



Blackpool Business Leadership Group

Business Partnerships Report – May 26, 2023

1. Visitor Economy Update

BLACKPOOL IN THE LIMELIGHT

Blackpool found itself in the international spotlight over the first half of May, featuring in two of the biggest TV events of this century.

The resort was one of just 10 UK destinations chosen to take part in the Lighting Up The Nation display (*pictured right*) as part of the spectacular Windsor Castle Coronation Concert – an event that was watched by more than 12million viewers.

The following week, Blackpool was among the places featured in a series of “video postcards” shown during the Eurovision Song Contest in Liverpool, first in the semi-finals and then in the grand final which was watched by a record UK audience of 11million and an estimated global audience of more than 160million.

To cap a fantastic fortnight of positive publicity for the resort, the Comedy Carpet and Blackpool Tower were then featured in one of the video clips shown during the BAFTA awards event screened live on the BBC from the Royal Festival Hall in London.



CELEBRATION FIT FOR A KING



Blackpool staged a spectacular programme of free family entertainment to mark the King's Coronation.

The event, which took place on Sunday 7 May, included a magnificent parade of 11 heritage trams, an afternoon of top-quality live entertainment featuring a host of performers, an outdoor picnic area, and a free screening of the Coronation concert from Windsor Castle.

It also saw the Golden Mile lit up with a dazzling display of purple and gold illuminations as Blackpool joined the Lighting Up The Nation tribute during the concert before staging its own glittering royal finale with a bespoke, synchronised light show on The Blackpool Tower.



Thousands of people lined the promenade for the tram parade, which stretched from Pleasure Beach to Bispham, and thousands more joined the afternoon and evening programme of events on the Tower Festival Headland.

The Coronation celebrations were staged by the Blackpool Tourism Improvement District (TBID) in association with VisitBlackpool and Blackpool Transport.

BLACKPOOL SEASON LAUNCH 2023

Blackpool has unveiled a dazzling multi-million pound programme of marketing, events and new attractions to celebrate the start of a new tourism season.

The highlights were revealed to an audience of hoteliers and other tourism businesses by VisitBlackpool and resort partners at the annual season launch in the new £30m Conference & Exhibition Centre in the historic Winter Gardens. These included:

- More than £15m of investment in new attractions including the world's first Gruffalo & Friends Clubhouse now open on the Golden Mile; a new big cat enclosure at Blackpool Zoo; the return of the award-winning Valhalla thrill ride at Blackpool Pleasure Beach; a new three-tier Ninja assault course at Ascent Trampoline Park and a new multiplex cinema in the town centre featuring one of the country's largest IMAX screens. *(See additional items for further details of the cinema, zoo and Valhalla attractions)*
- A repeat of the "Only In Blackpool" destination marketing campaign developed in partnership with Merlin Entertainments and other resort partners. The summer campaign will again feature resort "ambassador" Nigel C Gull giving TV viewers a whistle-stop tour of the resort.
- The planned opening of a new four-star Holiday Inn and Marco Pierre White restaurant; a 70-bedroom extension to the Hampton By Hilton; and a much-enhanced hospitality offer with the summer arrival of a Turtle Bay restaurant and newly-regenerated Abingdon Street Market with multiple food and drink concessions *(see also Town Centre Updates)*.
- The planned return of the annual Switch-On ceremony to the outdoors where the Illuminations will be turned on as part of a free event with music and family entertainment. For the past three years, the Switch-On ceremony has been performed indoors with a limited audience, largely due to COVID restrictions. Further details will be revealed in the weeks ahead.
- Another two-month extension to the Illuminations season with the lights shining nightly from September 1 until January 1, 2024. The Illuminations team is working on three brand new installations for the 2023 season which will be unveiled over the coming weeks.
- A packed calendar of free events including the two-day Blackpool Air Show with the Red Arrows performing on both days, as well as Ride The Lights, World Fireworks Championship Blackpool, the award-winning Lightpool Festival, and the return of Christmas By The Sea.
- A vast selection of West End shows and live entertainment at venues including the Winter Gardens, Grand Theatre, and Pleasure Beach, including Six The Musical; Annie; Shrek The Musical; The SpongeBob Musical; and a new production of Hot Ice. Sir Cliff Richard will also mark 60 years since he first performed a summer season in Blackpool with a concert at the Opera House.



The launch event also saw the publication of a free entertainment guide containing hundreds of listings for shows, musicals and concerts running from Easter to the end of the year at numerous venues including the piers and Viva Blackpool.

VALHALLA IS BACK!



Valhalla, one of Blackpool Pleasure Beach's best-loved rides, has officially reopened after a £4m investment.

Known as the UK's wettest rollercoaster and repeatedly voted the world's best water ride, Valhalla, has been reimagined.

Riders are immersed in more than four minutes of high-speed action, seeing them engulfed by elements including fire, water, snow and thunder and lightning. The half-mile journey on a Viking longboat takes them into a parallel world to reach Valhalla, experiencing plunging temperatures of minus 20°C and highs of more than 43°C.

The ride, which bears the tagline "You will get wet, you may get soaked", includes a reservoir holding over one and a half million gallons of water – enough to fill more than two Olympic sized swimming pools.

SEASIDE AWARDS

Three of Blackpool's beaches have been granted Seaside Awards.

The national awards, announced by Keep Britain Tidy, have rewarded Blackpool South, Blackpool Central, and Bispham for their high standards of beach management, as well as their nearby facilities and water quality.

Blackpool has more than 800 litter bins, including 250 large capacity bins on the Promenade alone. They are emptied daily under normal conditions, and collections are increased whenever there is good weather and high visitor numbers. Reminders are in place to prompt everyone to get rid of their rubbish in the nearest available bin or take it home with them.

Blackpool is part of Turning Tides, the cross-agency partnership working together in North West to do everything possible to improve the quality of our bathing waters.

BLACKPOOL ZOO UPDATES

Big Cat Habitat

Blackpool Zoo's new £1.5m facility for big cats is re-opening just in time for the May half-term holidays.

The previous attraction, which housed Amur tigers and African lions has been extended, renovated and renamed to create a state-of-the-art facility designed around the bespoke needs of each species.

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



Phase one of the project saw the return of the zoo's very own lion king - Khari the African lion. Born in Blackpool in 2015, Khari moved to Whipsnade Zoo in spring 2022 to allow the Big Cat Habitat scheme to take place. He returned at the start of May ahead of the arrival of three lionesses

Final works are taking place in the neighbouring tiger enclosure ahead of the return of Alyona the Amur tiger, who has been residing at Woodside Wildlife Park in Lincolnshire. A male tiger will be joining her later in the summer to form a non-breeding companion pair.

THE EAGLE HAS LANDED!

The zoo attracted global media coverage worth around £8m after advertising for a "human seagull deterrent".

Within hours of the job role going live – which entails the successful applicants wearing an inflatable eagle costume and educating the public not to feed seagulls – the media coverage had gone as far afield as Kenya, China, Borneo, Australia, Canada, Germany and America.



It became a topic of discussion on TV programmes including This Morning, Loose Women, Have I Got News For You, and James Corden's Late Late Show in the US.

NEW HOME FOR PENGUINS

The Zoo's colony of penguins are basking in brand new facilities after a £100k investment. The improvement works on the newly-named Penguin Cove started in January when the colony relocated to a specially designed off-show facility complete with their own pool.

A new beach, which has sand from an estuary on the River Mersey, is eight times bigger than the previous one and more nest boxes have been added for mating pairs. The pool has also had an overhaul, which includes a state-of-the-art lining and the entire area now has a net cover to help to protect the animals from bird flu.

SHOW UPDATES

BOY GEORGE IN PANTO

Singer Boy George is joining a big budget adaptation of JM Barrie's much loved tale of **Peter Pan**.

He will make his pantomime debut playing the role of Captain Hook in the production which is at the Opera House from October 26-29.

He will be joined by friend and Real Housewives of Beverly Hills star Dorit Kemsley who will be playing the mermaid.



LAST NIGHT OF THE PROMS

Welsh superstar mezzo soprano Katherine Jenkins OBE is to headline an exclusive Last Night of The Proms concert in Lytham.



The UK's biggest selling classical artist of the century will head to the grounds of historic Lytham Hall on Sunday August 27. She will be joined by West End star Danny Mac, Broadway and West End favourite John Owen-Jones and other critically-acclaimed West End performers.

Last Night of The Proms is presented by Lytham Festival organisers Cuffe and Taylor and follows the success of previous Proms concerts over the last

two years which has seen more than £200,000 donated to the continued restoration of Lytham Hall. All money raised from Katherine's concert will also be gifted to the Grade 1 listed venue.

GRAND THEATRE NEW SEASON

The Grand Theatre has unveiled a spectacular new season ahead including the return of the smash hit musical, **Buddy – the Buddy Holly Story**; the classic murder mystery, **The Mousetrap**; a magical new musical, **Disney's Winnie The Pooh**, featuring life-size puppetry of the characters from Hundred Acre Wood; and the return of the ground-breaking hip-hop festival, **Breakin' Convention**. One-night stands include comedians **Dara O'Briain**, **Ceri Dupree** and **Frankie Boyle**.



LINED UP FOR 2024

Shows already announced for 2024 include Bonnie And Clyde, The Musical at the Opera House (June) and 2:22 – A Ghost Story at The Grand Theatre (April).

TOWER TOP GARDEN

The top of The Blackpool Tower has been transformed into one of the country's highest indoor gardens, as it launches its floral wonderland for the second year.

The Tower Top Garden, which officially opened at the end of April features more than 50,000 blooms, creating a series of floral displays and picture-perfect spots 380ft-high in the sky.

The garden, which will remain in place until November, has been installed by a team of floristry experts who have spent hundreds of hours gathering blossoms and plants ensuring every single petal is in place.



The garden, which has been designed and created by Preston-based Margaret Mason Florist, includes a range of artificial botanical floral arrangements, offering visitors the chance to soak up the stunning views across the Fylde Coast.

This year, the garden will transform with the changing seasons. It launched in April with beautiful cherry and apple blossoms then, in July and August, sunflowers will be brought in to celebrate summer. As the weather turns cooler in September, the garden will become an autumnal wonderland of crisp golden leaves and pumpkins.

SHOWTOWN STREET ART

Following a recent call out for artists to work with a group of young people, Showtown has unveiled a brand new work of art celebrating Blackpool's entertainment heritage.

Wrapped around the hoardings of the Showtown site on Bank Hey Street, the street art project is a visual celebration of fun and entertainment in Blackpool.



Showtown commissioned Street Style Surgery to work with their Young People's Steering Group on the art project. The young people developed their own ideas and artistic visions for the piece with the support of artist, Jamie Rennie. He then helped bring their ideas to life through an original piece of outdoor artwork.

Showtown's Young People's Steering Group was formed in April 2022 and is made up of nine 11-15 year olds from the local area.

This latest project comes at a time when work is well underway on the interior exhibition space at Showtown, with a planned opening date of spring 2024.

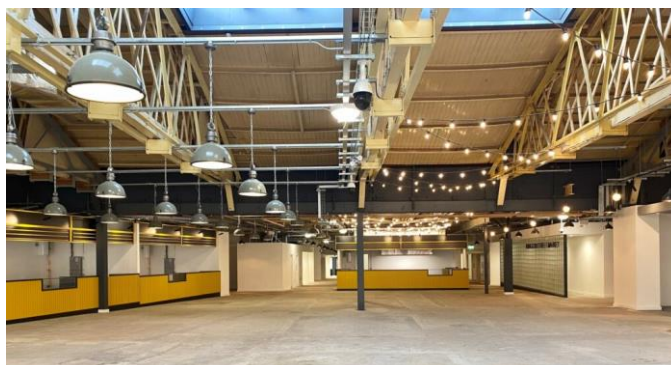
2. Town Centre Update

ABINGDON STREET MARKET SET TO OPEN

The newly-renovated Abingdon Street Market will open its doors to the public on Saturday 27 May.

The market has been given a slick and extensive facelift to align with modern 'food hall'-style venues such as those seen in Manchester or Liverpool.

The venue opening will be marked with a live DJ playing 12pm – 6pm, with local musicians Daisy Atkinson and Chris Wilde playing 7pm -10pm. From then on, the food hall, with its entrance located on Edward Street, will be open every day from 9am–10pm.



Visitors to the newly-opened market will be able to try food samples from the six local independent food vendors joining the market as well as sampling drinks from one of the venue's two bars or coffee shop. Food concessions already confirmed for the opening include Neighbourhood Subs, Pizza Rana, FLIPADELPHIA and TUK TUK, along with two bars, Public and Nomad, and a coffee shop, R Coffee.



As well as the variety of locally-focused food and drink vendors, Abingdon Street Market will also open retail units with a range of products, from fresh produce to

handmade crafts and gifts later in the year – which new operators Little Blackpool Leisure hope will help reinvigorate the town centre.

The market will also be available for use as an events space, and the operators plan to use it for community events, live music and charity-led initiatives.

The building was originally opened in 1862 as Blackpool's police station – a detail preserved in the stone-carved 'Police Station' sign above the Abingdon Street entrance - before being converted to an indoor market in 1928.

The contract to operate Abingdon Street Market was awarded to Little Blackpool Leisure, a company run by James Lucas, Andy Shields and Jake Whittington. The team also operates nearby Common Bar & Kitchen and Nook Wine Room and Terrace.

The Abingdon Street Market project has received £315,000 from the UK Government through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and £3,634,435 from the Getting Building Fund.

BOB & BERTS

A new artisan coffee shop is to open on the Victoria Street side of the Houndshell Shopping Centre. Bob & Berts was founded 10 years ago and now has stores throughout the UK.

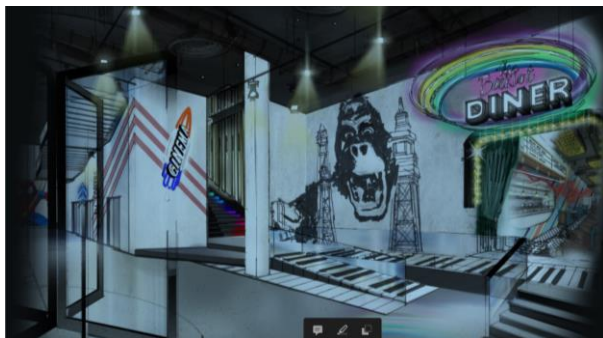
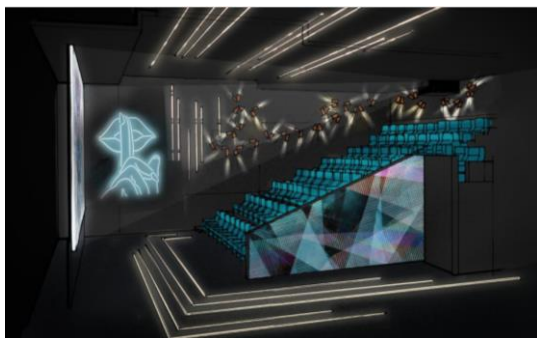


BACKLOT CINEMA TAKING SHAPE

Artist impressions have been revealed for the new Backlot Cinema & Diner, now under construction alongside the Houndshill Shopping Centre.

Scheduled to open towards the end of this year, the Backlot Cinema will comprise seven screens and 850 luxury seats and will be the anchor tenant of the Phase 2 extension of the Houndshill Shopping Centre.

It will incorporate one of the biggest IMAX screens in the country, complete with Dolby Surround Sound. Standing at 10.8m by 19.8m, it will be bigger than two double decker buses and wider than six!



Apart from showing new and classic films, the Backlot Cinema will include conferencing facilities and will also be offered for a range of community uses including wellness groups, breakfast clubs, youth groups, quiz and comedy nights, and live events.

NEW RETAIL UNITS

More than 5,000 sq ft of retail space is being released as part of Blackpool Council's £300m Talbot Gateway development.

The units, which sit at the ground level of the £35m Holiday Inn hotel and adjacent to the new tram terminal, will be a thoroughfare for people commuting to and visiting Blackpool, with a new underpass connecting passengers to Blackpool North train station with the new tramway extension linking the town centre to Blackpool Promenade.

The Station View retail units will be available from later this year, with units ranging from 400 to 1,800 sq ft in size. The units have planning permission for Class E retail use with the high volume of passing traffic offering options for food-to-go retailers.

Over two million visitors passed through Blackpool North train station in 2022, with the number expected to increase as a result of future phases of the Talbot Gateway development.

TOWN CENTRE RETAIL OCCUPANCY

The latest Blackpool Town Centre Occupancy Survey (carried out in May) shows a net decrease of one occupied unit in the town centre compared to February 2023.

This brings the overall total of occupied units down to 476 and decreases the occupancy rate from 77.1% to 76.9%. This means the vacancy rate increased from 22.9% to 23.1% over the period.

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

Encouragingly, a number of businesses have occupied previously vacant units since February. These include: Discount Clothing, Souvenirs/Discount Vapes (Victoria St); British Heart Foundation, The Nail Boutique, @oneseventy7 (Church St); Ex Catalogue Discount Outlet (Bank Hey St); Grand Accessories (Corporation St); Books for Less (Birley St); La Jainu (Talbot Rd); The Catch (Dickson Rd); Tasty Bites (Abingdon St); Greens Sandwich Bar, Vape King and Ploy Thai Cafe (Topping St).

The newly-vacant units include: Job Centre Plus (Albert Rd); H+H Fone Repairs, Clintons, Ex Catalogue Outlet, Cherish (Victoria St); British Heart Foundation (Church St); Bloom Hearing Specialist (Clifton St); Blackpool Community Homeless Project (Talbot Rd); Food Plus (Abingdon St); Sprinkles (Cedar Sq.); Love at First Bite (Deansgate); Dusk Bar Bistro (Promenade); Catering Equipment Sale, The Hair Hub and The Hungarians (Topping St).

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	135	22	86.0%	14.0%
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	367	94	79.6%	20.4%
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	476	143	76.9%	23.1%
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%

¹ Excluding the properties to the south of the Palatine Buildings; development sites (Sands Hotel); units within Blackpool North Station & Sainsbury's; community sites (e.g. churches, libraries, schools etc.) and civic sites (e.g. Town Hall).

3. General News

LANCASHIRE 2050

A new prospectus which demonstrates why Lancashire is THE place to do business has been unveiled at a major trade show.

The prospectus, 'Invest in Lancashire – A place for growth', is the first major project to be completed under the Lancashire 2050 banner, the ground-breaking agreement backed by the county's 15 local authorities.

Each council has signed up to the Lancashire 2050 Framework to ensure they are aligned on key county-wide issues such as economic prosperity, skills and employment, transport and infrastructure, environment and climate, and housing.

The prospectus highlights the potential for future investment in the county. It also details some of the exciting opportunities currently available across the county, including shovel-ready schemes with the connectivity and amenities required to enable all types of development to progress at pace and at scale.

It was officially launched at the UK's Real Estate and Infrastructure Forum event in Leeds, which brings together more than 6,000 delegates from the public sector, business investors, funders, developers, house-builders and Government.

NOTE: A presentation on Blackpool's bespoke inward investment campaign will be made at the May 26 meeting of the Blackpool Business Leadership Group.

DESTINATION NET ZERO

Businesses are being offered the opportunity to get fully-funded support in calculating and reducing their carbon footprint.

The Chamber of Commerce is holding two Destination Net Zero workshops at the Hampton By Hilton hotel on Thursday 15 June, one at 9am, the other at 1.30pm.

Each half-day workshop will cover:

- ❖ The difference between Net Zero and Carbon Neutrality
- ❖ How to identify and map your greenhouse gas emissions
- ❖ Where to get your activity data from
- ❖ How to calculate your carbon footprint
- ❖ How to devise and present your carbon reduction plan

Supporting materials provided will include:

- ❖ Simple Excel-based greenhouse gas inventory calculation tool
- ❖ Sector-specific guidance/suggested actions
- ❖ Editable Carbon Reduction Plan

To book and for more information use this link: <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/o/chamber-low-carbon-17317629743>



COUNCIL ELECTION RESULTS

Following the local election held in Blackpool on May 4, Blackpool Council now comprises 28 Labour councillors and 14 Conservative.

Cllr Lynn Williams was confirmed as Leader of the Council at the first full meeting of the new administration on May 24. Cllr Paul Galley has taken over as leader of the Conservative group.

Philip Welsh
Head of Tourism & Communications