



Blackpool Business Leadership Group

Business Partnerships Report – January 26, 2024

1. Visitor Economy Update

HERE COMES SHOWTOWN!

Tickets are now on sale for Blackpool's newest attraction, Showtown, after the long-awaited opening date has been set for March 15.

Showtown, which is the resort's first museum, will bring an amazing interactive attraction for all the family to enjoy, celebrating the seaside, circus, magic, show, dance and Blackpool's world-famous illuminations over a series of six interactive exhibition zones.

Visitors will also have a chance to get up close and personal with the entertainers who helped put Blackpool on the map, including the comedians, dancers, acrobats and characters who turned the resort into the home of showbusiness.



Available from the official Showtown website, tickets cost £15 for adults and £11.50 for children. With tickets being valid for a whole year, visitors are welcome to return as many times as they like.



Blackpool residents who pay Council Tax to Blackpool Council will be able to get a free ticket, giving them and their family full access to the museum's exhibitions and events, as well as family-friendly facilities.

Discounted tickets are available for students, and seniors and carers can go free.

Showtown will also offer free trips for local schools as part of its wider education and engagement programmes.

NEW 2024 DESTINATION GUIDE

Blackpool has unveiled a brand new guide for 2024 highlighting a dazzling programme of events, shows and attractions for the year ahead.

The 88-page guide provides a comprehensive insight into the myriad of reasons why people flock to the UK's most popular seaside destination.

The "cover star" of this year's guide is the famous Mirror Ball, the world's biggest, and a shining beacon at the southern gateway to the resort. It has benefited from an extensive makeover that included replacement of the 47,000 mirror tiles and new lighting technology.

The guide turns the spotlight on some of the faces behind the world-famous Blackpool Illuminations, including international designers Laurence Llewelyn-Bowen and Dr Chila Kumari Singh Burman, MBE. It features some of the amazing installations that turn the Promenade into a sea of light during the autumn and winter months.

Illustrated with stunning photography, the guide celebrates a very special milestone – the 85th anniversary of the Opera House in the Winter Gardens. It charts the star-studded history of a majestic theatre that has hosted an extraordinary cast of showbiz greats down the years including Charlie Chaplin, Frank Sinatra, Miley Cyrus, Lady Gaga, Bette Midler, Morecambe and Wise – and many, many more!

Other highlights include:

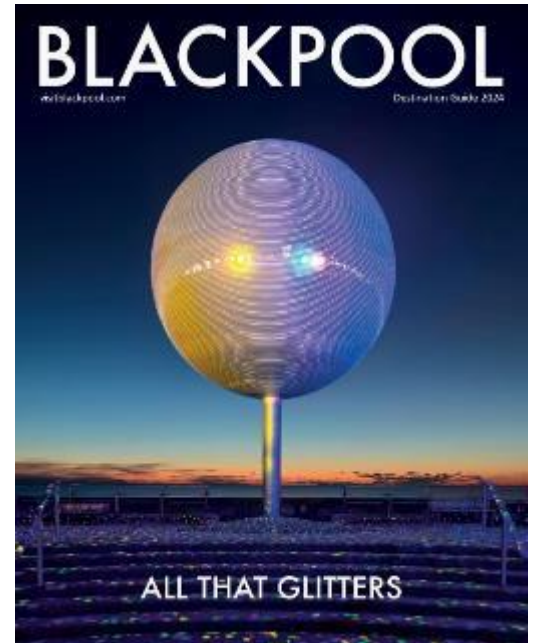
New For 2024: A taste of things to come with the opening of Showtown, the museum celebrating Blackpool's glorious entertainment history; the new four-star Holiday Inn and Marco Pierre White New York Italian restaurant; the new Frasers and Flannels department store; and Backlot, the multiplex cinema incorporating one of the UK's biggest IMAX screens.

World Class Events: A sneak peek at the resort's multi-million pound events programme including firm favourites such as Pride, Air Show Weekend, Rebellion Punk Festival, Ride The Lights, World Fireworks Championship Blackpool, Lightpool Festival, Illuminations Switch-On and Christmas By The Sea. New for 2024 is Elmer's Art Trail, comprising more than 30 Elmer elephant sculptures, each adorned with an exclusive design.

It's Showtime: A chance to book ahead for a brilliant line-up of shows at a multitude of venues including the Winter Gardens, Grand Theatre and Blackpool Pleasure Beach. Just some of the shows already announced for 2024 include Sister Act, Jesus Christ Superstar, An Officer And A Gentleman, Grease The Musical, Bonnie & Clyde, and a new version of the spectacular Hot Ice show.

To order a copy or view the guide online, please go to visitblackpool.com/guide

Note: The annual VisitBlackpool Season Launch will take place in partnership with Blackpool Pleasure Beach on the morning of Thursday 21 March. Further details to follow.



CHRISTMAS BY THE SEA



Blackpool's Christmas By The Sea event closed on January 7 after another spectacular winter season. Despite some exceptionally stormy weather, the village attracted visitors from all over the region. During the eight-week run, the free ice rink was used by tens of thousands of people.

A decision was made pre-Christmas to extend the village opening times by one week to coincide with the school holidays and to make up some of the time lost during inclement weather..

The event also saw a special family celebration on New Year's Eve with fireworks and entertainment, including an Oompah band performing throughout the afternoon.

It is encouraging that Christmas By The Sea continues to generate significant national publicity as one of the "go to" events in the UK. A survey by Samsung saw Blackpool come third in a public vote (behind only London and Edinburgh) to find the best affordable Christmas experiences.

CHRISTMAS 2024



A new production of one of the most popular musicals of all time, **Chitty Chitty Bang Bang**, will fly into the Winter Gardens for Christmas 2024.

Based on Ian Fleming's timeless story for children and later made into the famous 1968 film, the musical features some unforgettable songs including Toot Sweets, Truly Scrumptious, Hushabye Mountain, and the Academy Award-nominated title song, *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*.

The show will run from December 10-29, with tickets now on sale.

RECORD VISITOR NUMBERS IN 2022

The sheer scale of Blackpool's post-pandemic recovery has been revealed in new tourism figures, which show that the annual number of visitors in 2022 surged past 20 million.

The annual STEAM report, which analyses data from tourism and hospitality businesses, shows that the resort attracted a further 1.5 million visitors to what was a record year in 2021.



The total figure of 20.33 million is more than double the figure recorded in 2020 when pandemic restrictions on tourism were at the most severe and 12% higher than the pre-pandemic year of 2019.

Across Lancashire as a whole, the report shows that visitor numbers are showing strong recovery across all districts, but have not yet reached pre-pandemic levels. The exception is Blackpool where the number of visitors has surged, largely due to the extension of the season into the winter months.

The report, which evaluates the volume and value of visitors to Lancashire, shows that Blackpool accounted for more than 30% of all visits to the county in 2022.

It values the resort's tourism economy at more than £1.7bn compared to £1.4bn in 2021, supporting in excess of 22,000 jobs.

The gains made during 2022 were fuelled by the return of large-scale events such as the Air Show Weekend, another two-month extension of the autumn Illuminations season and an expansion of the hugely successful Christmas By The Sea village.

There was also a £1m investment in a multi-media marketing campaign featuring a new TV ad starring "resort ambassador", Nigel C Gull, a lovable seagull puppet voiced by actor and comedian Johnny Vegas.

That advertising campaign across Scotland and northern England incorporated TV, video on demand, digital and radio, and was co-funded by Blackpool Council, Merlin Entertainments and Blackpool's Tourism Business Improvement District (TBID).

The 2023 figures should be available in the autumn of this year.

NEW PLANS FOR SEAFRONT HOTEL



Plans for a £30m hotel on Blackpool Promenade have been submitted to Blackpool Council for planning permission.

The proposed 143-bedroom four-star accommodation will be built on the site of the former St Chad's Hotel on Central Promenade.

Singapore-based Fragrance Group, which owns The Imperial Hotel and The Lyndene Hotel in the resort, said the building would be a new landmark"

Proposals to redevelop the site were first revealed last summer when a public consultation was held. The number of rooms was subsequently reduced from the planned 184 to 143.

The proposed six-storey site will be designed in Art Deco style, inspired by the resort's landscape and history. It will include a ground floor restaurant, meeting rooms and a car park.

Land in front of the hotel has been earmarked for an art zone that will showcase work by local creatives.

Closed in 2021, St Chad's Hotel was demolished in May last year, along with the Lyric Hotel, Regency Apartments and the Seaside Fish and Chip Shop to make way for the new development.

LIBERTY'S SALE

Liberty's Hotel in Blackpool has been acquired by coach trip group, Caledonian Leisure.

The 67-room hotel sits just one street away from Blackpool's main promenade. It also features a restaurant, and a bar and lounge with a stage and dance floor.

NICKELODEON'S BLACKPOOL ADVENTURES



As part of VisitBlackpool's long-running partnership with Nickelodeon, a number of short videos were filmed in the run-up to and during the 2023 Illuminations Switch-On event.

The main piece, *Nickelodeon Goes On A Blackpool Adventure*, hosted by presenters and video bloggers Lee Hinchcliffe and Ellie Hinchcliffe, was premiered on Nick UK channels on November 20 and ran for 10 days.

Three other short videos, focusing on family attractions and days out, were also produced for use across VisitBlackpool and Nickelodeon social media channels.

These can all be viewed on the links below:

Nickelodeon Goes On An Adventure:

https://youtu.be/lj9t98NvNm0?si=cuhvgcyaVY_sM53T

Lee and Ellie Travel to the Top of the Blackpool Tower!

<https://youtu.be/LeEzmIsCag4?si=vuCewdGqe0xAAiAI>

Explore the Blackpool Zoo and Sea Life Aquarium with Lee and Ellie!

https://youtu.be/iht2_Mrbl5g?si=tuKD2QRcVbHmrxG

Lee and Ellie at North Pier and Blackpool Pleasure Beach

https://youtu.be/U6K_Idi6eKU?si=v_TGGDLO-FNflq0

Between them, they have already had almost three million views on YouTube.

LIGHT AROUND THE WORLD



The designer of the first North American installation to be featured in the annual Blackpool Illuminations display made a transatlantic journey to see his work in lights.

Canadian-born Bruce Alfred, who specialises in Native American art and woodworking, created an evocative design featuring hand-drawn images of eagles and Orca whales.

The tableau, one of the first to be developed using 3D printing technology at the Illuminations' Lightworks manufacturing facility in Blackpool, incorporates more than 13,000 programmable LED lamps.

Located on the Cliffs at the northern end of the six-mile display, it is intended to be the first of a new series of tableaux entitled "*Light Around The World*" that will celebrate international cultures.

Bruce, who travelled to Blackpool with his daughter, Molly, toured the Lightworks facility to see at first-hand how the Illuminations team translate designs into large-scale light installations before performing his own personal switch on of the tableau.

The artist and master carver lives in Alert Bay, a remote island village off the northern coast of Vancouver Island. It is home to a small Kwakwaka'wakw Nation community representing the Namgis tribe.

Bruce has had numerous commissions for his work both in his homeland and abroad, including one for Salford in Greater Manchester and another for a theme park in Holland where he helped create a village installation that included several totem poles and house fronts.

During his visit, Bruce also gave a presentation on the Kwakwaka'wakw traditions and artwork at KinCraig Primary School in Blackpool where pupils are studying Native American culture.

NEW INDOOR GOLF ATTRACTION

A new attraction has opened on the Golden Mile.

Putt Above is a new high-tech mini golf experience and cocktail bar with a twist. Visuals for each game are projected on to the lanes with players going head-to-head in a variety of mini-games.

Each lane can accommodate groups of up to eight and all age groups are welcome. The new attraction is on Central Promenade between Revolution and Papas Fish & Chip restaurant.



SEA LIFE PARTNERSHIP

SEA LIFE Blackpool and Girlguiding North West England have teamed up to launch a new ocean conservation badge.

The aim of the collaboration is to engage Girlguiding North West's 37,000 Rainbows, Brownies, Guides and Rangers with marine conservation, and inspire them to protect the oceans and sea creatures that live within them.

SEA LIFE Blackpool's head aquarist, Scott Blacker, is working closely with Girlguiding North West England to create a challenge pack covering key themes - what's in our oceans and plant life; marine eco systems and food chains; the dangerous impact of pollution and climate change; and overfishing on sea animals, and what we can do to protect them.

Girlguiding North West England members aged between four and 18, will have the opportunity to earn the new badge when it launches in Spring 2024, by selecting and successfully completing two activities from each theme within the pack.

To find out more about how SEA LIFE Blackpool is supporting the world's oceans visit [SEA LIFE Blackpool](https://www.visitfyldecoast.info/stayblackpool/stayblackpool-trade-show-and-open-day-2024/).

STAYBLACKPOOL OPEN DAY

StayBlackpool is holding its annual Open Day on March 19 at the Norcalympia suite at Norbreck Castle. Bookings are still being taken for the trade show, which already includes 28 suppliers ranging from large breweries, spirit, wine and soft drink suppliers and farm foods. Free parking will be available at the venue. For more details, go to:

<https://www.visitfyldecoast.info/stayblackpool/stayblackpool-trade-show-and-open-day-2024/>

TASTE OF BLACKPOOL IN THE WEST END

A new theatrical production set in Blackpool during the long, hot summer of 1976 opens in London's West End on January 27. The Hills Of California, which is a collaboration between playwright Jez Butterworth and film director Sam Mendes, is scheduled to run in the Harold Pinter Theatre until June 15.

2. Town Centre Update

PLANS FOR NEW TOWN CENTRE CULTURE HUB



Plans are being developed to create a new Culture Hub in the heart of Blackpool town centre.

The proposed major capital project on Queen Street would include an extensive refurbishment of Central Library and a new extension for the Grundy Art Gallery (*artist's impression above*).

The plans would deliver:

Grundy Art Gallery

- ❖ A new, high-quality gallery and support spaces that will complement the existing galleries and attract bigger and more complex exhibitions
- ❖ New public engagement and education space that will facilitate community involvement and education visits to the Gallery
- ❖ Public toilets (including fully accessible facilities) for the first time
- ❖ New foyer and gallery shop
- ❖ New lift to allow full access to the upper spaces and gallery for the first time

Blackpool Central Library

- ❖ New welcoming reception on the ground floor
- ❖ New "Engagement Space" at ground floor to facilitate a wide variety of events
- ❖ Refurbished public space at the ground floor to create an environment for quiet work, reading and study with a updated IT provision
- ❖ A new internal connection to the Grundy Art Gallery
- ❖ Remodelling of the public WC facilities and the inclusion of a Changing Places facility
- ❖ A revamped upper floor to include the new Showtown History Centre where the public can research local history and interact with physical and digitised archival material

Two information sessions on the project are being held at Blackpool Central Library on Thursday 8 February, one at 3pm, the other at 6pm. The sessions will include a 30-minute presentation followed by 15 minutes for questions.

GRUNDY KICKS OFF ITS SPRING PROGRAMME IN STYLE!

Blackpool's Grundy Art Gallery has been chosen as one of the host venues for one of Britain's most celebrated paintings.

Between March 2 and March 30, the Grundy will welcome the very special additional visitor for four weeks only. The 1953 painting 'Going To The Match' by the world-famous artist LS Lowry is going on a year-long tour from its home at The Lowry in Salford with the Grundy one of a small number of chosen venues.



The 1953 painting (*pictured above*) shows fans arriving for a Bolton Wanderers game at their former home, Burnden Park. The painting's iconic status has been recognised and enjoyed by visitors of all ages: those who love art, those who love football and anyone familiar with the excitement of a match day.

Each tour venue will work with their own audiences, local schools and communities as well as their own local football clubs to develop a programme of events that will reach and engage as many people as possible. The tour of *Going To The Match* has been supported by a grant from Arts Council England through its National Lottery Project Grants programme.

The Grundy is kicking off 2024 with five new displays, all of which have a local/regional focus; with three exhibitions additionally linked by football as a shared theme.

Including over 250 artworks, these exhibitions, which include Grundy's annual Open Exhibition, its annual Schools' Exhibition, a Collection Spotlight display and an exhibition exploring Blackpool Council's former architect JC Robinson, will all take place between January 20 to March 30.

The Grundy's winter programme will be supported by a free, family-friendly programme of activities. For details, go to: [Exhibitions - Grundy Art Gallery \(thegrundy.org\)](https://thegrundy.org/exhibitions)

BE WHO YOU WANT TO BE



Blackpool Council has declared its commitment to the development of a 'Be Who You Want To Be' area.

It follows a number of focus groups, discussions and a survey which was launched by the Council and its partners including Blackpool North Shore Business Group, Renaissance Charity, LGBTQ+ Facebook Friends, the hoteliers' group BAGS, and Pride Blackpool towards the end of last year.

The activity is focused around the Claremont area where there is already a long-established LGBTQ+ community and history.

The Council says the key aims of the plan are to ensure the area is safe for all to be who they want to be, to socialise and celebrate inclusion and diversity without the risks of homophobic or other discriminatory abuse. It is hoped this will help catalyse the regeneration of the area and build an inclusive culture in the wider town. Some of the themes within the action plan include:

- Public realm: Including streetscape, sense of place, cleanliness, highways, greening up, street lighting and illuminations
- Safety and security: Centred around CCTV, Street Angels, community policing, premises management and multi-agency operations
- Arts, heritage and culture: Embedding the area into the cultural strategy; public art; development of the Grundy and Central Library; working with LGBTQ+ artists and communities; community and visitor events, including street performances and festivals
- Young people: Ensuring the youth voice is a golden thread through themes with stakeholder meetings that are inclusive and accessible for young people. Exploring options for a young people's LGBTQ+ community space asset within the area
- Health and wellbeing: Accessible health care services to the LGBTQ+ community, particularly mental health; transgender needs assessment; sexual health clinics; NHS talking therapies and social care strategy and policy.

THE EDGE



Plans have been given the go-ahead to start work on renovating Stanley Buildings in the town centre.

Located on a triangular plot situated between Counce Street, Church Street and Cookson Street, the building will be transformed into a thriving business hub for start-ups and growing small businesses.

The £7.5m project will convert vacant and derelict upper floor space into 44 modern offices and state-of-the-art meeting facilities, creating a vibrant home for small businesses.

Parts of the ground floor will be altered to create an extensive co-working space offering a choice of flexible hot desk and meeting spaces.

Originally designed by the renowned Blackpool Borough architect, John Charles Robinson, Stanley Buildings was built in 1935 to replace former residential terraces. When it opened, the building contained 26 shops at ground floor level and housed Corporation departments above, then known as Stanley Chambers.

A former Midland Bank, a red brick corner building was retained, and forms part of current Council ownership and future development plans.

Restoration and repair works will focus on a number of key areas including roof replacement, installation of new windows to all upper floors, brick repair and render, and restoration and cleaning of the exterior and mosaic tiles.

Initially, eight shopfronts will be replaced, with an aim to restore all shopfronts when funding is available. A number of courtyard facing buildings will be demolished to form space for several parking spaces, electric vehicle charging facilities and secure bike storage.

The project is being developed in line with Blackpool Council's net-zero objective with both air source heat pumps and solar panels installed to power the office spaces.

The scheme is led by the Council and supported by Cassidy + Ashton architects. Local construction company, F Parkinson Ltd, has been appointed as the main contractor with works set to start in the early part of 2024 and completed by spring 2025.

HOLIDAY PLANS APPROVED FOR FORMER MUSIC HALL TAVERN



Proposals to convert an Art Deco building in Blackpool town centre into holiday accommodation have been given the go-ahead.

Blackpool Council planners have approved the change of use of residential apartments on Church Street, in what used to be the Music Hall Tavern. The application for 10 holiday apartments was agreed under delegated powers.

St Annes-based operator Mode Hotel Ltd has been appointed to manage the property, which is located almost opposite the Winter Gardens' new Conference and Exhibition Centre.

Mode Hotel Ltd already operates the Mode Hotel on South Promenade, St Annes, as well as holiday apartments in St Annes and Clifton Square, Lytham.

There will be no changes to the interior or exterior of the building, which also boasts a number of private roof terraces.

The new operators say the target market would be families during holiday times and weekends, as well as guests attending events at the Winter Gardens such as dance festivals, shows, conferences and exhibitions. They have stated that the apartments will not be marketed to stag and hen parties.

NEW CIVIL SERVICE HUB MOVING APACE



A new home for the UK Government in the heart of Blackpool continues to progress at a rapid rate.

The building façades are now being installed at the £100m, seven-storey Civil Service Hub, as part of the Talbot Gateway development close to Blackpool North train station.

The terracotta-faced, ultra-high strength concrete façade panels, which are highly sustainable and help reduce the building's embodied carbon, will feature across the exterior of the building and create an impressive Art Deco appearance, in keeping with Blackpool's architectural heritage in the town centre.

The Civil Service Hub will see over 3,000 government workers relocating to Blackpool town centre when it is completed in 2025, supporting the wider £350m redevelopment of the area, which also involves new Grade A offices, a hotel and transport interchange and a planned new Multiversity campus.

The site, which will include a new town centre square with cycle and pedestrian routes, is within walking distance of the new tram interchange at Blackpool North Station, promoting more sustainable travel routes.

Once complete, the Civil Service Hub will support Blackpool Council's ambitions to rejuvenate the town centre economy by introducing high-quality offices that will create and protect local jobs, drive footfall and breathe new life into the town centre economy.

NEW DESIGNS FOR MULTIVERSITY



An outline planning application for a new Multiversity campus for Blackpool and the Fylde College has been submitted to Blackpool Council, showing a five-storey campus on Cookson Street, which could bring up to 3,000 new staff and students to the town centre.

The £65m development would allow Blackpool and the Fylde College to relocate from out of town facilities into a state-of-the-art campus as part of the £350m Talbot Gateway regeneration of the area around Blackpool North train station.

The Multiversity would be built by Blackpool Council, and then leased to the College, offering more than 70 individual courses and enhancing its existing higher education provision, which is directly linked to local employment needs.

The proposed development would include two phases, starting with an education campus on the corner of Cookson Street and George Street, followed by future development across the southern end of the site by Milbourne Street and Grosvenor Street.

The plans would deliver up to 32,600 sqm of education and commercial space across several phases, starting with the new Multiversity building.

The main campus building would be designed to be carbon-neutral in operation, with the surrounding area on George Street landscaped and pedestrianised to make it a safer environment for students.

The Multiversity has been designed by established architects Hawkins\Brown and aims to complement the rest of the Talbot Gateway regeneration.

The land for the new Multiversity is currently being acquired by Blackpool Council, with the support of a £9m Government grant as part of Blackpool's Town Deal, which was awarded in March 2022.

The project was also awarded £40m via the Government's Levelling Up funding in January 2023 as part of a total project cost of £65m.

For more details on regeneration plans in Blackpool, visit www.blackpool.gov.uk/betterblackpool

3. General News

COURT CLOSURE



Blackpool Magistrates' Court complex is to close earlier than scheduled following the discovery of unsafe concrete.

The court building on Chapel Street was temporarily closed on November 1 after the discovery of RAAC (Reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete).

It was set for demolition at the end of this year along with the former police station, as part of the £300m Blackpool Central leisure development plans.

However, it has now been decided that it is too costly to repair, leaving Blackpool without a criminal and county court until a new £40m development is completed in 2026.

In the meantime, criminal cases will be heard at other courts including Preston and Lancaster magistrates' courts, and civil and family cases at Fleetwood.

Plans for the new courthouse on the former Devonshire Road Hospital site (*artist's impression shown above*), which includes 10 courtrooms, were submitted towards the end of last year.

The Government has awarded £40m of Levelling Up funding towards the relocation of the courts in order to facilitate future phases of the Blackpool Central leisure scheme.

HOUSE OF WINGZ TAKE CENTRE STAGE



Blackpool's home-grown dance crew House of Wingz made their TV debut in style – appearing alongside a star-studded cast on The National Lottery's New Year's Eve Big Bash.

The performance, which aired on ITV1 and was watched by an 8,000-strong audience in the Wembley Arena, saw the group celebrate 50 years of Hip Hop with an epic street dance.

Other performers in the two-hour show included Take That, Busted, Paloma Faith, Eurovision winner Loreen, as well as contributions from Idris Elba, Sir Mo Farah and Olivia Colman.

House of Wingz is a cultural organisation that teaches breaking, street dancing, street art, skateboarding, beat making, beatboxing to young people. The dance group has received more than £350K in National Lottery funding since 2018.

You can watch their performance on the link below (approximately 120 minutes in):

<https://www.itv.com/watch/the-national-lottterys-new-years-eve-big-bash/10a5169/10a5169a0001>

ARTS COUNCIL NPO EXTENSIONS

Arts Council England is to extend its 2023-26 Investment Programme for all National Portfolio Organisations (NPOs) by a further year. In Blackpool, that includes Lightpool Festival, The Grundy Gallery and Grand Theatre.

It means that, subject to a successful, non-competitive application process, they will be funded until March 31, 2027.

The Arts Council says the decision has been made because of the challenges facing many organisations in the cultural sector.

In the case of Lightpool Festival, it means further support for festivals in 2024, 2025 and 2026. The festival is the only one of its kind to be a part of the Arts Council's National Portfolio.

Last year's event was the first to be delivered with NPO support. It was staged over October half-term and included world premieres and installations never before seen in the UK, including artworks from Australia, France, the Netherlands and Spain. It once again attracted a large number of residents as well as visitors from across the country.

The trail featured larger-than-life jellyfish; a field of fireflies alongside the Cenotaph; a giant ball of wool made up of neon yarn on the roof of the Blackpool Church; and an exclusive preview of designer Laurence Llewelyn-Bowen's first digital installation.

The Blackpool Tower building saw an alien-like "invasion" with giant tentacles seemingly breaking through the ballroom roof (*pictured above*). The Tower Ballroom also hosted a performance of Carnival Magic with giant illuminated puppets played out to a capacity audience.



OLD ELECTRIC WRITING FESTIVAL

Blackpool's newest theatre, The Old Electric, is launching a festival of activity aimed at supporting new writing for the stage in the town after securing funding.

Supported by Arts Council England and with a host of regional and national partners, it is calling for scriptwriters to explore new perspectives of Blackpool.

Power Plays is a four-month long festival aimed at establishing The Old Electric, formerly a derelict nightclub, as Blackpool's home of new writing.

The OE already hosts a core programme of participatory activity including an annual playwriting course that has supported 50 new local playwrights over the last seven years.

Power Plays will invite writers to submit scripts that have resonance to Blackpool for consideration to be developed into a professional production hosted at The Old Electric as the climax to the festival in July 2024. Further details of the programme will be announced before Easter.

A supported writer-in-residence brief is now live and applications are open until January 26:

<https://theoldelectric.co.uk/artist-hub/writer-in-residence/>

For further information please contact Melanie Whitehead on 01253 834175 or melanie@theoldelectric.co.uk

DEVOLUTION CONSULTATION



A consultation exercise is underway after the Government announced it would be willing to enter into a devolution deal with Lancashire County Council, Blackburn with Darwen Council and Blackpool Council.

The devolution proposal is subject to the outcome of this consultation and still needs to be formally agreed by central Government. If given final approval, the deal will transfer new money and powers from central Government to a newly-created Combined County Authority allowing it to tackle key local priorities.

The deal would not require a change to the established democratic structures across the county or the need for an elected Mayor. It would not mean a rise in Council Tax. In fact there is no option to add the cost of the CCA on to bills.

The consultation ends on **Friday 26 January**. For more information and to have your say on Lancashire's devolution deal go to: [Home - Lancashire Devolution](#)

LAUNCH OF AIR PITCHES

Active Blackpool has made a £5,000 investment in two 3v3 air pitches.

It is aiming to use the pitches to attract young people of all ages and abilities from throughout Blackpool, using its football provision across four facilities - Blackpool Sports Centre, Common Edge Community Sports Village, Palatine Leisure Centre and Moor Park Health and Leisure Centre.



Air pitches are inflatable small-sided football pitches, with small goals at either end of the pitch. The inflatable sides ensure the ball doesn't go out of play, meaning continuous play and more touches for the players, improving the technical aspect of the game. It means that the ball is in play for an average of 94% of playing time

To book a pitch for a game email commonedge@blackpool.gov.uk

ENTERPRISE ZONE FLYING HIGH



A major Blackpool business growth project has already hit the halfway mark to creating 5,000 new jobs for the Fylde Coast.

Blackpool Enterprise Zone, which covers business parks at Squires Gate Industrial Estate and Blackpool Business Park off Amy Johnson Way, as well as Blackpool Airport, has attracted 2,500 new jobs since it was granted Enterprise Zone status in 2016.

New businesses relocating to Blackpool, as well as a range of developments and local business growth as a result of business rates relief, have resulted in the extra jobs, sparking an estimated £60m of private sector investment on new premises and machinery.

Work on a new road connecting to Common Edge Road is expected to start over the coming weeks and be completed by early 2026, as a requirement of the £7.5m grant from the Blackpool Town Deal.

A report to Blackpool Council's Executive also set out plans to create a new high tech business park called Silicon Sands, centred around a series of data centres powered by renewable energy.

Silicon Sands would attract new businesses that require ultra-fast internet speeds, such as advanced manufacturing, virtual reality and esports, making the most of the CeltixConnect-2 internet cable, which carries up to one third of the world's internet traffic via Blackpool Airport.

The cable sends data from Blackpool to New York under the sea in less than 0.064 seconds and offers significant benefits for businesses that need ultrafast and reliable internet.

The development would also position Blackpool as a leader for green data, with the data centres powered by renewable energy while also being liquid immersion cooled to increase efficiency and reduce emissions. Any excess heat created from the data centres would then be reused to heat surrounding buildings in a district heat network.

A proposed first data centre would be built on land off Squires Gate Lane, on the site of Blackpool Airport's old fire station and engineering yard, which was demolished last March.

THE PLATFORM

Blackpool's Youth Employment hub, The Platform has celebrated a major milestone with more than 1,000 young people supported by the service since its launch less than two years ago. Of those, around 500 have been successfully moved into work, training or education.

The milestone was achieved in the same week that The Platform was awarded "Partnership Of The Year" in the ERSA Employability Awards, for its partnership working with the Department For Work and Pensions (DWP).

The service, which was launched by Blackpool Council in partnership with the DWP, is funded by the Towns Fund. The aim is to provide people aged 16 to 24 in Blackpool with free one-to-one employment support to help them improve their skills, build their confidence and prepare them for employment, further education or entrepreneurship.

It is based on the ground floor of the Council offices on Bickerstaffe Square.

BLACKPOOL TRANSPORT ROUTE CHANGES

Blackpool Transport has launched a revised network with new bus routes to create improved frequencies, direct connections and more travel choices.

To coincide with the relaunch, which took place from January 7, timetables have been produced providing customers with more information as well as showing the improved reliability of routes, some of which have been grouped together.

As part of the changes, Blackpool Transport now serves Blackpool Zoo and Whitehills Business Park.

The number 5 group of buses now go to Blackpool Victoria Hospital, creating a 15-minute frequency between Blackpool and the hospital. The 11 group of buses serve Lytham and St Annes, meaning there is now a bus up to every 12 minutes from Blackpool.

The 3 group and the 7 group of buses, which serve Cleveleys, will also provide strong links between Cleveleys and Blackpool Town Centre, both operating at a combined 15-minute frequency.

Blackpool Transport's dedicated Street Team has been out across the network for several weeks engaging with customers and handing out leaflets. Details about the changes are available at blackpooltransport.com, including new timetables and network maps. Printed timetables and leaflets are available in public information centres such as libraries.

THE BIG SLEEPOUT

Registration to take part in the Big SleepOut 2024 is now open. The annual Streetlife event, which takes place on Friday 22 March in St John's Square outside the church, aims to raise awareness and support vulnerable young people faced with homelessness.

All funds raised during the event will contribute towards keeping the emergency night shelter open 24/7, 365 days a year, to support homeless young people aged 16-25 in Blackpool. It costs more than £85k per year to keep the night shelter operational and available to some of our community's most vulnerable people.

For more information and to register to take part, go to: www.wearestreetlife.org

4. Congratulations to...

NEW YEAR HONOURS RECIPIENTS

A number of individuals from Blackpool and the Fylde Coast were recognised in the New Year Honours List. They include:

Antony Lockley, Director of Strategy and Assistant Chief Executive, who has been awarded an OBE for the pivotal part he has played in Blackpool's ongoing regeneration.

He has taken a leading role in developing Blackpool's Levelling Up pilot partnership with central Government over the past two years, attracting more than £100m in regeneration funding for the town. He is also a member of the core team that recently secured a devolution deal for Lancashire.

Lancashire and England rugby legend **Sir Bill Beaumont** has been awarded the Knights Grand Cross of the Order of the British Empire. The 71-year-old, who lives in Lytham, was knighted for his services to rugby union by the late Queen Elizabeth five years ago.

Andrew Pollock, from Poulton, founder of Blackpool and Fylde's credit union CLEVR Money, was awarded an MBE for services to financial inclusion. Andrew launched the credit union whilst director of finance for Blackpool Council.

Philip Welsh
Head of Tourism & Communications