



BLACKPOOL BUSINESS LEADERSHIP GROUP

Business Partnerships Report – January 28, 2022

Visitor Economy Update

RETURN OF CONSERVATIVE PARTY CONFERENCE TO BLACKPOOL



The Conservative Party returns to Blackpool in March after a 15-year absence.

The party is holding its Spring Conference in the new £28m Conference & Exhibition Centre adjacent to the Winter Gardens.

The last time the Conservatives met in Blackpool was back in 2007 when David Cameron was Party Leader and Boris Johnson a member of his Shadow Cabinet (*both pictured above in the resort during that year's autumn conference*).



This year's event, which will be held on March 18 and 19, is expected to attract around 1,500 delegates including senior members of the Cabinet.

Ahead of the main event, the party's prestigious Business Day returns with a dinner on the evening of March 17 and continues into the morning of March 18.

- Conservative HQ has indicated there are a number of small scale sponsorship opportunities still available to local businesses for the conference. For further details, contact conference@conservatives.com or mandy@visitblackpool.com

BALLROOM BLITZ!

The Blackpool Tower Ballroom's famous dancefloor, which has played host to some of the world's most talented dancers, including the stars of Strictly Come Dancing, has been restored to its original state.



The work was completed ahead of the ballroom's official reopening on January 25. It is the first time in more than 30 years that the floor has undergone such extensive work, meaning the original wooden floor is once again ready for dancers.

A team of floor restoration experts was brought in to break down more than 100 layers of lacquer, before the floor was sanded down and resealed.

The floor, which is made up of 30,602 individual blocks of oak, mahogany and walnut that were placed together to create the unique design, has taken around three weeks to be fully refurbished.

The renovation means the iconic dancefloor now has an ultra-smooth finish and will enhance ballroom-goers' experience.

Last year, the ballroom, which dates back to 1894 and is known by millions as the home to Strictly Come Dancing's annual ballroom special, underwent the most extensive programme of work and deep clean for more than 60 years.

It included £1m of restoration work to the ornate ceiling.

NEW DESTINATION GUIDE

Blackpool has unveiled a spectacular programme of events, shows and attractions for the coming year as it looks to build on the staycation boom of 2021.

The resort's 2022 Destination Guide showcases a brand new family attraction, the return of major events including the annual Air Show, a vast range of top-quality shows and entertainment, and a two-month extension of the annual Illuminations season.

The guide, illustrated with stunning photography, also celebrates a very special milestone - the 50th anniversary of Blackpool Zoo – as well as featuring an extensive range of hotel and guest accommodation to suit all pockets.

Highlights within the 88-page glossy publication include:



World Class Events: A sneak peek at the resort's multi-million pound events programme including some established favourites such as Pride, Air Show Weekend, Rebellion Punk Festival, Ride The Lights, World Fireworks, Lightpool Festival, Illuminations Switch-On weekend and Christmas By The Sea. And there's a promise of more special events still to be announced.

Curtain Up: A chance to book ahead for a brilliant line-up of shows at venues including the Opera House, Grand Theatre and Blackpool Pleasure Beach. Shows already announced include The Osmonds, A New Musical; The Cher Show; Jersey Boys; Dream Girls The Musical; Strictly Ballroom The Musical; Gangsta Granny and Rapture, a brand new production on ice.

Child's Play: A bucket and spade list of kid-friendly things to do in Blackpool including family attractions such as Sandcastle Waterpark, the Blackpool Tower Circus, three piers, donkey rides, Marvel superheroes – and not forgetting the miles of glorious beaches.

Insta-worthy Locations: A visitors' guide to how to create the best photographic memories of a trip to Blackpool. Images of our glorious sunsets over the Irish Sea are definitely high on the list of favourites!

Baywatch, Blackpool-style: Spotlight on Blackpool's Beach Patrol team who work tirelessly, around the clock, 365 days a year, to protect the hundreds of thousands of people who flock to our beaches every year.

Access All Areas: A visitor guide to how Blackpool rolls out the welcome mat to make the resort accessible for everyone whether people have physical, sensory, mental health or learning difficulties.

Check Out, Check In: A must-have guide to Blackpool's diverse accommodation ranging from traditional guest house to luxury hotel, from budget bolthole to boutique chic – there is something to suit all tastes and pockets and all carrying the Blackpool seal of approval.

To view the guide online, please head to visitblackpool.com/guide

ILLUMINATIONS EXTENSION FOR 2022

Blackpool's annual Illuminations display is to be extended by two months for a third consecutive year.



Photo Credit: Gary Mitchell

This year's Illuminations season will now start on Friday 2 September and run until Monday 2 January, 2023.

Blackpool Council said it had made the decision after the 2021 extension showed exceptional growth in visitor numbers with key indicators such as footfall and parking usage significantly higher than the volumes experienced pre-pandemic.

Although the Illuminations were extended for the first time in history in 2020, the final part of the year was heavily disrupted by tier restrictions and lockdowns.

The extension of the Illuminations season was intended to give the resort's tourism industry an added boost after the pandemic created severe disruption over the first few months of the year.

It was repeated in 2021 as part of a £1m Council-led investment in marketing and events to help kick-start Blackpool's tourism recovery plans.

It resulted in Blackpool's most ambitious winter offer with a Christmas By The Sea village on the Tower Festival Headland with a free-to-use skating rink, magic forest, log cabins, artificial snowfalls, light installations and themed projection shows.

Alongside the village was the Star Flyer, Europe's largest aerial ride and a short distance away, the Winter Gardens Wonderland with indoor and outdoor festive market stalls, virtual reality experiences, and funfair rides.

ILLUMINATIONS EXTENSION/CHRISTMAS BY THE SEA RESULTS



The two-month extension of the Illuminations during 2021, coupled with Blackpool's biggest ever Christmas campaign, has delivered record footfall across the resort.

Footfall figures for the town centre and Promenade show exceptional increases across all four months of the autumn/winter season, providing a complete endorsement of the Council's decision to kick-start tourism recovery with a large-scale investment in marketing and events.

The Christmas By The Sea campaign, which ran on the Tower Festival Headland from November 19 to January 3 and included a free skating rink, artificial snowfalls, light projection shows, log cabins, and large-scale light installations, resulted in a 75% increase in footfall on the seafront.



The additional Christmas activity around St John's Square and the Winter Gardens, combined with discounted parking, resulted in town centre footfall increasing by almost 28% over the same period.

Footfall during the Christmas campaign (November 19 to January 3)

	2021-22	2019-20	% change from 2019-20 to 2021-22
Town centre	3,924,036	3,068,688	+27.9%
Promenade	4,966,570	2,835,421	+75.2%

PETER RABBIT HOPS INTO TOWN



Merlin Entertainments have announced that the beloved characters from the award-winning Peter Rabbit animated TV series are set to make a new home on Blackpool's Golden Mile this spring.

The £1m attraction is set to open next door to the famous Madame Tussauds Blackpool as part of a new standalone visitor experience. Visitors will hop into the over-sized world of Peter and his friends to embark on an adventure across five themed zones.

Guests will need to think like a rabbit, move like a rabbit and deploy rabbit-like senses to complete the various challenges and earn badges to be able to join the secret treehouse club! They will also be able to meet and greet Peter himself.

The attraction, due to open on February 12, joins Merlin's portfolio of six other attractions in Blackpool including The Blackpool Tower and SEA LIFE Blackpool.

- Kate Shane, the regional director of Merlin, will present to the BBLG on January 28 on the company's continuing investment in the resort's attractions.

RETURN OF VALHALLA

It's been voted "Best Water Ride in the World" for an amazing six consecutive years in the global Golden Ticket Awards – and now it is returning to Blackpool Pleasure Beach even better than ever!

Scheduled to reopen ahead of the main tourism season, visitors will be able to travel through fantastic new special effects and extreme elements.

The high-speed, dark-water ride takes people on Viking long boats on a six-minute journey through scenes of fire, snow and freezing mists, complemented by a stunning new sound track.



STAY CLOSE



Blackpool is taking centre stage in one of the most popular drama series of the year to date.

The resort is heavily featured in the Netflix thriller, *Stay Close*, starring Eddie Izzard and Sarah Parish.

Based on Harlen Coben's 2012 novel of the same name, *Blackpool* takes the place of Atlantic City which is where the original book is based.

The event that kicks off the story is a vibrant carnival that begins marching down the local beachfront. This was filmed, along with other coastal scenes throughout the series, on Blackpool seafront.

Although there were lockdown restrictions in place, the VisitBlackpool team helped facilitate two days of filming work in the resort, including a special showing of the Illuminations that featured in the series.

NEW APPOINTMENTS

Adam Knight is joining the Grand Theatre as chief executive in early May following the planned departure of Ruth Eastwood. Adam joins the Grand from HQ Theatres and the Lyceum Theatre in Crewe, where he is currently Theatre Director.

Ruth who has led the Grand for eight years will leave in a few weeks' time to return to her freelance career. She has steered the theatre through one of the most challenging periods in its history over the course of the two-year pandemic.

Sue Grindrod has been appointed as Managing Director of the new combined BIDs company. Sue, who lives on the Fylde Coast and has previously worked in the resort's tourism industry, was most recently CEO of the Royal Albert Dock Company in Liverpool. Her new role, which commences on February 1, will see her take over the management of the Town Centre BID and the new Tourism BID.

GRAND THEATRE SEASON LAUNCH

Blackpool's Grand Theatre has launched a new season of entertainment with a spectacular mix of dance, drama, comedy, music and family entertainment. Some of the highlights include:

A selection of top-class dramas including the gripping thriller **Catch Me If You Can** starring Patrick Duffy (*Dallas*); the intriguing whodunit **Father Brown The Murderer In The Mirror** starring John Lyons (*A Touch of Frost*), and the award-winning musical drama **The Rise and Fall Of Little Voice**.



James Wilton Dance will showcase a breath-taking new work with **The Four Seasons**; **Northern Ballet** will delight young and old with a charming child-friendly retelling of the classic tale of **Pinocchio**, and **Wayne Sleep** and **Craig Revel Horwood** bring their trademark wit and plenty of showbiz glitter for each of their very own "audience with" shows!

The Grand is also bringing back a healthy dose of happiness with madcap comedy **Some Mother's Do 'Ave Em** starring Joe Pasquale and a whole host of top nights out with stand-up stars **Omid Djalili**, **Ed Byrne**, **Jason Manford**, **Milton Jones** and **Julian Clary** taking to the mic.

Musical productions include the glorious age of glam rock with **ELO Again**; the music of **Bowie**; **Experience Beyond The Barricade** with two hours of the best of Broadway and the West End; and the welcome return of singing star **Elkie Brooks**,

The line-up of family entertainment includes the award-winning stage adaptation of David Walliams' crime caper **Gangsta Granny**; join Paddington, Pip and Posy and all the cheeky crew in the all-singing, all-dancing **Milkshake! Live**; the irrepressible **Peppa Pig**; and Christmas pantomime **Sleeping Beauty**, starring Steve Royle.

Check out the guide here:

[https://issuu.com/grandtheatreblackpool/docs/blackpool_grand - the guide pages](https://issuu.com/grandtheatreblackpool/docs/blackpool_grand_-_the_guide_pages)

HAIRSPRAY JOINS ROLL OF HONOUR

The smash-hit musical *Hairspray* has been added to the Winter Garden's Roll of Honour as the highest grossing Christmas show in the venue's history.

Stars from the show, John Thomson, Alex Bourne, Brenda Edwards and Katie Brace, celebrated the news as the inclusion was unveiled and its name added to the roll call of honour. Despite new guidelines that masks must once again be worn in theatres during the run, ticket sales reached around 30,000 by the time the show ended at the start of January.

BLACKPOOL CENTRAL

As part of Blackpool's ongoing regeneration programme, work is about to start on the £300m world-class leisure attraction planned for Blackpool Central.

Sections of the car park behind the Edward VII pub, east of the Seaside's Way entrance, will be fenced off so that essential services can be diverted from the site ahead of the first phase of works that will start in March to build a new 1,300 space multi-storey car park.

To learn more about the Blackpool Central development visit <https://bit.ly/3AuU48V>

Town Centre Update

BLACKPOOL BUCKS RETAIL TREND

Blackpool's retail sector bucked the national trend in a report showing that Britain's biggest cities lost almost a year's worth of sales during the coronavirus as lockdowns and a lack of office workers caused a collapse in consumer spending.

London recorded the biggest drop for in-person spending for retail and hospitality, losing as much as 47 weeks' worth of sales between March 2020 and November 2021 compared with the average value for weekly transactions in 2019 before the crisis hit.

According to spending data compiled from anonymous card transactions, Birmingham, Edinburgh and Cardiff also lost nearly a year's worth of sales as people stayed away from big city centres during the health emergency.

In comparison, towns and smaller cities including Blackpool have recorded a smaller drop in retail and hospitality, according to the think-tank's annual Cities Outlook report for 2022.

Burnley had the smallest drop in spending with the loss of just eight weeks of sales, whilst Blackpool lost 12 weeks compared with 2019, the tenth lowest in the survey.

The study of 52 city and town centres also showed a sharp increase in the number of commercial units falling vacant during the crisis, rising to 2,426 compared with an increase of 1,374 between 2018 and 2020.

However, it showed that high streets in economically weaker places have been less affected by the pandemic, with a smaller increase in vacancy rates than in bigger city centre locations.

Again, Blackpool fared particularly well showing that it actually showed a decrease of 1.5% in the number of vacant units compared to pre-pandemic years, the smallest increase in vacant units in the country.

Retail consultancy Springboard said home working had led to the growth of "localism", with consumers visiting nearby high streets when previously they would have shopped in city centres.

The most extreme example was in London: In 2021 footfall in outer London was 27% lower than in 2019, while in central London the drop was 52%.

The organisation said in 2022 it expected hybrid working to lead to more and longer visits to retail destinations in the evenings and at weekends, as well as an increase in people combining shopping and dining.

GRUNDY ANNOUNCES WINTER PROGRAMME

Grundy Art Gallery has launched its new winter 2022 programme with a number of exhibitions opening from January 15.

Linked together by a commitment to showcasing artists from Blackpool and the wider region, the exhibitions on display will offer a diverse range of activities celebrating artworks made close to home. Supported by workshops, talks and events, the programme includes:

Annual Schools' Exhibition with Nicholas Delap

Signs of Light, 15 January–26 February

Each year, Grundy Art Gallery invites a contemporary artist and groups of schoolchildren from across Blackpool and the Fylde Coast to work together to develop an exhibition.

In 2022, artist Nicholas Delap has interpreted drawings that the schoolchildren have made to create a new digital artwork.

Taking inspiration from Grundy Art Gallery's recent exhibition of neon light works by Chila Kumari Singh Burman, the schoolchildren have produced signs, symbols and motifs that they think represent Blackpool, just as Burman's work was inspired by her childhood visits to the town and its illuminations. Artist Nicholas Delap has then transformed the images that the schoolchildren have made into 3D digital sculptures.

Collection Spotlight: Patti Mayor (1872-1962)

15 January–11 June

Collection Spotlight exhibitions are an opportunity to highlight individual artists, or showcase a specific selection of works from the Grundy Art Gallery collection. Patti Mayor's work predominantly takes the form of painted portraits.

OPEN 2022

15 January–26 February

Following last year's online exhibition, 'OPEN 2022' returns to the physical exhibition spaces of the gallery. This annual exhibition aims to demonstrate the wide range of artwork being produced throughout Blackpool and the Fylde Coast today, bringing together works produced in a wide range of media, including painting, drawing, photography and sculpture.

The pARTnership: Watch This Space

15 January – 26 February

'Watch This Space' is a group exhibition that brings together a selection of artists who have worked together over the last 12 months as part of a project called, 'the pARTnership'.

Bringing together artists with and without a learning disability, the pARTnership is an Arts Council England-funded, 12-month pilot project that has seen these artists sharing ideas, skills and experiences in weekly art-making sessions.

MODEL PLAN FOR BHS STORE

Plans have been submitted to Blackpool Council to transform part of the former British Home Stores building in the town centre into the UK's largest exhibition of iconic model buildings and vehicles. The project lodged with planners would see the basement of the old BHS in Market Street renovated and turned into Mini Planet, a giant emporium housing hundreds of replica models of iconic British buildings, trains, aircraft and boats. Subject to planning permission, the creators hope to have the attraction open by this summer.

General News

COUNTY DEAL



Council leaders have made an historic pledge to work together to deliver a bold vision for a County Deal to benefit the people of Lancashire.

For months, all 15 of the council leaders who make up Greater Lancashire have been working in close collaboration to develop a set of ambitious and forward-thinking proposals.

If adopted they would represent a New Deal for a Greater Lancashire across a range of areas including the economy, transport, jobs, skills and the environment.

In a demonstration of co-operation, each of the councils that make up Greater Lancashire – Lancashire County Council, the 12 district councils, Blackpool Council and Blackburn-with-Darwen Council – are to consider setting up a new formal body to help drive co-operation to the next level to help secure a deal with Government.

In July 2021, as part of its levelling-up plans, the Government announced it would introduce County Deals as part of its devolution plans, with the aim of transferring powers from Whitehall to local areas.

All 15 councils that comprise Greater Lancashire will discuss these proposals at full council meetings in the coming weeks, where they will be asked to agree a joint report.

WEDDING CHAPEL ANNIVERSARY



Blackpool's unique Wedding Chapel is celebrating its own special anniversary – 10 years since the first wedding was held there.

It was on January 12, 2012, that the sun set on a spectacular day in Blackpool as Kelly Goudie and Simon Garrick tied the knot in Festival House, Blackpool's new register office.

Mr and Mrs Garrick became part of Blackpool's history as they exchanged their vows and shared their first kiss as husband and wife in the Tower View Room, looking out across the Promenade to the world-famous Blackpool Tower.

Ten years on and almost 5,000 couples have got married in the Wedding Chapel.

The eye-catching gold clad venue on the Promenade offers couples the chance to get married with a backdrop of Blackpool Tower. Around 350 weddings are already booked for the year ahead.

The building is also home to the town's Tourist Information Centre and the Beach House Bar & Bistro.

For more information on The Wedding Chapel visit www.blackpool.gov.uk/weddingchapel

OMICRON GRANTS FOR BUSINESSES

The third round of the Blackpool Business Recovery Fund is now open following the Government's announcement of additional support for businesses impacted by COVID restrictions and particularly the Omicron variant.

The Blackpool Council-managed scheme aims to provide grant support to a limited range of retail, leisure and hospitality (RHL) businesses.



The eligible sectors are as follows

Category 1

Hospitality

- Restaurants & Cafes (businesses not responsible for business rates)

Category 2

Travel Sector:

- Travel agents
- Group travel
- Tour operators
- Coach operators

Performing arts and events:

- Performing arts/artists/events businesses in the hospitality and tourism sector
- Specialist local recruitment agencies providing staffing for hospitality events.
- Event caterers

Category 3

Accommodation

- B&Bs that pay Council Tax rather than business rates

Category 4

Other Eligible Businesses

- Kennels and catteries

Before applying, please read the grant guidance and criteria policy [here](#)

Submit an application [here](#)

The deadline for applications is February 14

Omicron Hospitality and Leisure Grant scheme

The primary principle of the Omicron Hospitality and Leisure Grant scheme is to support businesses that offer in-person services, where the main service and activity takes place in a fixed rate-paying premises, in the hospitality, leisure and accommodation sectors.

[Read eligibility criteria and make an application here](#)

ANTI-TERRORIST MEASURES

Tougher security measures to combat the threat of terrorism are set to be adopted in Blackpool to protect the resort's busiest areas.

The added controls will give the police stronger powers over the road and pedestrian network in the event of a serious incident.

While there is no specific threat to Blackpool, the introduction of an anti-terrorism traffic regulation order (ATTRO) has been proposed to enable the new powers that will help "super-proof" the resort against the risk of terrorist attack.

The resort, which attracts millions of visitors a year, is acting in response to attacks elsewhere where terrorists have targeted crowded places.

Stronger systems are also deemed necessary to protect the new conference centre at the Winter Gardens, which is expected to attract high-profile dignitaries.

The ATTRO zone will circle the town via Squires Gate Lane, Progress Way, the M55 Link, Preston New Road, South Park Drive, East Park Drive, St Walburgas, Plymouth Road, Warbreck Hill Road, Gynn Square, the Promenade and Starr Gate.

Its use would include keeping access clear on main routes for emergency vehicles in the instance of an emergency incident, and also to assist with evacuation procedures.

It would also allow measures such as the installation of rising security bollards around the town centre, the removal of parked cars and restriction of pedestrian and vehicle movements.

The powers within the order would only be used on a temporary basis in response to specific incidents or security intelligence.

The use of the ATTRO for a pre-planned event must be agreed between the police and the council. Restrictions must remain in place for no longer than is necessary and would be reviewed by the council and the police jointly at least every 48 hours.

Request for business support

REQUEST FOR BUSINESS PARTICIPATION

The group leading on Blackpool's new Literacy Strategy (an item presented at the November meeting of the BBLG) is looking for a business representative.

The group, which will meet around four times a year, is looking for someone who can provide an insight into how local businesses can get involved in the literacy work across the town as well as offer support, ideas and avenues for potential sponsorship.

The next meeting is scheduled for the morning of Wednesday 16 February. Any business interested in supporting the group, please email Elaine Allen, Elaine.Allen@sjvprimary.co.uk

Philip Welsh
Head of Tourism & Communications