to attract local students with a young persons' café, sports activities and a new art and vintage market.

Stockport won its share of the money after submitting plans to tap into the character and potential of the Markets and Underbanks area with a creative arts complex, outdoor screenings, new parking and street champions.

The Government said there had been more than 370 applications to receive funding as part of the scheme. A further 12 pilots are set to be announced by the end of July.

Blackpool has not submitted bids to either of the first two rounds, although a sum of £100,000 has been received via the High Street Innovation fund (see below).

## **HIGH STREET INNOVATION FUND**

A range of initiatives is being explored following the award of £100k to Blackpool Council via the High Street Innovation Fund. The Town Team and Town Centre BID have already put forward a number of proposals including:

- The provision of high-quality VMS (variable messaging signs) on key approach roads to the town centre giving information on parking, events and diversions/delays
- Subsidised parking schemes at off peak periods to stimulate footfall, particularly for the benefit of the early evening economy
- Purchase of high-quality outdoor market stalls that would facilitate a co-ordinated programme of Christmas and Continental food markets in the St Johns Square area

These proposals will be given further consideration in the autumn. If any other businesses have any views on how the fund might be used for the benefit of the town centre please email [philip.welsh@blackpool.gov.uk](mailto:philip.welsh@blackpool.gov.uk) in the first instance.

## **CURRY'S STORE LET**

The former Curry's unit on Church Street, Blackpool, has been let to a DVD and music retailer following an £80,000 refurbishment of the building.



Entertainment retailer That's Entertainment, which is one of the UK's fastest-growing retailers of music, DVDs and console games, has taken a lease on all three floors of the property, which is owned by Lancashire County Pension Fund.

## **CULTURE SHOPS PROGRAMME**

A final report has revealed the impact of the "Culture Shops" programme that ran in Blackpool town centre over the last two years.

Using funding from the Department for Communities & Local Government and the Arts Council, the programme was intended to encourage use of vacant shop premises for creative activity.

The programme provided local and regional artists with high-profile locations in which to display their work and improved the appearance of individual shops. It resulted in:

- Funding provided for 28 artists, two arts collectives and seven community groups to develop 33 new commissions for public display in empty shops
- Seven locations across town being used to display artworks, including two large properties on Church Street. Five of the seven premises that were used have since been brought back into use on a commercial basis.

As a result of the programme, the Houndshell has been hosting artists' workshops and temporary artwork displays in some of its empty premises, and Crown Entertainments has approached artists to display work in empty windows.

The Supercollider Contemporary Arts Project is now developing an artists' space in an empty unit on Cookson Street and aims to establish a town centre exhibition space for contemporary art exhibitions and installations this summer.

### **VIVA INVITATION**

Members of the Blackpool Business Leadership Group are invited to a VIP preview evening to mark the opening of the new town centre show and events venue, VIVA.

The event will take place at the Church Street venue from 7pm onwards on **Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> August**. Any group members wishing to attend should call 01253 297 297 or email [info@vivablackpool.com](mailto:info@vivablackpool.com)

## Section 2: Enterprise & Funding Opportunities

### **BLACKPOOL TOURISM ACADEMY**

A decision on a £1m bid to develop a "Tourism Academy" for Blackpool is expected over the summer.

A consortium of businesses including Pleasure Beach, Merlin, Sandcastle, Zoo, Crown Leisure and Blackpool Transport has put forward the bid to the Employer Ownership of Skills fund to develop skills within Blackpool's visitor economy.

John Hayes, Minister of State for Further Education, Skills and Lifelong Learning has acknowledged the £1m bid in a letter to Paul Maynard MP, saying that he is "delighted" that the private sector in Blackpool has expressed interest in the skills initiative. Mr Hayes will oversee the appraisal and selection of successful bids during the summer.

Gordon Marsden, MP for Blackpool South, is also lobbying Ministers on behalf of the consortium.

### **THE ORACLE**

Blackpool's new youth enterprise hub, originally called Southpoint, has been re-named as The Oracle.



The name for the youth facility, situated next to Palatine Sports College, was decided by young people as part of a competition open to 11 to 24-year-olds.

The winning entry was made by a pupil from Highfield Humanities College.

Young people have been involved in the design and usage of the building, and 23-year-old Nathan Erskine, has been appointed to run the centre.

The building, to be officially opened in the autumn, has already been used for a range of events including the launch of the Chance2Shine jobs initiative (see below).

The development of The Oracle was supported from its inception by the Blackpool Business Leadership Group. We are hoping to stage a future meeting of the BBLG at the centre to give businesses an opportunity to see the facility at first hand.

## **CHANCE2SHINE LAUNCH**

A new initiative has been launched to help young people in Blackpool and the Fylde Coast get into paid employment.

Chance2Shine is a partnership between Blackpool Council and Blackpool & the Fylde College, aimed at making it easier for employers to hire 16 to 24-year-olds and give them their first step on the jobs ladder.

Various employers from around the Fylde Coast attended a launch event at the new Oracle youth enterprise hub on St Annes Road, Blackpool, to find out how they can get involved with the scheme and benefit from some of the financial incentives that are available to support the recruitment of people from this age group.

A wide range of public, private and voluntary sector employees have already expressed an interest in taking up the scheme and recruiting more local young people.

Blackpool Parks Ltd and Sandcastle Waterparks were some of the first companies to get involved with the Chance2Shine initiative.

**Note:** Natalie Guerin from the Chance2Shine initiative will be attending the Blackpool Business Leadership Group meeting on Friday 27<sup>th</sup> July and will be available to discuss Chance2Shine immediately after the meeting.

Any businesses not attending the meeting, but interested in finding out how the 'Chance2Shine' initiative can help them recruit young people can contact 477326 or email [chance2shine@blackpool.gov.uk](mailto:chance2shine@blackpool.gov.uk).

## **START UP SUPPORT**

Blackpool Council is now delivering direct support and advice to new-start businesses, employing a full-time qualified Small Business Advisor, Geoff Reeves.

Geoff, formerly of the Prince's Trust, has been advising new-start businesses in Blackpool for over five years.

Customers are offered a mixture of one-to-one advice and workshops, and it is hoped the service can be expanded further later in the year subject to European Funding becoming available.

Introductory half-day "Road To Enterprise" courses take place every fortnight at FYCreatives centre on Church Street. All new-start businesses are asked to attend this before accessing one-to-one advice. The service is exclusive to Blackpool residents at present - contact (01253) 477147 and ask for Get Started.

## **COASTAL COMMUNITIES FUND**

A £1.2m funding bid by the South Beach Partnership has reached the second stage of the Coastal Communities bidding competition.

The Groundwork organisation submitted an application on behalf of the consortium of private, public and third sector partners who want to create a more sustainable economic future for the South Beach area of Blackpool.

Central to the partnership are the South Beach Business Forum, Chamber of Commerce and Federation of Small Businesses.

The bid estimates the creation of over 200 jobs through a range of activities including use of key public assets such as the new Oracle youth enterprise hub; targeted job creation in the hospitality, retail and cultural sectors; and improvements to the physical environment in and around South Beach.

A more detailed proposal is now being drawn up to meet the September deadline. Successful bids are likely to be announced by the end of this year.

### **GROWTH ACCELERATOR PROGRAMME**

A new subsidised service to help ambitious businesses achieve rapid and sustainable growth has been launched.

Growth Accelerator, a partnership between private sector and Government, offers a complete package of support including:

- Bespoke business development coaching
- Access to finance
- Help to innovate
- Access to leadership and management funding for training

Eligible companies must have fewer than 250 employees, a turnover of less than £40m and to be registered as a limited company in England.

For further information visit [www.growthaccelerator.com](http://www.growthaccelerator.com) or you can speak directly to Jane Law who will be available to speak to businesses before and after the BBLG meeting at The Winter Gardens on July 27<sup>th</sup>.

## Section 3: Visitor Economy

### **BATHING WATERS**

A selection of representatives from Blackpool Business Leadership Group has been invited to contribute to discussions over the improvement of Blackpool's bathing waters.

It is felt that some of the businesses along the Promenade can play an influential role in helping the resort to improve bathing water standards.

They will meet with representatives from Blackpool Council, the Environment Agency and United Utilities at a consultation meeting planned for Thursday 30<sup>th</sup> August.

The group will feed into the newly-formed Fylde Peninsula Water Management Group, a partnership between Blackpool, Fylde, Wyre and Lancashire Councils, the Environment Agency, United Utilities and Keep Britain Tidy that has been set up to look at a range of initiatives that will improve bathing water quality.

The Fylde peninsula stretches from Lytham St Annes to Fleetwood, and includes eight bathing waters, half of them at risk of failing to meet the requirements of the revised Bathing Water Directive.

Any business interested in attending the August 30<sup>th</sup> meeting should contact [philip.welsh@blackpool.gov.uk](mailto:philip.welsh@blackpool.gov.uk)

## **BLACKPOOL ZOO INVESTMENT**

Blackpool Zoo has continued its rolling programme of investment with a £500k development of Wolf Ridge – a new enclosure built in a wooded area of the park near East Park Drive.

The enclosure, which houses a pack of four Iberian wolves, seeks to re-create the animals' natural habitat. A large, covered viewing platform enables visitors to view all of the outside area.

## **OPEN GOLF NUMBERS**

A total of 181,300 spectators attended the Open Golf championships at Royal Lytham this year – beating the 178,000 recorded the last time the championships were staged here in 2001.

## **OMNIBUS SURVEY**

Blackpool attracted almost 3.5m visits in the first four months of this year – with over 40% of them including an overnight stay.

The latest Omnibus survey, which tracked visitor numbers between January and April, also recorded a record high satisfaction rating – with 93% of visitors happy with their visit to the resort compared with 89% in the same period in 2011 and 84% in 2010.

April, which included the Easter holiday, was the strongest month with 1.1m visits, followed by March at 980,000 visits. February, which included the February half term and annual Showzam! Festival, recorded just over 630,000 visits.

The single most important reasons for visiting the resort between January and April were:

- Coastal location including beach and seafront (20% of all respondents)
- Pleasure Beach Resort (14%)
- Entertainment/nightlife (12%)
- Retail and shopping offer (15%)

The headline visitor number of 3.45m visits is roughly in line with the number of visits recorded over the same period last year.

The Omnibus survey is carried out at over 4,000 households across Britain. Results are recorded for Blackpool over three periods – January to April, May to August and September to December.

## **STANLEY PARK BOAT LAUNCH**

A flotilla of 32 electric boats has been launched on Stanley Park Lake, replacing the current stock of rowing boats and motorboats which have been used on the lake since the 1960s.

## Section 4: General Information

### FESTIVAL HOUSE ACCOLADE



Festival House has been named as one of Britain's 50 best new buildings by RIBA (the Royal Institute of British Architects).

Festival House, which sits alongside the Tower Festival Headland, is the home of Blackpool's Tourist Information Centre and the town's Register Office.

Just three buildings were chosen from the North West region to be named amongst the best in Britain for architectural excellence. Two of those were in Lancashire – Blackpool Council's Festival House on the Festival Headland and the Brockholes Visitor Centre at Samlesbury, Preston.

The architects for Festival House were dRMM; the building contractors were Parkinson's of Blackpool and the project was managed by Blackpool Council's Capital Projects Team.

Meanwhile, more people are choosing to say "I do" beside the seaside. Since Festival House officially opened last December, the number of people booking to get married in the resort has increased.

Since the first wedding took place in January, Festival House has welcomed couples from across the UK.

- The lease for the new seafront restaurant/café facility adjacent to Festival House has been awarded to Blackpool Parks Ltd. Fit-out work on the building is now underway and it is hoped the restaurant will be operational before the end of August.

### **GROWTH IN TRAM USAGE (June performance - 235,209)**

Blackpool's new £100m tram service is now running every 10 minutes during peak times.

Blackpool Transport Services say passenger numbers have exceeded expectations since the Bombardier trams were introduced in April.

A total of 190,000 passengers used the tramway during the May trading period – growth of 20% over the April period.

## BLACKPOOL LIGHTS UP LONDON



Blackpool Council's Illuminations Manager Richard Ryan has overseen the installation of two spectacular illuminated crowns on the top of Wellington Arch in London.

The Arch is hosting a new English Heritage exhibition – Blackpool: Wonderland Of The World – which celebrates the heritage, history and glamour of Blackpool.

The exhibition, which focuses on two of Blackpool's most enduring venues – The Tower and the Winter Gardens – opened to the public on July 4 and will run until August 27.

The illuminated crowns have been specially commissioned for the exhibition, bringing a touch of Blackpool to London as it hosts the Olympic Games. Built at the Council's Lightworks Depot, the crowns are based on an illuminated crown that featured in the Royal Variety Performance at the Winter Gardens in 1955 – particularly appropriate in this, the Queen's Diamond Jubilee year.

The exhibition itself features items from the Council's historical collections including photographs, paintings and original artifacts. Highlights include:

- A beautiful silver model of Blackpool Tower from 1893, presented to Sir John Bickerstaffe, the hotelier and Mayor of Blackpool who - inspired by the Eiffel Tower - was instrumental in the Tower's construction and success
- Rare Victorian and vintage posters advertising some of the international stars and Blackpool institutions who performed there over the years, including Dusty Springfield, Bob Hope, Josef Locke, Eric Sykes and Hattie Jacques, and Ken Dodd
- Early 20th century photographs of the interiors of the Winter Gardens including the Empress Ballroom, Indian Lounge, Spanish and Baronial Halls, and the Galleon Bar
- Early photographs showing the construction of the Blackpool Tower from its foundations right up to the finishing touches to its pinnacle



Further details, including opening times, can be found at

<http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/about/news/blackpool-lightsup-london/>

### **FORMER B&M BARGAINS BASE ON MARKET**

An industrial warehousing unit totalling 800,000 sq ft is being marketed in Blackpool.

The ING-owned unit on the Squires Gate Industrial Estate was formerly the distribution centre for B&M Bargains and a manufacturing base for Arvin Industries.

The space is being marketed by Preston-based commercial property consultants Robert Pinkus & Co, who say it is one of the most substantial plots of industrial space to come to market in the Blackpool area for some time.

### **BLACKPOOL SCHOOLS WIN FUNDING**

Blackpool Council has successfully bid for funds to improve four Blackpool schools, the Government has announced.

The undisclosed funding will benefit Collegiate High School, Palatine Sports College, Hawes Side Primary School and Highfurlong School.

The funding is from the Government's new Priority School Building Programme, aimed to rebuild some of the schools most in need.

A number of Blackpool schools had lost capital funding when the Building Schools for the Future programme was scaled back two years ago as part of central Government spending cuts.

**Philip Welsh**  
**Head of Partnerships & Business Development**