



Blackpool Business Leadership Group

Business Partnerships Report – March 31, 2023

1. Visitor Economy Update

HERE COMES THE GRUFFALO!



Merlin Entertainments has announced a brand-new world class attraction will launch on Blackpool's Golden Mile this May.

In a world first, The Gruffalo & Friends Clubhouse will feature favourite characters from six of the best-loved stories by author Julia Donaldson and illustrator Axel Scheffler to create a spectacular indoor play adventure.

The £2.3 million investment has been 18 months in the making. Distinct play zones are inspired by The Gruffalo, The Gruffalo's Child, Zog, The Snail And The Whale, Room On The Broom; and The Highway Rat. The attraction will include play suitable for children under 10, with a toddler play area specifically for those under three.

Developed in partnership with Magic Light and Blackpool Council, the attraction is set to open next door to SEA LIFE Blackpool in May 2023. The new experience will join Merlin's seven other attractions in the resort including The Blackpool Tower, Madame Tussauds, and Peter Rabbit™: Explore and Play, making it a key destination for families of all ages.

ILLUMINATIONS EXTENDED FOR 2023



Blackpool's annual Illuminations display will once again be extended by two months after another dramatic rise in visitor numbers over the winter months.

VisitBlackpool has announced that the Illuminations season will start on Friday 1 September and run until Monday 1 January, 2024.

The decision follows the release of new figures showing an 18 per cent increase in promenade footfall during November and December over what was a spectacular performance in 2021. The footfall also shows an increase of almost 60 per cent compared to the pre-pandemic year of 2019 when the Illuminations season ended in the first week of November.

The latest figures reveal that the Christmas By The Sea event also proved an invaluable boost to Blackpool's tourism economy. Promenade footfall for the period of the Christmas event (November 18 to January 2 inclusive) was recorded at over 6 million, an increase of more than 10 per cent compared to 2021 which was again an exceptional year in terms of growth in visitor numbers.

CORONATION WEEKEND

Blackpool's Tourism Business Improvement District (TBID) is planning a special event to mark the King's Coronation.

The event, on Sunday 7 May, will feature a heritage tram parade along the seafront and a Big Lunch celebration with live entertainment on the Tower Festival Headland.

There are also plans to extend the celebration into the evening to coincide with the Coronation Concert at Windsor Castle. One of the main features of the concert will be Lighting Up The Nation, as iconic locations across the UK (including Blackpool) are lit up using projections, lasers and illuminations. Watch out for further details at www.visitblackpool.com

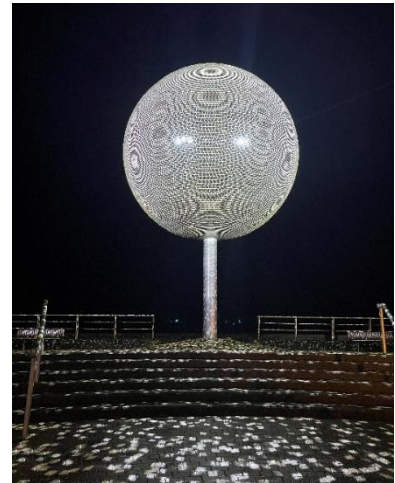
MIRROR BALL LIGHTING

The iconic Mirror Ball installation, reputed to be the biggest in the world, has been given a dazzling new look.

Six new projectors have been installed to create a colour-changing light show each night.

The South Beach artwork, created by artist Michael Trainor, had all of its 47,000 mirror tiles replaced at the end of 2021.

The new light projectors use 75% per cent less energy than before.



MEETBLACKPOOL MARKETING CAMPAIGN

Meet Blackpool, Blackpool's conference and exhibition arm, is investing £450,000 into a marketing campaign to raise awareness for the town's business events sector.

The campaign 'Business in Blackpool, always a pleasure' has been designed to showcase the town's blend of quality venues, technology and new infrastructure alongside its entertainment roots.

Over the past five years, more than £500m has been invested in improving the resort's connectivity and infrastructure.

The Winter Gardens Blackpool Conference and Exhibition Centre is the largest venue of its kind in the north of England, providing 2,400sqm of event space to accommodate 2,000 visitors over two floors.

When integrated with the wider Winter Gardens complex the space has an overall delegate capacity of 7,000.

HITTING THE HEIGHTS

Blackpool's Ascent Trampoline Park is bouncing into the new season on the back of a £100k investment in new play equipment.

A new three-tier Ninja assault course opened towards the end of last year, with a dozen features aimed at children aged seven to 14.

The course is included in the attraction's all-in-one ticket admission.



TRAMTOWN



Artist Impression of the new-look Tramtown. Credit: John Bridge Studios

Plans for a brand new tourist attraction based on Blackpool's heritage tram fleet have been unveiled.

The proposals would see Tramtown, the existing historical tram depot in Rigby Road, repaired and redeveloped, to include a brand new exhibition hall, viewing platform and cafe.

Work on the Council-owned site will begin shortly thanks to a substantial investment of £800,000, with further stages of the project set to be completed over the next four years.

Tramtown was originally opened to the public in 2022, allowing visitors to look around the depot and see some of the 55 different tram models on show.

The first phase of work will be to move the existing engineering workshops all under one roof. Future phases will see roof repairs carried out, a new glass frontage, and an exhibition space with walkways, conference facilities and a cafe.

One of the star attractions is set to be the infamous tram 710, which famously knocked down villain Alan Bradley on ITV's Coronation Street in 1989. Since being re-liveried, it had been gathering dust in Fleetwood docks until the team at Blackpool Transport secured its return to the Blackpool depot.

Meanwhile, the tram depot has been awarded a Heritage Plaque by the National Transport Trust to mark the historic significance of the building.

The purpose-built tram shed was constructed in 1935 and was capable of housing 120 trams. It is now the last operational first-generation depot in the UK and one of only three tram depots in the world that operate double deck trams on a mainline tramway.



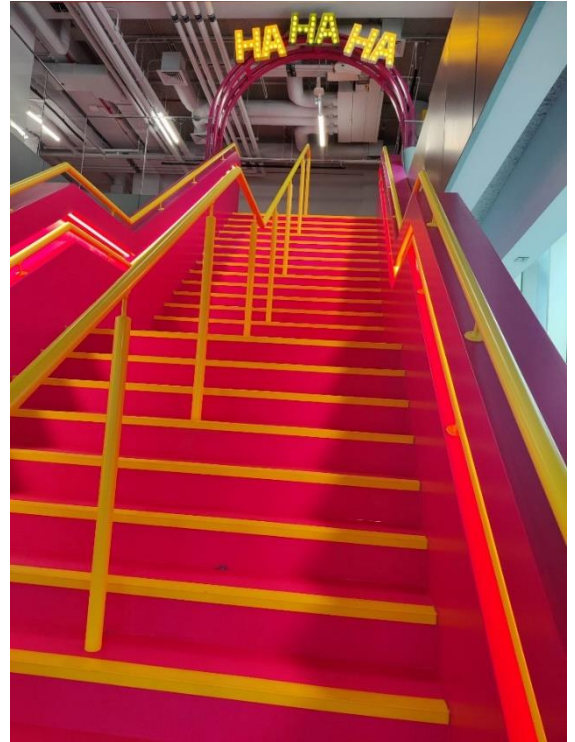
SNEAK PREVIEW OF SHOWTOWN

A sneak preview of Blackpool's planned new museum of fun and entertainment has been released.

The interior shots of the seafront attraction were released to mark the completion of the construction phase of the project. This image (right) shows the staircase leading to the attraction, which is due to open on the first floor of the Sands Venue building early next year.

The 18-month build has been undertaken by Conlons. The next phase will see the Showtown team working with Beck Interiors to build the exhibition areas and install the vast assortment of objects and interactives that will bring the museum to life.

Showtown will celebrate Blackpool's unique history as the home of popular entertainment.



PRIDE OF BLACKPOOL

Blackpool Zoo's new £1.5m facility for big cats is on schedule to open in late spring 2023.

The previous Pride of Blackpool attraction, which housed Amur tigers and African lions, is currently being extended and renovated to create a state-of-the-art facility designed around the specific need of each species.

Significantly increased indoor space and a larger off-show management area will be complemented by extended outdoor paddocks and improved keeper facilities, which will enable the best possible care for the magnificent animals.

New, larger windows will mean visitors can enjoy panoramic indoor and outdoor views of the lions and tigers.

BLACKPOOL EVENTS GUIDE

A new pocket-size Events Guide has been produced to mark the start of the 2023 tourism season in Blackpool.

The guide, which covers April to December, is packed with hundreds of event listings ranging from West End musicals, pop concerts, dramas, pantos and variety shows at numerous venues including the Opera House, Grand Theatre, Viva, Funny Girls and the resort's three piers.

Copies of the guide can be picked up at the Tourist Information Centre on Central Promenade or it can be viewed online at: [Blackpool Events Guide 2023 by VisitBlackpool - Issuu](#)



VALHALLA IS BACK!

Following a £4m investment, Blackpool Pleasure Beach has officially announced the much-anticipated return of the world's best dark ride, Valhalla. It will open in time for the park's 2023 season, with technical rehearsals starting in April.

Featuring many of the exciting elements that made the ride so popular when it first launched in 2000, the team at Blackpool Pleasure Beach have hinted that there are some surprises in store now that the ride has been truly brought into the modern era.



Riders can expect to be taken on a fantastical journey to Valhalla, boarding a longboat and travelling into a parallel world guided by a brave Viking named Ivàr. While on their adventure, riders will get to experience the elements - fire, ice and lots of water!

BLACKPOOL COMEDY FESTIVAL

The Blackpool Comedy Festival is returning to the Winter Gardens this year for the first time since 2019.

The Winter Gardens has joined forces with the Comedy Station to deliver two high profile line-ups on July 7 and 8.

Friday Night Laughs will feature Blackpool's own Ryan Gleeson acting as MC, joined by Jojo Sutherland, Angelos Epithemiou, Tom Stade and Eddie Izzard. Eddie is one of the UK's most celebrated comics and has an equally stellar reputation as a film, television and stage actor.

Saturday Night Live will see Ryan hosting a line-up featuring Scott Bennett, Nina Gilligan, Tez Illyas and Seann Walsh.

Ryan is resident host of the Comedy Station Comedy Club, the first and longest running comedy club in Blackpool from its home on Bank Hey Street.

The two new events join the already announced Legends Of Variety that will bring the festival to a close on Sunday 9 July.

Alongside the headline events, Showtown, Blackpool's new museum of fun and entertainment, will host a series of events throughout the weekend funded by the Government through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

KAREN'S DINER

An attraction that bills itself as "the rudest restaurant in the world" is about to pop up in Blackpool.

The company behind Karen's Diners currently have multiple outlets across Australia, America and the UK including Birmingham, Manchester and Sheffield.

They guarantee great New York-style food mixed with poor service and offensive staff in an outlandish culinary experience.

Karen's On Tour is bringing the concept to various pop up locations around the country including Tiffany's Hotel on North Promenade where it will run from June 4 until July 16.

RED ARROWS RETURNING THIS SUMMER

The world-famous Red Arrows display team will return to Blackpool this summer to perform on both days of the annual Air Show.

They will be joined on Saturday 12 and Sunday 13 August by the RAF Typhoon display team and the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight who are also confirmed for both days of the free event.

Last year, the Air Show was one of the region's biggest events, attracting an estimated 250,000 people to the Promenade over the two days.



The Red Arrows, one of the world's foremost aerial aerobatic display teams will perform high above the seafront opposite The Blackpool Tower.

The weekend show will also feature a whole host of incredible flying machines with the full programme of civil and military aircraft to be confirmed in coming weeks.

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.

INTERNATIONAL YOUTH CUP TOURNAMENT

Blackpool is preparing to welcome 350 youth football teams and over 10,000 attendees during Easter and May Day bank holiday weekends as they return for the Blackpool Cup tournaments.

Blackpool Council and VisitBlackpool will once again host the events in partnership with Euro-Sporting, organiser of Europe's largest international youth football tournaments.

The tournaments will bring a major boost to the local economy as well as highlighting Blackpool's excellent credentials as a family-friendly resort, capable of hosting major International sporting events.

Teams are travelling from seven countries across Europe, including Netherlands, Poland, Ireland and the four home nations together with more than 70 local teams for what is sure to be an exciting festival of football and fun.

Both weekends kick off with an official opening ceremony at the iconic Blackpool Tower Circus, the first on Friday 7 April, the second on Friday 28 April. Matches will be played over both weekends at the new facilities on Common Edge Road at the Airport Enterprise Zone and UCLan Sports Arena.

This year the Blackpool Cup is supporting two local charities, the NHS Blue Skies Hospital Fund and Blackpool Carers along with the Butterfly Tree Charity in Zambia. There will be donation stations set up for people to bring along any old kit and boots, which will be sent to Zambia after the competitions along with the tournament match balls.

SEA LIFE TACKLES POLLUTION

SEA LIFE Blackpool is helping tackle the issues of plastic pollution and micro-plastics with the installation of a new floor – made from over half a million plastic straws!

The attraction has used 540,000 straws to create a new floor for visitors to walk across as they make their way through the mirage of tunnels and rock pools housing some of the UK's rarest creatures.

The floor has been made from Recycled Bound, the world's first sustainable resin. Recycle Bound is made from waste plastic - straws, bottles and food packaging - which is sorted, crushed and granulated down to grain. The grain is then mixed with resin to create the floor surface.

It took four days to install the new floor, which depicts turtles and sharks as visitors make their way around.

At the end of its life, the floor can be broken down and reused. An average of 70m² per recycled base could offset one tonne of CO₂, the equivalent of planting six trees.

DORIC HOTEL INVESTMENT

Blackpool's Doric Hotel has been transformed thanks to a £250k investment from its owners, the Waterside Hotel Group. During a five-week closure at the turn of the year, the reception area, lounge, bar and communal corridors, were renovated.

The Waterside Hotel Group, which also owns and operates the Park House Hotel and Pavilion On The Prom in Blackpool, is continuing to invest in both the Doric and Park House by refurbishing around four bedrooms in each hotel each month.

LANCASHIRE TOURISM AWARDS

The stars of Lancashire's tourism and hospitality have been honoured at a special awards ceremony. The 2022 Lancashire Tourism Awards were held at the new Blackpool Conference and Exhibition Centre, with Steve Royle of Britain's Got Talent as the guest presenter.

Among the local winners were:

Business Events Venue Of The Year: Merlin Events, Blackpool

Cultural Venue/Organisation: Winter Gardens

Experience Of The Year: Blackpool Pleasure Beach "Walk The..." Experiences

Large Hotel Of The Year: Hampton By Hilton, Blackpool Council

Hospitality & Tourism Student Of The Year: Charlie Nicholls, C&G L3 Diploma in Professional Cookery at Blackpool and the Fylde College

Blackpool's Christmas By The Sea and the British Country Music Festival at the Winter Gardens were finalists in the Large Event and Small Event Of The Year categories respectively.

COUNTRY MUSIC FESTIVAL

Musician and song-writing legend Graham Nash OBE has been announced as the headliner for The British Country Music Festival, as he returns to Blackpool - the town of his birth - to perform at the Winter Gardens this autumn.



Nash, who rose to fame as a founding member of both The Hollies and Crosby, Stills and Nash (CSN), was awarded the “Legendary Spirit of Americana Free Speech in Music” award at Americana Fest in Nashville and the “Lifetime Achievement Award at the UK Americana Awards in 2017.

The three day songwriters’ festival runs over the weekend of September 1-3. The Friday night headliner is Irish-born country singer Donna Taggart. Nash will headline the Saturday, with the Sunday night headliner to be confirmed.

The British Country Music Festival is now in its fourth year at the Winter Gardens.

HIGH FIVE!

Blackpool has been named as one of the most popular UK destinations to visit this spring. The annual travel index published by TripAdvisor ranked Blackpool fifth, ahead of Windermere and city destinations such as Manchester and Birmingham. Last year, the resort was ranked in the top three Christmas destinations.

ELMER ART TRAIL

Elmer, the much-loved patchwork elephant, is coming to Blackpool in a major event that will boost tourism, while raising vital funds for Brian House children’s hospice.

As part of a partnership with Wild In Art and Andersen Press, the parade will see 30 large Elmer sculptures inspired by David McKee’s beloved children’s books, each uniquely decorated by established and up and coming artists. They will create a parade through the town that can be enjoyed by visitors and locals for eight weeks in spring 2024.



Note: Full details of the event will be provided as one of the agenda items at the next BBLG meeting on Friday 31 March.

Businesses are also invited to attend an official Elmer launch night which will take place at Blackpool Football Club on Wednesday 5 April. You can secure your place(s) at <https://www.brianhouse.org.uk/elmerblackpool/> or alternatively email linzi.warburton@nhs.net

2. Town Centre Update

ABINGDON STREET MARKET: NEW OPERATORS



The operators of the newly-transformed Abingdon Street Market have been announced.

The Little Blackpool Leisure Company Limited, comprising Blackpool-born directors Andrew Shields and James Lucas, and locally-based Jake Whittington, have agreed terms with Blackpool Council to bring the market into their portfolio of local businesses.

The market will join the company's existing Blackpool ventures including the South American themed Common Bar & Kitchen and Nook Wine Room & Terrace.

The renovated market will see a bright, modern space created with new glazed doors and windows, including:

- A new 250-capacity seating area for socialising and enjoying food and beverages purchased in the market
- Six dedicated food outlets, two bar areas and café/coffee stall
- A range of units providing food produce, artisan stalls and flexible retail space for independent traders

The first phase of Abingdon Street Market is anticipated to open in June 2023. If any business is interested in learning more about trading/general opportunities available at Abingdon Street Market, please contact Little Blackpool Leisure Limited via this link: www.abingdonstreet.market

Blackpool Council used £3.6m of funding from Getting Building Fund to purchase the market and carry out a full internal refurbishment securing its long-term future.

Note: Little Blackpool Leisure will be presenting their plans at the BBLG meeting on Friday 31 March.

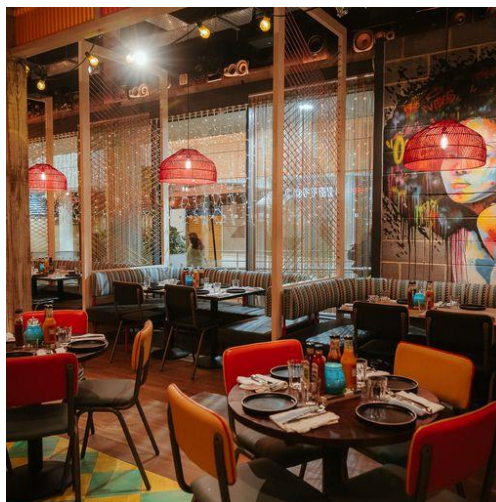
TURTLE BAY HEADING TO BLACKPOOL

Caribbean restaurant and bar, Turtle Bay, is set to open its first venue in Blackpool this summer.

The 3,800 sq ft restaurant and bar will be located in the former Che Bar and Coco site on the ground floor of The Brook Group-owned newly-restored Forshaw's Hotel (formerly the Ibis) on Talbot Square.

It will have a Promenade frontage and is intended to be opened just in time for the summer season.

Turtle Bay specialises in Caribbean-inspired soul food and rum cocktails, served in an island inspired interior.



A day-to-night menu will be served starting with Turtle Bay's Caribbean brunch, taking in lunch, small plates, and dinner as well as the brand's tropical cocktail menu and late-night bites. Turtle Bay's famous bottomless brunch will also be served up daily.

Turtle Bay Blackpool is also looking for people to join its team with a range of positions available both front and back of house.

WINTER GARDENS UPGRADE

Work is underway on the first phase of a £1.7m programme of investment at the Winter Gardens.

The Galleon Bar, a recreation of a ship from the Spanish Armada and which first opened in 1931, has been given a bar re-fit to accommodate more staff and to protect the heritage of the site.

The oak beams in the bar were designed by Andrew Mazzei and were created in replica plasterwork. As part of the works the beams have been restored.

The project marks the first major changes made in over 40 years to the Galleon Bar and will improve service quality and speed for customers.

The next phase of the five-year programme of renovation works, will see improvements to the highly popular Old Victoria bar and cabaret venue.

TOWN CENTRE PARKING

A 700-space multi-storey car park is planned on the town centre site once occupied by the Syndicate nightclub.

Blackpool Council has identified the need for a significant increase in parking provision due to various redevelopment projects that are in the pipeline or nearing completion.

These include the extended Houndhill Shopping Centre, the £300m Blackpool Central leisure development, and a new civil service hub and Multiversity both within the Talbot Gateway regeneration area.

The new multi-storey would be on a site at the junction of Church Street and King Street, part of which is already used as a surface car park. The Syndicate nightclub building was demolished in 2014.

TOWN CENTRE VACANCIES

In February this year, there was a net decrease of seven occupied units in the town centre compared to November 2022, bringing the overall total down to 477 and decreasing the occupancy rate from 78.2% to 77.1%.

The latest occupancy rate downturn is due to a net reduction of three occupied units in the core retail area and a further net loss of four occupied units in the town centre periphery area.

Despite this, the latest occupancy rate remains higher than the two surveys prior to the first national Covid-19 lockdown (75.9% and 76% respectively).

Encouragingly since November, a number of businesses have occupied previously vacant units. These include: Blackpool Amusements, Fidget Corner (Bank Hey St); Vape Lux (Corporation St); Revelry Bar (Birley St); Top Boys Basement, Northside Lettings (Clifton St); Solutions Bar, Big Cat Sports Bar, The Underground (Talbot Rd); Hip Hop Chicken (Cedar Square); Aunty Social, Cutting Point, Second Hand Bookshop (Topping St) and Love At First Bite (Deansgate).

The newly-vacant units include: The Gift Box, Sea Breeze Café (Victoria St); Charabanc (Coronation Street); The Chinese Buffet (Church Street); The Crypt, The Lounge, Neighbourhood Sub (Birley St); R&B Kitchen, RSPCA: Kindness Beats Cruelty, Millennium Barbers, Positive Approach Care (Talbot Road); Africa Central, Top Boys (Abingdon St) and Cosmic Fireworks (Promenade).

February 2023: Vacant Units

Area	Total Units ¹	Total Units		Rates (%)	
		Occupied	Vacant	Occupancy	Vacancy
Principal Retail Core (Local Plan boundary based around Houndshell, Victoria St, Bank Hey St, Church St, Corporation St and Adelaide St West)	157	133	24	84.7%	15.3%
Core Retail Area (as above but also including Topping St, Queen St, Clifton St, Birley St, Market St, Talbot Rd, Abingdon St and Cedar Sq)	461	368	93	79.8%	20.2%
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 Rd, Dickson Rd, King St, Cookson St, Caunce St and the new Talbot Gateway area)	619	477	142	77.1%	22.9%
Periphery Town Centre Area (the Town Centre Boundary area excluding the units contained within the Core Retail Area)	158	109	49	69.0%	31.0%

3. General News

NEW CCTV SYSTEM

Blackpool's CCTV system has been given a £2m overhaul – and a new home.

The upgrade of the system means a big improvement on the quality of images and in the number of cameras operating across the town.

The control room, which has moved to a new location to the south of Blackpool, has been built by the same company that has fitted security at Buckingham Palace and Downing Street.

Terrorist attacks, including the Manchester Arena bombing in 2017, mean local authorities and the emergency services have stronger duties than ever when it comes to protecting the public.

As part of the upgrade, the number of cameras has been increased from 92 to more than 300, with parks including Stanley Park included in the coverage so vandals can be caught in the act.

Around 100 cameras will also be fitted with Tannoy systems to enable public announcements or to make miscreants aware they are being watched.

As well as fighting crime, the system will improve public safety by giving police instant views of crowds during big events such as Air Show, the Illuminations Switch-on, and the World Fireworks Championships. The system is also useful in tracking down missing children.

Blackpool Council agreed in September 2021 to invest £2m into improving the CCTV network and moving the control room from the town centre to its new base.

The control room is manned by a combination of paid staff and volunteers, and in the next few months further volunteers will be recruited through the Police Volunteer website.



NEW AMBULANCE HQ

Blackpool's new ambulance station is now up and running with staff relocated to the facility on Waterloo Road from stations across the Fylde coast. The new station boasts state-of-the-art facilities aimed at improving working conditions for staff and cutting down the time it takes for vehicles to get on the road.

North West Ambulance Service (NWAS) will now move to a "hub and spoke" system as part of its plans to modernise the service. This means ambulance stations at Fleetwood, Lytham, Wesham and Thornton will close with vehicles and crews starting shifts from "spoke" locations in the vicinity of the old sites. These could include health centres, fire stations and police stations.

COMMON EDGE SPORTS VILLAGE

Work is underway to upgrade the roads around the new £5m Common Edge Community Sports Village.

The works include widening the new Division Lane West junction to safely allow the local community to access the new sporting facilities and car park, which will ease traffic away from the current entrance at Jepson Way. Improvements will also be made to the Division Lane East junction including widening the entrance, reducing the gradient of the road and improving the street lighting.

The new facilities include changing rooms and spectator pavilion, a floodlit 3G pitch, floodlit rugby pitch, training area and 194-space car park. Although the new changing rooms are now complete, they will only be opened to the public once the new junction is finished. Work is due to be completed in May 2023.

BLACKPOOL FC COMMUNITY SPORTS VILLAGE

Blackpool Football Club has been granted planning permission to develop a community sports village adjacent to its Bloomfield Road Stadium.

Currently comprising a surface car park and storage facility, the 5.5-acre brownfield site will be transformed into two enclosed community sports pitches, sports pavilion, and storage facility.

A full-sized, 11-a-side artificial grass pitch will be built adjacent to an FA-sized five-a-side pitch, surrounded by viewing space for spectators. Both will be floodlit.

The development also includes a public plaza and fan zone, and the existing car park will be relocated to create 160 car parking spaces, including eight accessible and 12 EV charging bays. Pedestrian and vehicle access will be provided via Seaside Way and Field Street.

Once complete, the sports village will be operated by the Blackpool FC Community Trust.

BUS SHELTER INVESTMENT

Almost £1m is being invested in new bus shelters as part of a five-year rolling programme across Blackpool.

After securing an initial £175k of funding from the Local Transport Plan (LTP), Blackpool Council has procured a contract with Euroshel to replace and repair damaged shelters.

Over the past few months, 14 new shelters have been installed across the bus network with a further eight to be completed during the coming weeks. That programme is being complemented by the upgrading of advertising opportunities in the bus shelter stock which has enabled the purchase of a further 20 shelters.

Some of these new shelters will include digital advertising screens that will be used to generate additional income to maintain and replace shelters.

As part of the rolling programme, it is anticipated that further allocations of £195k per annum will be secured over the next three years, creating the potential to replace around 15 shelters each year.

Philip Welsh
Head of Tourism & Communications