



Blackpool Business Leadership Group

Business Partnerships Report – December 9, 2022

1. Visitor Economy Update

THE RETURN OF STRICTLY...



The BBC's Strictly Come Dancing returned to the Blackpool Tower Ballroom for the first time since 2019.

The long-awaited return of the show generated a huge volume of prime-time publicity for Blackpool in the days leading up to the show and across the two televised shows on Saturday 19 and Sunday 20 November.



Two of the celebrities – host, Claudia Winkleman, and contestant, Fleur East, presented live radio shows from Blackpool ahead of the Saturday night episode.

The Strictly team also filmed a spectacular “Blackpool’s Back” dance sequence on the Comedy Carpet to mark its return to the ballroom.

...AND THE RETURN OF CHRISTMAS BY THE SEA

Blackpool's spectacular Christmas village is back this winter – thanks to the resort's tourism businesses and national broadband providers, TalkTalk.

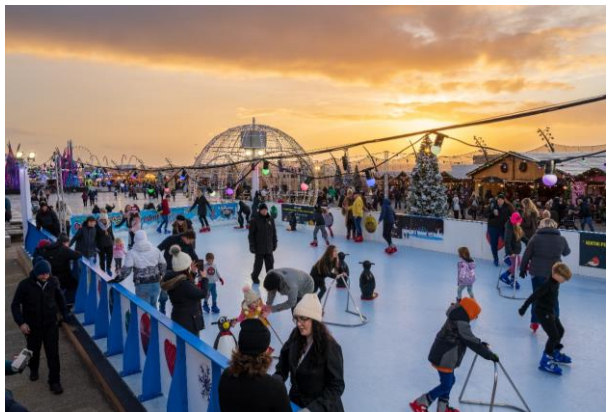
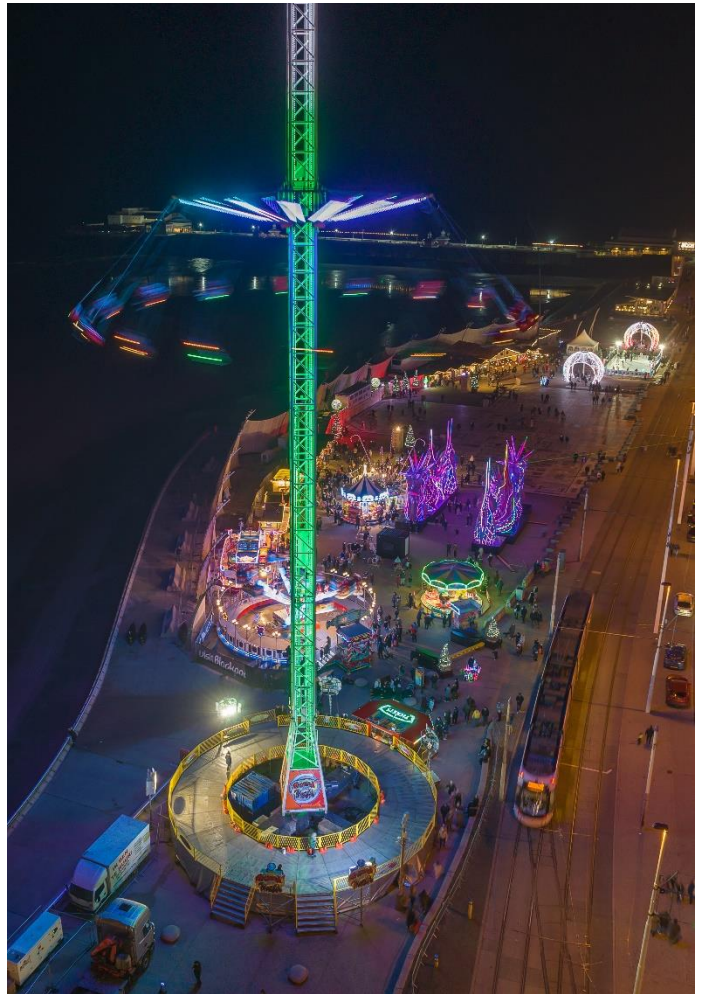
The Tourism Business Improvement District (TBID), which represents hundreds of tourism operators, has joined forces with sponsors TalkTalk and Blackpool Council to fund the event during the extended Illuminations season.

Last year, Christmas By The Sea delivered the highest visitor numbers ever recorded on the seafront during the winter months and the first two weekends of this year's event have already attracted tens of thousands of visitors.

The 2021 event has been nominated in the "Best Large Event" category in the forthcoming Lancashire Tourism Awards.

Situated on the Tower Festival Headland opposite The Blackpool Tower, this year's village will run until January 2.

It includes a free-to-use skating rink, festive light installations and projection shows, themed log cabins, artificial snowfalls, Christmas trees, Christmas tram rides and the Star Flyer ride.



The rink was officially opened by Strictly dancers Neil and Katya Jones, accompanied by children from the Blackpool Ice Dome Charities Association (BIDCA) who performed short excerpts from Peter Pan – A Magical Adventure On Ice and Hairspray.

The Christmas campaign is supported by a discounted car parking offer on most Council car parks for the duration of the event, offering residents and visitors three hours of parking for a pound.

Note: Blackpool was in the top three in Tripadvisor's Travel Index for the best places to visit this Christmas, finishing behind only London and Edinburgh.

LOOKING A LOT LIKE CHRISTMAS!

The Christmas By The Sea village is just part of a spectacular resort-wide offer that also includes pantomimes, shows, attractions, grottos, and late night shopping.

Some of the shows and pantos on offer include:

Sleeping Beauty at The Grand Theatre. The enchanting tale features Hayley Tamaddon (Dancing On Ice, Emmerdale) as the Good Fairy; panto and stand-up comedy star Steve Royle as Silly Billy; Philip Meeks (Emmerdale, Heartbeat, Doctors) as Dame Nursie; award-winning actor and director Daniel Taylor as The King; Josh Belward (Skin Deep) as The Prince; Christina Meehan (Around The World In 80s Days) as the Bad Fairy Carabosse and Maisie Sellwood, making her professional debut as Princess Rose. The panto opened on December 2 and runs until January 1.



Cinderella The Pantomime at The Globe, Blackpool Pleasure Beach.

Starring Charlotte Dawson as the Glamorous Stepmother; singing star Kevin Simm as Prince Charming; ITV weather presenter Emma Jesson as the Fairy Godmother and radio presenter Scott Gallagher as Buttons.

Selected dates from November 26 to December 24.

Elf: The Musical, Opera House. Based on the hit movie starring Will Ferrell, this heart-warming story follows the fortunes of Buddy, a young orphan child who mistakenly crawls into Santa's bag of gifts and is transported back to the North Pole.



The show features a fantastic flying sleigh, 20ft high candy canes, a giant screen with Pixar-style animation and amazing aerial stunts. Runs from December 15-26.

Festive Adventure Golf, Blackpool Pleasure Beach. The seafront attraction has received a seasonal makeover with Christmas trees galore and festive lighting. The course will be open on selected dates until Sunday January 1, 2023.

For full details of Blackpool's festive offer, including grottos, shopping and other shows and events, check out www.visitblackpool.com/christmas

ILLUMINATIONS TO SHINE ON CHANNEL FOUR



Blackpool Illuminations are playing a starring role in a new Channel 4 documentary which will air just before Christmas.

Lighting Up Christmas features five locations that specialise in festive lighting including Blackpool, Longleat, Kew Gardens, Chessington Theme Park, and the John Lewis store on London's Oxford Street.

The production company, True North, spent several days filming in Blackpool in the run-up to the launch of the Christmas By The Sea village. The crew also filmed the opening of the village, which features several light installations including Odyssey, two giant baubles (one of them pictured above), bespoke projection shows and more than a dozen Christmas trees.

Channel 4 says the programme will follow the people behind some of the best lighting displays in Britain and take a look behind the scenes on what it takes to provide spectacular Christmas attractions. The programme synopsis states:

"If you think of lights, you have to think Blackpool. The illuminations switch on is viewed by millions, but once they are glowing in September the real hard work to make the lights sparkle at Christmas begins. In collaboration with Laurence Llewelyn-Bowen the promenade is transformed, and the Tower is illuminated in the most magical of displays.

"What many people don't realise is Blackpool is at the centre of an incredible "Best of British" story. A locally-based factory (the Blackpool Illuminations Lightworks facility) not only makes all the lights for Blackpool, but now uses their well-honed skills to bring Christmas to the surrounding towns such as Chorley (where part of the special is filmed), Morecambe and Lytham.

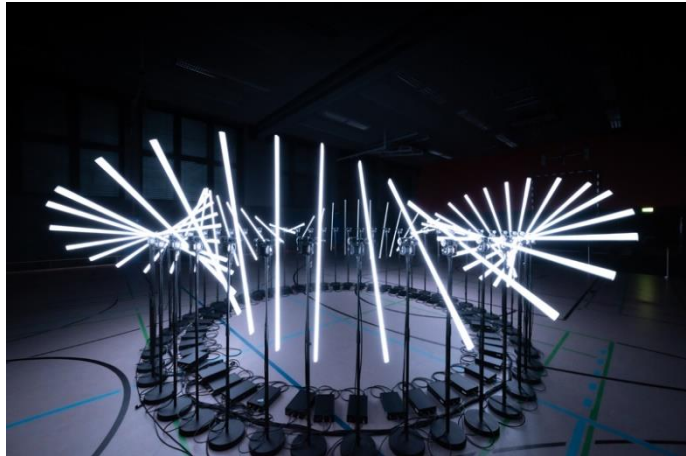
"This is a story of one of Britain's most famous towns at Christmas with British manufacturing at its heart."

The programme will be aired at 6pm on Channel 4 on Sunday 18 December.

LIGHTPOOL FESTIVAL

The award-winning festival returned for 16 nights in October with a spectacular programme of light-based art installations, live performance, 3D projection shows and family-friendly activities.

Two light-based installations created in French studios – Flux (*pictured right*) and CRYSTALLIZED - got their UK premieres in the new Blackpool Conference & Exhibition Centre at the Winter Gardens. A third, entitled Drop Of Light, created by Dutch artist Gus Van Bon, was also showcased.



The installations formed part of an extensive art trail which took in some of Blackpool's iconic venues and outdoor spaces including the Grand Theatre, St John's Church and Winter Gardens.

Live performances took place in the Blackpool Tower Ballroom and the hugely-popular Illuminated Tram Parade saw Blackpool's three illuminated trams travelling in convoy accompanied by the Spark! drummers and carnival characters. Planning is already underway for the 2023 festival.

ARTS COUNCIL RECOGNITION FOR BLACKPOOL ILLUMINATIONS

Blackpool Illuminations is to become an Arts Council National Portfolio Organisation (NPO) for the first time – providing a funding boost of almost £700k over the next three years.

A grant of £225k a year, starting in April 2023, will allow the Illuminations team to develop the work of Lightpool, the award-winning light art festival held in October every year.

The funding is part of a £43.5m investment in Levelling Up by the Arts Council with around 900 organisations being named within the new national portfolio.

Blackpool's Grand Theatre and Grundy Art Gallery, both existing NPOs, have been awarded a new three-year investment with the Grand receiving more than £1.5m and The Grundy £99k.

The Illuminations NPO funding will enable:

- Commissioning of new light art for the Illuminations display and Lightpool Festival collaborating with national and international artists;
- Delivery of an extensive talent development programme for artists and creatives with artists in residence; and developing new work using the expertise of the Illuminations team and the amazing facilities at Lightworks, the Illuminations manufacturing facility at Blackpool Airport Enterprise Zone;
- Expansion of the work with local cultural partners such as LeftCoast, Old Electric, and the Grand Theatre to provide year-round activity for children, young people and local communities to creatively take part and present work to a wider audience during the Illuminations season and as part of Lightpool Festival.

ODYSSEY UNVEILED



The biggest standalone light installation ever created for Blackpool Illuminations has brought a futuristic feel to the famous Golden Mile.

Standing at 11 metres high, Odyssey is a spectacular interactive display that has been co-created by international designer Jack Irving in collaboration with a highly-talented team of computer scientists from Lancaster University.

The outdoor installation comprises six large-scale towers that are combined with state-of-the-art technology to create an immersive projection show themed on undiscovered creatures lurking in the depths of the deep sea.

Odyssey, which has been manufactured at the Blackpool Illuminations Lightworks factory, has taken more than two years to design and build.

The design of the three towers is based on sea gods from Greek mythology: Poseidon, Aphrodite, and Amphitrite. Aphrodite, the tallest of the three towers, is an impressive 7 metres wide, and 11 metres high!

Incorporating 60 powerful lasers and a sound and light show, the installation provides an extraordinary interactive experience for visitors as they discover alien sea creatures swimming and swirling around their feet.

The creation of Odyssey has been assisted by the investment that Blackpool Council has received from the Towns Fund, which is aimed at rejuvenating the Illuminations and developing concepts that will attract new generations of visitors.

Situated on the Tower Festival Headland, alongside this year's Christmas By The Sea village, the free attraction will remain in place throughout the extended Illuminations season which ends on January 2, 2023.

WORLD FIREWORKS BLACKPOOL



Wales were crowned champions of Blackpool's annual World Fireworks competition after a spectacular display that dazzled tens of thousands of spectators.

The team from Celtic Fireworks put on their display over the seafront in the second of the heats on October 15 and outscored rival displays by Finland and Barbados.

The result was announced at the grand finale to Blackpool's fireworks season on Friday 28 October when Titanium put on a showcase event.

The judging panel praised the outstanding quality of the synchronised display by Wales, which opened with music from the nation's best-loved singing star, Sir Tom Jones, and continued with an upbeat medley of pop songs which gave a nod to Welsh heritage and other home-grown stars.

The panel said they were particularly impressed with the innovation from the Welsh team with a display that included love hearts in the sky and ended with what they described as "a stunning finale".

It was the first time that Wales had participated in the competition. Founded in 2004, Celtic Fireworks has become one of the largest importers of fireworks in the UK and has worked across the globe on events including the Olympic Games, Saudi National Day and Bastille celebrations.

The World Fireworks Championship Blackpool is one of the resort's most spectacular events, with the fireworks being launched from the beach in front of The Blackpool Tower. It is estimated that more than 50,000 people attended each of this year's free fireworks events.

FUNDING BOOST FOR BLACKPOOL CENTRAL



Levelling Up Secretary Michael Gove has pledged £40m to relocate Blackpool Magistrates' and County Court building, paving the way for the resort's £300m leisure development behind the Golden Mile.

Plans for the Blackpool Central scheme were approved in October 2021 and include family attractions, hotel, heritage quarter and a new public events space.

The first phase of work - to build a 1,300-space multi-storey (pictured right) to replace the existing surface car park - is already underway, but public sector investment and collaboration were required to relocate the courts from the 17-acre site so later phases could be completed.



Mr Gove visited Blackpool to announce that £40m will be transferred from the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities, to the Home Office and will pay for the relocation of the facility to a new state-of-the-art complex in Blackpool.

Blackpool Central, on the site of what was once one of the world's busiest railway stations, represents the largest single investment in Blackpool for over a century. It will see the area transformed into a year-round leisure destination, creating an estimated 1,000 jobs and attracting around 600,000 additional visitors to the resort every year.

Note: Bonny Street Market closed at the end of November to make way for the Blackpool Central development after occupying the site for more than 30 years. The market was originally set to close last year, but was given a one-year reprieve.

RECORD-BREAKING BOUNCE BACK

The speed and scale of Blackpool's post-pandemic recovery has been revealed in new tourism figures published a few weeks ago.

The annual STEAM report, which analyses data from tourism and hospitality businesses, showed that the resort attracted a record number of almost 19million visitors in 2021 – despite losing the first four months of the year to COVID lockdowns and restrictions.

The total figure of 18.81m is more than double the figure recorded in 2020 when pandemic restrictions on tourism were at the most severe level and 4% higher than the pre-pandemic year of 2019.

The report, which evaluates the volume and value of visitors to Lancashire, shows that Blackpool accounted for almost 40% of all visits to the county in 2021. It values the resort's tourism economy at more than £1.4bn, supporting in excess of 20,000 jobs.

The figures reflected the huge commitment made by the local authority in helping businesses through the pandemic. This included a two-month extension to the Illuminations season and a £1m investment in marketing and events to kick-start the tourism, retail and hospitality industry as it emerged from COVID restrictions.

The autumn and winter programme included the launch of the new Christmas By The Sea event which ran on the Tower Festival Headland from mid-November to the New Year and included a free skating rink, artificial snowfalls, light projection shows, log cabins and large-scale light installations. Over the duration of that event, there was a 75% increase in footfall on the seafront compared to pre-pandemic levels in 2019.

BLACKPOOL TOWER STEELWORKS

A local company has been appointed to carry out works on the steel structure of Blackpool Tower.

Blackpool Council has awarded a contract to complete maintenance and renewals to Bri-Met Ltd, a steelwork company based in Poulton.

The work on the Grade 1 listed building began in December with a team of 11 locally-employed people carrying out the works, which are expected to be completed by Easter next year.

LYTHAM FESTIVAL LINE-UP

The headline stars for next year's Lytham Festival have been announced. They include Jamiroquai, George Ezra, Sting, Lionel Richie, Def Leppard, and Mötley Crüe.

The line-up of international rock, pop and funk legends and multi-award-winning musicians will perform over five nights from June 28 to July 2 with special guests including Blondie, Kaiser Chiefs, Gabrielle and Kim Wilde. More acts are to be announced.

TOP AWARD FOR TIFFANY

Tiffany Belle Harper, the owner of Belleva House in St Chad's Road, Blackpool, was named "Most Sustainable Female Entrepreneur" at the European tourism sustainability award at the GrINN Awards 2022. The announcement was made at the World Travel Market in London. Belleva opened its doors in August 2021 and comprises seven individually designed double bedrooms. It stands out for its commitment to offering more eco-conscious accommodation, focusing on saving energy and water, reducing waste, limiting single-use plastic items and supporting small local businesses.

NEW SHOWS FOR 2023

A huge range of top-class entertainment is already lined up for 2023.

The Winter Gardens has announced several high-profile shows including:

Rock Of Ages, February 20-25
Mamma Mia!, March 21 to April 1
The Commitments, May 1-6
The SpongeBob Musical, June 13-17
Six The Musical, July 11-15
Greatest Days (the official Take That musical), August 15-19
Annie, September 4-9 September
Heathers, The Musical, September 12-16
Everybody's Talking About Jamie, November 21-25
Shrek The Musical, December 12-30



2023 will also see the legendary Peter Pan of pop, Sir Cliff Richard, performing in Blackpool, one of only three locations on his Blue Sapphire tour. He will appear at the Opera House on Tuesday 14 November, marking 60 years since he performed a summer season in the resort with The Shadows.

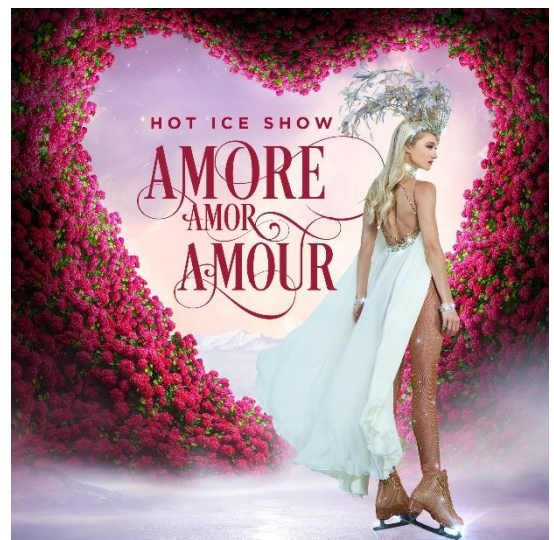


Meanwhile, The Grand Theatre has also revealed some of its highlights for the year ahead including:

The Rocky Horror Show, February 13-18
Titanic The Musical, March 21-25
The Mousetrap, June 19-24
Winnie The Pooh (a new musical stage adaptation of the classic children's books) from August 14-16

Elsewhere in the resort, there is a vast range of shows lined up at Viva Blackpool; the return of Kings & Queens to Central Pier and the famous Blackpool Tower Circus; performances of High Jinx in the Tower Circus on Fridays throughout the main season; and a new Hot Ice production, Amore Amor Amour at the Pleasure Beach Arena.

The World Senior Darts tour has announced a Champion of Champions event to the 2023 calendar. The inaugural event will take place at Viva Blackpool on March 25 and 26. It will be broadcast on Channel 5.



2. Town Centre Update

FRASERS TO TAKE OVER FORMER DEBENHAMS STORE

Blackpool Council and the Houndshill Centre management company, Ellandi, have announced the letting of the former Debenhams store to Frasers Group.

The retailer is preparing to refurbish the space over the coming months before opening a Frasers department store that will become an aspirational retail destination in Blackpool, housing a range of beauty, fashion, home, premium and contemporary accessories and children's-wear across a comprehensive mix of hundreds of brands.

In addition, the site will see Frasers Group open a Sports Direct store. Sports Direct is Europe's biggest retailer of sports and fitness footwear, clothing, and equipment and will bring the best brands in sports to consumers in Blackpool.



Frasers Group will also open a Flannels in the centre. The luxury retailer will bring a completely new experience to the shopping destination, allowing consumers to enjoy the leading brands in fashion.

Following its acquisition of the shopping centre in 2019, Blackpool Council has been committed to maximising its impact as a catalyst for town centre regeneration and as a key part of its strategy to aid the town's post-pandemic recovery.

Construction of a second phase including an IMAX and multi-screen cinema, restaurant and new Wilko store, are already underway and are also due to open next year. When completed, the extension is expected to create more than 100 new jobs and attract an additional 1.2m residents and visitors to the shopping centre each year.

Work on the second phase of Houndshill is progressing and on schedule with steelworks taking shape to build the structure that will feature ground-breaking IMAX with laser technology, as well as IMAX's 12-channel sound technology. IMAX has signed up to deliver state-of-the-art, immersive movie experiences at the new multi-screen development which will be known as the Backlot Cinema. The complex will feature one of the largest IMAX screens in the country, standing at a massive 10.8m.

Blackpool Council has also announced the acquisition of the building occupied by Marks & Spencer, which has entrances on both Church Street and Victoria Street, just a few yards away from the Houndshill. The Council said that this was a "strategic acquisition" given the prime location of the building and its importance in the ongoing revitalisation of the town centre, with M&S continuing to trade from the store.

TOWN CENTRE VACANCIES

The latest town centre vacancy report carried out at the start of November showed a slight increase, bringing to an end the five successive vacancy rate reductions seen over the previous five surveys. The survey showed a net increase of six vacant units compared to August 2022, bringing the overall total up to 135 and increasing the vacancy rate from 20.9% to 21.8%.

Despite this increase, it remains the second-lowest vacancy rate since May 2018. This vacancy rate upturn is largely due to a net increase of seven vacant units in the core retail area and a net increase of four vacant units in the periphery town centre area respectively. This increase was partially offset by a reduction of five vacant units in the principal retail core.

The newly-vacant units include: Millie's Cookies (Houndshill); Fidget Corner (Bank Hey Street); Life, Cully's World, Shadow (Clifton Street); Renaissance Tattoo (Abingdon Street); Il Nonno's (Talbot Road); Sprinkles (No. 1 Bickerstaffe Square); Crazy Horse (Queen Street); Pastels (Cedar Square); Records & Relics (Caunce Street) and Toys Plus (Topping Street).

Since August, several businesses have occupied previously vacant units, these include: Muffin Break (Houndshill); The Gift Box (Victoria Street); The Hole In Wand (Bank Hey Street); Café Meow (Birley Street); Sprinkles (Cedar Square); Catering Equipment Sale, Furniture Matters (Topping Street).

Area	Total Units	Total Vacant Units	Vacancy Rate
Principal Retail Core (Local Plan boundary based around Houndshill, Victoria Street, Bank Hey Street, Church Street, Corporation Street and Adelaide Street West)	158	22	13.9%
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	91	19.7%
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)	619	135	21.8%
Periphery Town Centre Area (the Town Centre Boundary area excluding the units contained within the Core Retail Area)	157	44	28.0%

WINTER GARDENS FOOTBALL FAN ZONE

The Olympia Exhibition Hall in the Winter Gardens has been transformed into a World Cup fan zone, screening all 64 of the tournament games. Artificial turf has been laid throughout and the venue can accommodate up to 1,000 fans. Catering outlets have been provided and there is pre-match entertainment and post-match parties for all England games. Entry to the venue is free for standing room, with a £10 charge for a guaranteed seat in front of the large screen. (**Note:** Places for the England v France quarter final on Saturday 10 December are already sold out). Further details at: www.wintergardensblackpool.co.uk



3. General News

SUPPORT FOR WHITE RIBBON

Blackpool is showing its support for White Ribbon UK, a charity organisation that works to prevent violence against women and girls. It was established by a group of men who wanted to stand up to violence after the shooting of 14 female students at Montreal University in Canada in 1989.

Fylde Coast Women's Aid is a local organisation and women's refuge that works to end domestic violence against women throughout the Fylde Coast. They deliver specialist White Ribbon awareness training to numerous agencies and work closely with the licensed premises and other town centre establishments with a view to making the streets of Blackpool a safer place.

Blackpool Council is supporting Fylde Coast Women's Aid, along with other organisations including Blackpool and The Fylde College, Blackpool FC Community Trust, and AFC Fylde.

Various events are taking place in support of the White Ribbon message. The Blackpool Tower was lit up in white on November 25 to mark National White Ribbon Day and again on Saturday 10 December to complete 16 days of action.

The Winter Gardens has been lit up throughout and White Ribbon posters and beer mats have been placed in the fan zone that has been created for the World Cup tournament.

Throughout the 16 days of action, a White Ribbon flag is flying above the Town Hall and the message, "Blackpool Council supports White Ribbon", is flashing every 15 seconds on both the approach and exit Illumination arches on the Promenade as a symbol of solidarity. Staff at Council gyms are wearing White Ribbon t-shirts and using White Ribbon water bottles.

There is also an information stall at Sainsbury's store on Talbot Road to raise awareness and recruit White Ribbon ambassadors and champions.

Blackpool FC is providing a match-day notice in the programme of the home match v Birmingham on December 10, with notices on the big screen at half-time and on their social media channels. White Ribbon beer mats will also be placed in the ground on match-day and in the surrounding pubs.

GOLF CLUB PLANS DROPPED

Plans to build a £45m adventure park on the east side of Blackpool Stanley Park Golf Course have been dropped.

UKAP, the wholly owned subsidiary of Holmes Investment Properties, the UK property investment company focused on the leisure sector, and Blackpool Council, have agreed not to proceed with the redevelopment of part of the course. The decision follows feasibility work undertaken by UKAP.

The developer was planning to build an adrenalin park and holiday lodges on part of the course on the east side of East Park Drive, with a nine-hole course retained and upgraded on the west side.

The 18-hole golf course will now continue to operate in its existing format for the time being. The parties are working together to secure an alternative site for the development, the details of which will be released in due course.

UKAP retains a lease of Stanley Park Golf Course and HIP will continue to operate the golf course through its operating subsidiary. Plans for the Family Golf Centre on the site are to be finalised in early 2023. The site will include a new Pod Range, short game practice area, redevelopment of the clubhouse and facilities to include a new retail store.

BLACKPOOL FC OPENS ITS DOORS

Blackpool Football Club has announced it is opening the Moretti Lounge within the Bloomfield Road stadium as a warm hub. The club said it wanted to provide families and those socially isolated and vulnerable with a place to keep warm, socialise and have access to free WiFi, coffee, biscuits and hot food. The hub will remain open until March 2023.

TOP AWARDS FOR BLACKPOOL TRANSPORT

Blackpool Transport has been awarded two prestige titles at this year's UK Bus Awards.

Winners of the UK Bus Operator of the Year and Gold Award winners of the Top Shire Operator of the Year, Blackpool Transport have dedicated the awards to their hard working and dependable teams, who continue to keep Blackpool moving despite the challenges of the last few years.

The awards, presented in London on November 15, are some of the most prestigious in the UK for the industry, with operators from far and wide competing in multiple categories. Blackpool Transport's win follows a pause in the awards scheme over the last two years as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

ROYAL HONOUR FOR STANLEY PARK

Blackpool has been nominated to receive a special tree from The Queen's Green Canopy (QGC) "Tree of Trees" as a message of hope, regeneration and optimism to the nation as part of the Platinum Jubilee weekend celebrations.



Blackpool's Stanley Park joins over 300 locations across the UK who were recently announced by the QGC as recipients of these special trees in The Queen's name, which are gifted in a pot embossed with Her Majesty's cypher.

The tree becomes part of the living legacy in honour of Her Majesty, joining over a million trees already planted across the UK as part of The Queen's Green Canopy.

Philip Welsh
Head of Tourism & Communications