



BLACKPOOL BUSINESS LEADERSHIP GROUP

Business Partnerships Report – September 24, 2021

The Road To Recovery

£1m INVESTMENT TO KICK-START TOURISM



Earlier this year, Blackpool Council unveiled a £1m package to kick-start the town's tourism economy after businesses suffered unprecedented losses over the course of the pandemic.

This special edition of the Business Partnerships Report sets out some of the initiatives that have been put in place to accelerate resort recovery and help our businesses recoup some of their losses. These include:

- ❖ A two-month extension to the Illuminations season, stretching to January 3, 2022
- ❖ Large-scale investment in a programme of destination marketing and new events over the remaining months of this year, including a greatly-enhanced package of Christmas entertainment and attractions
- ❖ The establishment of a Tourism Business Improvement District (TBID), led by key stakeholders in the tourism industry and giving the potential for a further £1.4m of funding for marketing and events over the next five years

EXTENDED ILLUMINATIONS SEASON

The main strand of Blackpool's tourism recovery plan for 2021 is an extension of the Illuminations which will see the display continue until the Bank Holiday Monday on January 3, 2022.

A number of attractions and accommodation providers have already committed to remaining open into December to ensure that they can capitalise on the extension.

This year's display sees two of Britain's leading designers bringing a unique twist to the annual display. Blackpool-born Jack Irving, best known for creating wildly-theatrical outfits for Lady Gaga, has produced Astral Dreams, a new laser-mapped show that is being projected nightly on to the front of The Blackpool Tower building.



And Laurence Llewelyn-Bowen, the Illuminations' creative curator and star of Channel 4's new remake of Changing Rooms, has re-imagined a spectacular water feature at South Beach, turning it into a drag-themed sound and light show, Venus Remixed.

Other new features include a series of interactive light-based installations on the Tower Festival Headland including two giant pixelated beach balls, the Spiro interactive light tunnel, and a specially commissioned I Love BPL installation, manufactured at the Lightworks depot and standing eight feet tall (pictured on previous page).

The 2021 display also sees the return of the hugely-popular Spitfire Island at Gynn Square and a recreation of a historic section of lighting on Princess Parade that was first visited by royalty more than a century ago.

Commercial sponsors of this year's Illuminations include Access Fylde Coast; Affinity Lancashire; Barclaycard; Beaverbrooks; Better Start; City Fibre; Comedy Station; Coral Island; Fox Brothers; Fylde Coast Women's Aid; Hangar 42 Visitor Centre; Hikvision; Houndshill Shopping Centre; Nickelodeon; Northern Rail; Partington's Holiday Parks; Sooty; and White Ribbon.

SWITCH-ON

The Blackpool Illuminations Switch-On celebration was watched by a worldwide audience with more than 160,000 views from as far afield as Australia, Canada and the United States.

The freely-accessible streamed show, which was broadcast from The Blackpool Tower Ballroom, saw Shirley Ballas, head judge of BBC's *Strictly Come Dancing*, pull the switch to trigger four months of Illuminations in the resort.

It was the culmination of a spectacular live concert, produced by MTV and featuring performances by KSI, Wes Nelson, Ella Henderson and The Wombats.

Pre-COVID, the annual event has been staged in an outdoor arena on the promenade with a live audience of around 20,000 people.

This year, VisitBlackpool and MTV created a "hybrid" event including the show in the ballroom, attended by an audience of around 1,500 lucky ticket ballot winners, and the live stream.

It was the first time in history that an Illuminations Switch-On – the biggest event in Blackpool's calendar – has been staged in the ballroom, which has just reopened after a £1m make-over.



On the promenade headland outside the ballroom, tens of thousands of people gathered to watch the lights come on along with a celebratory burst of fireworks at the top of The Tower.

MTV has announced that two more shows will be created from the Switch-On celebrations: An individual artist special, *MTV Live: KSI* and a compilation show, *MTV Live From Blackpool Switch-On: The Best Bits*.

Both shows will be broadcast on MTV MUSIC at 6pm and 6.30pm respectively on Friday 15 October and at midday and 12.30pm on Saturday 16 October. There will be further scheduled repeats during November.

RIDE THE LIGHTS

The Switch-On ceremony was preceded earlier that week by a return of the annual Ride The Lights event.

Thousands of cyclists of all ages took advantage to ride along a traffic-free promenade and get a sneak preview of the Illuminations at the same time.

WORLD FIREWORKS CHAMPIONSHIPS BLACKPOOL



Blackpool's annual fireworks season has returned with a new beachfront launch pad. Four spectacular displays, all set to music, are scheduled to take place over the promenade in front of The Blackpool Tower on alternate Saturday evenings during September and October.

The first one on Saturday 11 September featured a display by Russia (pictured above) and attracted a huge number of spectators to the seafront. The second display by Ireland will take place on Saturday 25 September followed by Germany on October 9 with a showcase by firework company Titanium on October 23.

The free displays start at around 8.30pm each night subject to prevailing winds and weather conditions.

FESTIVAL VILLAGE

Throughout the Illuminations season, 12 wooden cabins are being offered rent-free to local businesses.

The cabins, located on the Tower Festival Headland, are offering a mixture of gifts, food and beverages at weekends and peak periods during September and October.

From November onwards, the cabins will become part of the Christmas village that will be created on the headland.



The cabins are only being offered to locally-based businesses and are part of the plan to help traders recoup some of the losses sustained during the pandemic.

LIGHTPOOL FESTIVAL



Blackpool's award-winning Lightpool Festival is back for October half-term.

It will be staged over 16 nights from October 15-30 and will feature a vast programme of indoor and outdoor free entertainment with spectacular large-scale light installations, projection shows, music and live performance.

Featuring national and internationally-renowned artists, it includes 16 new artworks, nine world premieres and one UK premiere, creating the biggest and most spectacular Lightpool Festival the resort has seen.

It will include some favourites from previous years including the LumiDogs workshops, the illuminated tram parade headlined by the Spark! LED drummers, and the Carnival Of Magic with giant puppets, Indian elephants and musicians.



The new artworks include some extraordinary installations including Aqualux (shown above), a 3.5m high pigeon crafted from old London taxis and House of Cards, a beautiful light art installation comprising 128 light boxes in the form of playing cards.

The Lightpool Festival programme will be complemented by the Illuminations, 3D projection shows and seafront festival village on the Comedy Carpet. A brochure promoting the numerous events and attractions has just gone to print and will be distributed over the coming weeks. Full details at www.visitblackpool.com/lightpoolfestival

WHITE TIGER

A stunning artistic interpretation of the car that played a starring role in the hit film, *The White Tiger*, has gone on display in Blackpool town centre.

The car, which includes an illuminated white tiger on its roof, has been created by the renowned international artist, Chila Kumari Singh Burman.



It is being exhibited in the former Disney store in the Houndshell Shopping Centre every day until Saturday 30 October.

The car was created to celebrate the Netflix launch of the critically-acclaimed film, which is based on the New York Times bestseller and 2008 Man Booker Prize-winning novel of the same name.

The White Tiger car will be on display in the Houndshell Centre each day during normal opening hours until October 17. Between October 18 and 30, the opening hours will be extended until 10pm each night so Lightpool Festival-goers can see her work up close.

Chila is an internationally-recognised artist who has just completed a large-scale neon exhibition in London's Covent Garden. Last year, she transformed the iconic façade of the Tate Britain in the capital. In October, she will be unveiling a new commission on the front of Blackpool's Grundy Art Gallery to celebrate the resort's annual two-week Lightpool Festival.

Here, visitors will be able to delight in a display of multi-coloured new light works that have been specially commissioned for the exterior of the building. Brought together under the title, "Blackpool Light of My Life", the exhibition is the artist's love letter to the town which she visited regularly as a child, with Blackpool Illuminations being an abiding memory.

The appearance of the White Tiger Car in Blackpool is part-funded by the European Regional Development Fund and utilises an award from the main Welcome Back Fund.

CHRISTMAS CAMPAIGN



November and December will see the biggest programme of Christmas entertainment that the resort has staged in years.

In addition to the Illuminations remaining lit throughout, there will be an indoor festive market at the Winter Gardens, a Christmas By The Sea village on the Tower Festival Headland with synthetic skating rink, magic forest, snowfalls, and themed light projection shows.

The new attractions will be complemented by traditional shows and pantomimes, and for the first time outside London, the FriendsFestive exhibition celebrating all the best seasonal moments from the hit TV show. It will run at the Winter Gardens from November 5-19.

SLIMEFEST

Nickelodeon's SLIMEFEST shows return to Blackpool in October after a two-year absence.

Four shows will be staged at the Pleasure Beach Arena over the weekend of Saturday 16 and Sunday 17 October

Actress and broadcaster Fleur East and The Voice 2020 winner Blessing Annatoria (pictured right)



are the latest stars to be named in the line-up. Fleur will headline the Saturday shows.

They will be joined by BAFTA award-winning dance group, Diversity, Wes Nelson, singer Kid Rain, and by best-selling artist John Newman who will headline the two Sunday shows.

SLIMEFEST is presented by Nickelodeon in partnership with VisitBlackpool and will be hosted by Diversity's Jordan Banjo and Perri Kiely, as well as hosts, social media stars and singers Max & Harvey, and TikTok sensation Holly H.

Check out the www.visitblackpool.com/slimefest for ticket details.

SHOWTOWN

A lease has now been signed for Showtown, Blackpool's first museum of entertainment, to be constructed in the new Sands Venue Resort Hotel building.

The project team for the new attraction have been working with Lancashire-based construction firm, Conlon, who are laying the groundwork. Work commenced at the beginning of September and the museum has a new opening date of April 2023.

Once open, the museum will allow visitors to get up close with the entertainers who put Blackpool on the map – the comedians, dancers, acrobats, performers and larger-than-life characters who turned a seaside resort into the home of show business.

It is being created within the Sands Venue building, which is planned as Blackpool's first five-star hotel when it opens next year with 91 luxury rooms and penthouses, restaurants, spa, and conference facilities.

The Wild West Diner is already trading on the ground floor along with Spy Glass, a new themed cocktail bar.

MIRROR BALL IS BACK

Blackpool's iconic Mirror Ball is returning for the autumn season after undergoing a full refurbishment. Preparations for installing the work back in its original location on the South Promenade began earlier this month.

The artwork was originally created by artist Michael Trainor and, at six metres in diameter, is reputed to be the world's largest.

The artist was inspired by and named the work after the 1969 Hollywood film 'They Shoot Horses Don't They?' which features a large Mirror Ball. It was originally installed in 2002 as one of a series of commissioned artworks known as The Great Promenade Show.



The refurbishment project has been undertaken by a range of partners led by the Council's Property Services Department.

It has involved the structure being completely re-mirrored with the mirrors being supplied by local company Jordan's Glass and the tiling undertaken by Mirror Finish North West. Students and staff from the Blackpool School of Arts as well as local volunteers have all played a part in removing and replacing the 47,000 mirror tiles.

DESTINATION MARKETING

VisitBlackpool has published a second destination guide covering the autumn/winter season after facing unprecedented demand for copies of its annual guide.

The 84-page glossy guide spans the entire Illuminations season ending on January 3, 2022.

At the same time, an e-version of the Blackpool Events Guide has been produced as the opening up of venues sees more and more shows and entertainment being reinstated over the second half of the year.

The new printed destination guide, which is part-funded by the European Regional Development Fund and the Welcome Back Fund, is now freely available and features the most extensive programme of events that the resort has offered over the autumn and winter period.

The new Autumn Guide can be viewed and ordered at visitblackpool.com/guide

Hundreds of other events can be found online in the new e-version of the Blackpool Events Guide, which includes a comprehensive collection of what's on listings spanning the period from August 2021 to March 2022. The Events Guide can also be viewed at visitblackpool.com/guide

During the extended Illuminations season, there will be a major destination marketing campaign devised in association with resort partners including Merlin Entertainments and Blackpool Pleasure Beach.

It incorporates TV and video-on-demand advertising, 48-sheet and six-sheet poster campaigns, radio and extensive digital advertising which will run over a three-month period.

The campaign will target day-trippers within 90 minutes' drive time including Lancashire, Greater Manchester and Merseyside as well as overnight stays from potential visitors in Scotland, Yorkshire, the North East and the Midlands.

A specially commissioned TV advert has been produced which will be broadcast on Channel 5, MTV and Nickelodeon channels as well as on video-on-demand services covering All4, Sky, ITV and YouTube.

You can view it here: <https://youtu.be/qgVrGdxSX14>



BEACH PATROL GEARS UP

Blackpool's year-round beach patrol service took delivery of a brand new vehicle as visitors flocked to the coast during the summer months.

The new Land Rover is fitted out with state-of-the-art lifesaving equipment to ensure that the service can provide vital services with the best possible response times.

The vehicle is equipped with the latest VHF radio communication system with a direct link to Holyhead Coastguard's Marine Rescue Co-ordination Centre and has the capacity to house a wide range of life-saving equipment.

The Land Rover is primarily used in a preventative role, patrolling the six miles of Blackpool seafront giving out safety advice and guidance via the on-board PA system and responding to first aid incidents and searches for lost children.

But it also has the capability to support major incidents to ensure that the hundreds of thousands of people who use Blackpool's beaches each year are protected.

The replacement vehicle is also being used to support Blackpool's major events programme, deal with enforcement issues and promote the Beach Safety Education Programme with local schoolchildren.



AIR SHOW CONFIRMED FOR 2022

Blackpool's annual Air Show will take place next year over the weekend of August 13 and 14.

The free event, which attracts up to 100,000 visitors, has been cancelled for the past two years because of COVID restrictions on mass gatherings.

But VisitBlackpool has announced that the show will return for 2022 with some of the world's finest military and civilian aircraft performing over the iconic seafront.



To complement the aerial programme, there will be plenty to see and do on the ground with a wide range of stalls, attractions and food concessions in the Air Show Village on the Tower Festival Headland.

Further details of the air show programme will be released in the early part of next year.

ONGOING BUSINESS SUPPORT

Tourism BID

A new Tourism Business Improvement District (TBID) has been created in Blackpool after tourism businesses voted overwhelmingly in favour.

The ballot result, which revealed support from more than 90% of voters, means that the private sector-led TBID can play a key role in supporting the resort's post-COVID recovery plan by generating around £1.4m of investment over the next five years.

The business plan that supported the ballot process demonstrated how a collaboration between private and public sector could be used to focus on protecting and developing a vibrant tourism economy.

In its prospectus, the TBID promises to deliver marketing and events activity to increase footfall, spend, dwell time and overnight stays, and give businesses a greater say in what is happening across the tourism sector.

The TBID area, which includes more than 250 businesses on the seafront as well as those operating around the Stanley Park and Marton Mere areas, becomes the second Business Improvement District to be formed in Blackpool.

The existing Town Centre BID is long-established and recently won another five-year mandate to support town centre traders.

In order to maximise the benefit of the TBID levy, there will be a close alliance with the Town Centre BID to ensure there is no duplication of resource.

This will result in the formation of a combined Blackpool BIDS board. This will be supported by a TBID steering group, chaired by Kate Shane, Regional Director for Merlin Entertainments, and a Town Centre BID steering group, chaired by its existing chair, Michael Williams, Managing Director of the Winter Gardens.

Both will join the BIDS main board as directors, alongside Philip Welsh, who is head of Tourism & Communications for Blackpool Council, and John Westhead, the Head of Operations for Blackpool Promotions, who has agreed to act as interim chair of the board.

Over the course of the coming weeks, more directors will be appointed to the Blackpool BIDS board and additional members to the TBID Steering Group, to ensure we have a broad representation of Blackpool's tourism industry.

This model is intended to provide clarity of leadership and reduce operating costs by adopting a single management structure.

You can also view an e-version of the TBID business plan at this link:

www.blackpooltbidbusinessplan.com

Tourism Recovery Group

In June 2020 while the tourism industry was still in lockdown, a Blackpool Tourism Recovery Group was established.

It includes key stakeholders from attractions, venues, transport services and the accommodation sector.

Fifteen months on, it continues to meet on a weekly basis to share performance and customer insights, disseminate and interpret Government guidance and restrictions, as well as focusing on forward-looking activities around recruitment, training and destination marketing. It has also played a lead role in lobbying for support for the industry at the height of the pandemic.

It is envisaged that the group will remain in place for the remainder of this year.

Welcome Back Fund

The Government's Welcome Back Fund is also being used to support town centre and resort recovery.

It has already been utilised to provide the pop-up al fresco eating area in St John's Square, a deep clean of town centre streets and radio campaigns supporting the reopening of the town centre and tourism industry in May and June.

Further business support events and initiatives are planned between now and next March when the funding comes to an end.

VISITOR NUMBERS TO DATE

Whilst we have no formal research on visitor numbers due to traditional household research being suspended, our own key indicators such as car parking, inbound rail, tram usage and mobile phone monitoring data indicate that Blackpool's tourism industry has enjoyed a remarkably strong recovery.

Businesses across most tourism and hospitality sectors in the resort are reporting exceptional results compared to 2019 (the last full year of tourism activity pre-pandemic) and strong bookings over the remainder of this year.

For example, in the final week of the school summer holidays, car parking patronage was around 30% higher than the comparative week in 2019. There are similar strong comparisons compared to both 2019 and 2020 throughout July and August and as we move into September.

Philip Welsh
Head of Tourism & Communications