



BLACKPOOL BUSINESS LEADERSHIP GROUP

Business Partnerships Report – November 29, 2019

Section 1: Town Centre Economy

COUNCIL BUYS HOUNDSHILL

Blackpool Council has acquired the resort's Houndshill Shopping Centre in a move aimed at catalysing the regeneration of the town centre.

The Council had been in discussions for some time regarding the future of the Houndshill with the previous owner of the centre, BCC Eiffel and its funders.



The Council decided to step in following the appointment of receivers who took over the running of the centre and agreed to purchase it for £47.6m – less than half the price originally paid by BCC.

With more than 60 outlets, including the Debenhams department store, the Houndshill is the largest shopping centre on the Fylde Coast and is situated in a key location in the heart of Blackpool town centre.

As part of the purchase, the Council has also taken ownership of a 770-space multi-storey car park.

The acquisition will not only secure the future of the centre but will potentially facilitate investment in a Phase Two development of Houndshill that will include restaurants and a cinema, providing a significant boost for the night-time economy.

A bid has now been submitted to the Future High Street Fund for up to £5m of funding that will fast-track that expansion.

The management company that operated the Houndshill on behalf of the previous owners is expected to remain in place for an interim period until the Council has determined more permanent arrangements.

CHRISTMAS PARKING OFFER

Blackpool town centre is to benefit from discounted parking in the run-up to Christmas to encourage people to shop local.

The campaign will start on Saturday 30 November when most Council-owned car parks across Blackpool will be free to use to celebrate both National Small Business Saturday and the Christmas Lights Switch-On event in St John's Square.

Then, throughout December, residents and out-of-town visitors will be able to park for just £1 for any three-hour period on Central, East Topping Street and West Street car parks in the town centre.

The £1 parking offer, which is being funded by Blackpool Council and the Town Centre BID, will run from December 1 to January 1 inclusive.

The Christmas lights switch-on event, which has been organised by the BID, will take place on the afternoon of Saturday 30 November with a special guest appearance by TV personality, Scarlett Moffatt.

VisitBlackpool has launched a promotional campaign aimed at showcasing the vast range of Christmas entertainment on offer.

This year sees a number of top-quality Christmas productions in and around the town centre including the Peter Pan pantomime at the Grand Theatre; Horrible Christmas at the Opera House; and Pinocchio at The Blackpool Tower Circus.

In addition, there is a wide range of Christmas shows and party nights at leading venues.

Late night shopping in Blackpool town centre will take place until 8pm over three consecutive Thursdays – December 5, 12 and 19.

For full details of all the Christmas shows, attractions and entertainment in Blackpool, go to www.visitblackpool.com

BEST IN EUROPE

Michael Wan's Mandarin on Clifton Street, Blackpool, has been named as Best Chinese Restaurant in Europe by an international travel site.

Big 7 Travel compiled a list of the top 50 across Europe and placed The Mandarin at top spot, describing it as "without a doubt, the best Chinese restaurant in Europe".

The restaurant was founded more than 50 years ago by Michael Wan who started a new life in the resort after leaving his homeland of Hong Kong.

In 2004, his goddaughter, Pauline Lai, took over the business. She has subsequently opened another outlet, the highly-acclaimed Wok Inn, on Blackpool Promenade.



TOWN CENTRE VACANCIES

There was a net increase of 13 vacant units in the town centre in November compared to August 2019, bringing the overall total up to 154 and increasing the vacancy rate from 22.1% to 24.1% - its highest on record.

The increase is largely due to the significant rise in vacant units outside of the principal retail core, namely in the periphery town centre and core retail areas which together accounted for a net increase of 12 units.

The newly-vacant units include: Soul (Victoria Street); The Lunchbox (Church Street); Thomas Cook (Birley Street); Oyston's, Yahgo, Shaw's Café Bar (Clifton Street); Blacks (Edward Street); Kats Café, Piazza Italia (Cedar Square) and Salon Red (King Street).

Since August, a number of businesses have occupied previously vacant units. These include: Jimmy's Mix & Match (Victoria Street); Jawa Unique Toys (Church Street); Game Over Convenience, Freakish Ink Tattoo (Clifton Street); Burger Shack, LC Wedding & Party (Talbot Road); Sprinkles (No. 1 Bickerstaffe Square) and Mel's Café (Topping Street).

The November 2019 vacancy rates are as follows:

Area	Total Units	Total Vacant Units	Vacancy Rate
Principal Retail Core (Local Plan boundary based around Houndshell, Victoria Street, Bank Hey Street, Church Street, Corporation Street and Adelaide Street West)	161	20	12.4%
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)	462	97	21.0%
Town Centre Boundary – this relates to the Core Strategy found in the Local Plan but it excludes the Central Station site and Coral Island (as above but also including the Promenade, Springfield Road, Dickson Road, King Street, Cookson Street, Caunce Street and the new Talbot Gateway area)	638	154	24.1%
Periphery Town Centre Area (the Town Centre Boundary area excluding the units contained within the Core Retail Area)	176	57	32.4%

POST OFFICE HOTEL PLAN

Plans to turn the former main Post Office in the town centre into a 102-bedroom hotel have been approved.

The plan for the Grade II listed building on Abingdon Street also includes shops, bar and restaurant, and a roof terrace. The service yard at the rear of the building would be converted into a 46-space car park.

It is the third proposal to be put forward for the site. Previous schemes included a smaller hotel and a shopping outlet called the Red Box Quarter.

The front of the Post Office building has eight cast iron telephone boxes which are also Grade II listed.

Section 2: Visitor Economy

RETURN OF STRICTLY

Blackpool enjoyed several hours of prime-time TV coverage as Strictly returned for its annual trip to The Blackpool Tower Ballroom.

Around 10 million viewers tuned into the Saturday edition of the Blackpool show over the weekend of November 16 and 17, with millions more watching the Sunday results show and the It Takes Two spin-off shows on BBC2.



The extensive external footage of the resort included the Empress Ballroom, Coral Island, the promenade and tramway, and the Pleasure Beach's latest rollercoaster, ICON.

The celebrities who competed in the ballroom included Michelle Visage, Alex Scott, Saffron Barker, Kelvin Fletcher, Chris Ramsey, Karim Zeroual and Emma Barton (pictured above with dance partner Anton du Beke).

The Blackpool weekend also included a performance by chart-topping group, Westlife.

BATHING WATER RESULTS

Blackpool's four beaches have all achieved positive results in the latest bathing water standards revealed by Defra (the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs).

Blackpool North, South and Central were all rated as "good" while Bispham was classed as "excellent", the highest rating possible.

The tough cleanliness standards are based on World Health Organisation (WHO) guidelines.

The classifications are the result of a remarkable turnaround for the resort's beaches in the last few years, where heavy investment coupled with partnership work between businesses, communities and public sector has resulted in vastly improved sea water quality.

To find out more about the work being undertaken across the North West to improve bathing waters, visit www.lovemybeach.org

LIGHTPOOL FESTIVAL 2019



The two-week Lightpool Festival held over the October half-term proved a resounding success attracting more than 50,000 visitors to the various events and generating substantial national media coverage.

Initial analysis shows:

- 17,000 people viewed the Earth installation in the Tower Ballroom (*pictured above*)
- A 10,000-strong crowd watched the Illuminated Tram Parade and Carnival Of The Lights
- 5,200 visitors used the Wave-Field illuminated seesaws in St John's Square
- 9,000 people viewed the giant Sun installation in the Winter Gardens
- 6,000 spectators watched the Carnival Magic and Pyronix live performance shows
- Around 1,100 local people took part in community-based events such as Fit2Glow, When I Grow Up, Late At The Library and Lumidogs

The festival attracted a remarkable amount of national media attention with coverage in The Times, Guardian, Daily Telegraph, Sunday Telegraph, BBC and Granada.

Planning for the 2020 festival has already commenced.

RESORT PASS SALES

Sales of the Blackpool Resort Pass reached a record figure of more than 19,000 during the 2019 tourism season. The passes, which offer heavily discounted admission to key attractions across the resort, are designed to be used over several days, encouraging visitors to stay over.

ILLUMINATIONS COMPETITION

Four internationally-renowned designers are vying for the unique opportunity to create a spectacular light installation in the Blackpool Illuminations.

The competition, announced earlier this year, has attracted interest from across the globe. Now four teams and individuals have been shortlisted for the final judging when one of them will win a £100k award to take their project from concept to manufacture.

The finalists, whose work will be judged by a panel chaired by Blackpool Illuminations Creative Curator Laurence Llewelyn-Bowen, are:

Guildhall Live Events. Based in London, this prestigious performing arts institution has had its artistic work featured throughout the UK including the British Museum, Glastonbury and the Tower of London.

Jack Irving. One of Blackpool's most creative sons, the London-based set and costume designer is widely known for his dazzling work, including the design of costumes for Lady Gaga.

Lancaster University. The team from one of the UK's most respected universities has set its sights on creating a concept aimed at turning the Promenade into a playground of light.

Lisa Ashcroft. The Lancashire-born artist, now based in Australia, is widely respected for her talent and has work featured in private collections in the UK, Cyprus, America, Japan and Spain.

The four were selected from dozens of entries and expressions of interest from artists, designers and creative professionals.

Once the final judging has taken place, the winner will be invited to work with the Blackpool Illuminations team to turn their idea into reality for inclusion in the 2020 display.

WELCOME EMMETT!

Blackpool Zoo has welcomed the first male elephant in its 47-year history.

Emmett, who is an Asian elephant, completed a 200-mile journey from Whipsnade towards the end of October and then spent the weekend settling in to the multi-million pound Project Elephant Base Camp development ahead of being introduced to the resident herd of females.

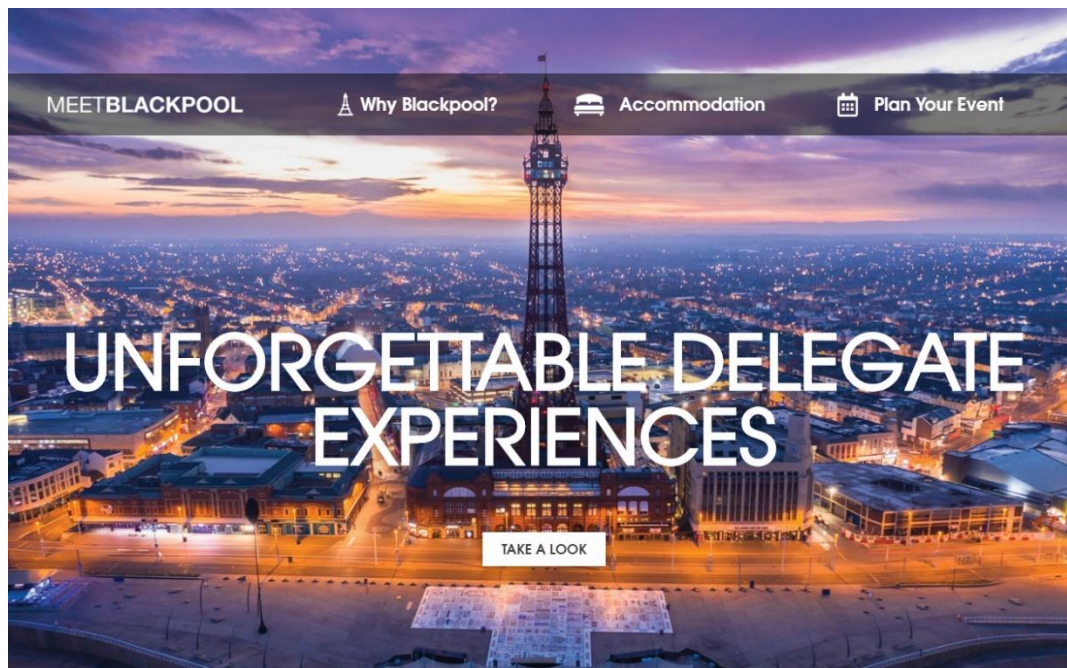
Blackpool is one of just four zoos in the UK to house a breeding herd of Asian elephants and has an ongoing commitment to helping the endangered species thrive.

Emmett will now be introduced to females Kate, Minbu, Noorjahan, Tara and Esha. Kate was the first animal to arrive at Blackpool in 1972 while the other four moved to Blackpool from Twycross Zoo in 2018.



MEETBLACKPOOL

A new website has been launched to help reinstate Blackpool's reputation as an unrivalled conference destination.



MeetBlackpool.com illustrates how £500m of investment in infrastructure has resulted in the emergence of a reinvigorated business tourism offer with unique opportunities for event organisers and delegates on a regional, national and international scale.

Launched by VisitBlackpool, the website is intended to be a powerful tool in helping to re-engage with event organisers and revitalise the resort's conference market.

The MeetBlackpool.com site highlights the new £28m state-of-the-art conference and exhibition centre which will open next year alongside the historic Winter Gardens, a venue that was once the first-choice destination for all the major political conferences. It also showcases:

- The development of several "next generation" hotels, mainly at four and five-star standard, which will provide another dimension to the resort's extensive range of accommodation to suit all budgets
- A vast selection of unique venues, delegate experiences and world-class attractions including The Blackpool Tower Ballroom, Circus, Empress Ballroom, Opera House, Heritage Tramway and Blackpool Pleasure Beach
- Greatly-improved connectivity with direct rail services to major cities including London, Birmingham, Manchester and Liverpool, and with five additional daily services to the capital due to commence in the early part of 2020
- Seamless transport connections across the resort with a new tramway extension under construction that will link heavy rail to Blackpool's seafront tramway
- Year-round programme of shows and entertainment and a fast-improving food and drink offer

Since it announced the construction of the new conference centre, the resort has secured the return of the GMB union in 2020 and the Inner Wheel in 2021. The shopworkers' union, Usdaw, has also confirmed it will return to Blackpool every year until at least 2024.

PREMIER INN NORTH PIER



The new Premier Inn on Talbot Square is to open on April 27 next year.

The 150-bedroom hotel will be known as the Premier Inn North Pier and will include a Cookhouse family restaurant and pub on the ground floor.

The restaurant, which will accommodate more than 200, will be open to hotel residents and the public from 6.30am.

More than 100 new jobs will be created in the hotel and restaurant. Recruitment will start in the early spring.

ANOTHER YEAR OF GROWTH

Blackpool's tourism economy has grown for a fourth successive year.

The latest STEAM independent research figures for 2018 show that compared to the previous year, the total number of visitors grew by almost 200,000 to 18.2m, with increases in both day and staying visitors.

Over the same period, the value of Blackpool's tourism industry soared by 4% to £1.58bn. That means that the resort accounts for more than 40% of the total value of Lancashire's visitor economy.

The report also shows that the number of full-time tourism and hospitality jobs supported in Blackpool has grown to 25,400, a one per cent increase over the previous year.

The STEAM research shows there has been consistent growth since 2014, when Blackpool's visitor numbers stood at 16.8m and the value of the tourist industry at £1.3bn.

LYTHAM FESTIVAL

A star-studded line-up has been announced for the 2020 Lytham Festival, which will take place from July 1-5. The headline acts for the five nights are Westlife, Lewis Capaldi, Snow Patrol, Lionel Richie and Little Mix.

LANCASHIRE TOURISM AWARDS

Blackpool hosted the annual Lancashire Tourism Awards – and picked up a raft of prizes.

The Blackpool Tower celebrated its 125th anniversary year by winning two awards – Business Events Venue and Large Visitor Attraction.

The Elgin Hotel was awarded best Large Hotel, before its managing director Nigel Seddon was named as the county's Tourism Superstar. Nigel and his family have run the Elgin for around 50 years. They also operate the nearby Hotel Sheraton.

The awards were staged at the Pleasure Beach Arena.

BLACKPOOL VIES FOR TITLE

Blackpool is competing for the title of the UK's Best Seaside Resort at the annual British Travel Awards. The result will be announced at an event in London on November 27. The resort was voted into the final round by a public vote.

NEW SHOWS FOR 2020

A number of new shows and concerts have been announced for the Winter Gardens during 2020. These include:

Kaiser Chiefs, January 24

Sound Of Music, February 18-22

Peter Kay's Phoenix Nights, February 29

Dennis & Gnasher Unleashed, August 11-15 (pictured right)

Grease The Musical, August 31-September 5

Hairspray, September 21-26

Sir Cliff Richard, September 27

Deacon Blue, December 1



AMANDA'S GLOBAL HONOUR

Amanda Thompson OBE, managing director of Blackpool Pleasure Beach, has taken over as chairman of the board of directors of IAAPA, the global association for the attractions industry.

Amanda formally took over chairmanship earlier this month at the association's annual world conference and trade show in Orlando.

Her great-grandfather, William G. Bean, established Blackpool Pleasure Beach in 1896. Her grandfather, Leonard Thompson, took over in 1931, and her father, Geoffrey, oversaw the business from 1976 until 2004. Since then, Amanda has led the park as Managing Director.

Her election as IAAPA Chairman of the Board marks the first time a second member of the same family has chaired the global trade association. She is also the first female Chair from Europe and the third woman in the association's history.

WORLD FIREWORKS WINNER



The Ukraine's dazzling Dance of Fire won the annual World Fireworks Championship Blackpool.

They beat off international competition from Estonia and last year's winners, Canada, to take the coveted title.

The annual fireworks championship is free and is among the most popular events in Blackpool's calendar, attracting tens of thousands of visitors to the Promenade.

Next year's event is scheduled to take place on September 11, 18 and 25, and October 2.

SLIMEFEST 2019

More than 12,000 parents and children watched six SLIMEFEST shows at Blackpool Pleasure Beach Arena over the October half-term.

Staged as part of a partnership between Nickelodeon and VisitBlackpool, the shows were completely sold out.

The shows, which included performances by Diversity, Professor Green, Scouting For Girls, Raye and stars from America including Kira Kosarin, are exclusive to Blackpool in the UK.

A 45-minute compilation of the highlights of the shows was broadcast on Nickelodeon channels during November.



Section 3: General News

ROYAL VISIT

Her Royal Highness the Countess of Wessex visited two of Blackpool's famous landmarks to mark their 125th anniversaries.

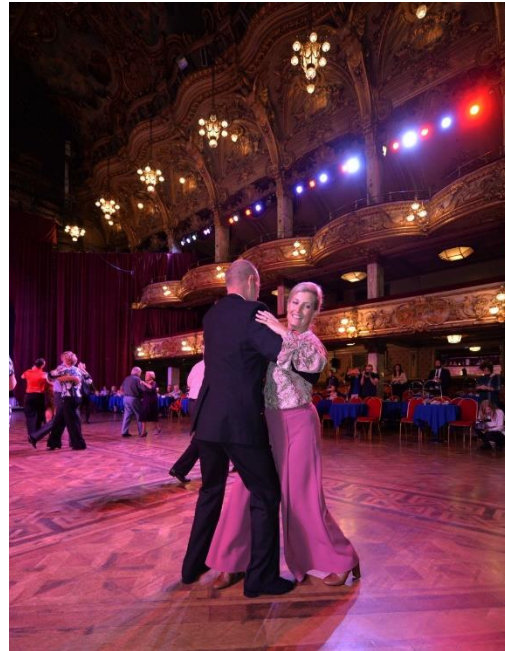
The Countess started her visit at the Grand Theatre, where she enjoyed a performance from two youth groups, Our Lady of the Assumption RC Primary School group who are part of the Grand Theatre's Associate Schools Programme.

Scouts, Guides, Cubs and Brownies then performed an excerpt from the Blackpool Scout Gang Show.

Her Royal Highness met representatives from the charities who saved the theatre from demolition in the early 1970s.

The Countess then took a guided tour of The Blackpool Tower including the circus, Tower Eye and ballroom, where she couldn't resist taking to the famous sprung dance floor.

Before departing, the Countess unveiled a new blue plaque commemorating The Blackpool Tower's 125th birthday.



YEADON WAY CLOSURE

Yeadon Way has been closed to allow for the final phase of improvement works.

During this last major phase, a number of improvements will take place including replacing old concrete walls with new safety fencing and support columns.

The road will be strengthened and a new drainage system incorporating state-of-the-art technology will be installed. The street lighting will also be upgraded.

Motorists are being diverted along Parkinson Way, Waterloo Road, Lytham Road, Squires Gate Lane and Progress Way.

The works are expected to last until May 2020.

PRESTON MINSTER WORKS

Blackpool-based joinery company Singleton & Smart has completed a 16-week refurbishment of the historic Preston Minster.

The building, previously known as St John's Minster, has been revamped to retain its existing congregation while enhancing its appeal to a new and younger group. Works included new flooring, installation of automatic doors, a full commercial kitchen and new internal lighting.

HOTEL CONVERSIONS

Blackpool Housing Company has completed the conversion of two former hotels into quality rental apartments.

The 11 new residential units on Station Road have been created within two adjoining buildings previously operating as hotels but which had fallen into a state of disrepair.

The redevelopment was undertaken by Fylde Coast based Simmons Construction. The pictures below show the exterior before and after the conversion work:



CONTEMPORARY MERMAID

Members of the public are being invited to share their views on the design of a sea-inspired statue, which will be located near North Pier.

Artist Laurence Payot wants the statue to be dedicated to people living and working in Blackpool and is asking the local community to contribute ideas to the design.

The statue, which will be inspired by sea goddesses and mermaids, is to be installed next year. Laurence is seeking a young woman from the Blackpool area who will act as a model for the cast.

Blackpool Council has commissioned the project as part of the wider plans for the town centre regeneration.

People can join the discussion on Facebook at 'the making of a contemporary mermaid' or you can email the artist on laurencepayot@yahoo.co.uk Suggestions are required by December 1.

COMMUNITY SPORTS AWARDS

Blackpool Community Sports Awards are now open for nominations.

The scheme recognises and celebrates the role that sport plays in people's lives within the community from grassroots to elite. Awards in 11 categories will be made at a special ceremony in the Winter Gardens on March 5 next year.

Categories include Young Achiever; Lifetime Achievement; Disability Award; Wilkinson Sword; Club Of The Year; Coach; Primary School; Secondary School; Adult Volunteer; Young Volunteer; Team Of The Year.

Nominations will close on 17 January 2020.

Section 4: Requests for Private Sector Support

CARERS' GROUP ANNIVERSARY BALL

Blackpool Carers' Group is holding its biggest ever fund-raising ball to mark its 15th anniversary.

The Disco Ball will be held in the Empress Ballroom in the Winter Gardens on February 1, 2020, with guest host Lionel Vinyl.

Tickets are priced at £50 per head and include drinks reception, four-course meal with wine, auction and late supper. Tables of 10 or 12 are available as well as corporate VIP sponsorship packages.

For details, contact julie.holland@blackpoolcarers.org

Philip Welsh
Head of Tourism & Communications