



Blackpool Business Leadership Group

Business Partnerships Report – July 26, 2024

1. Visitor Economy Update

PLANS SUBMITTED FOR £75m HOLIDAY PARK



Lancashire-based holiday company, Partington's, has submitted plans to build a spectacular new leisure destination on the Fylde Coast.

This proposed new development at Windy Harbour at Singleton on the banks of the River Wyre represents a £75 million investment, as well as the creation of hundreds of jobs for the local leisure and hospitality industry.

Partington's already operate a number of holiday parks in Lancashire, including Newton Hall on the outskirts of Blackpool. The company says the new development on a 166-acre site that surrounds their existing holiday park at Windy Harbour will create a destination for "aspirational escapism".

Planning permission is already in place to build holiday and leisure facilities on the site, which was recently purchased by Partington's Chief Executive Officers, Rob Kearsley and Andrea Challis.

An amended planning application that has been submitted to Fylde Council proposes a phased development over several years. This will begin with a lodge park of 495 holiday homes and swimming pools, state-of-the-art gymnasium, bar, restaurant and entertainment facilities. Further phases include a luxury spa and wellbeing centre offering holistic treatments. The application also includes cycle and running tracks, nature walks and plans for a 102-bedroom hotel.

BLACKPOOL ILLUMINATIONS – NEW FOR 2024

A dazzling array of new, fun-packed features that will grace the 2024 Illuminations display has been unveiled.

At a special preview event held at Blackpool Council's Lightworks facility, where the world-famous display is manufactured, the Illuminations team revealed the work that is nearing completion to rejuvenate this year's display. It includes:

- A spectacular new installation by the Illuminations' creative curator, Laurence Llewellyn-Bowen. Entitled Disco Donkey Cavalcade, it is a celebration of one of Blackpool's iconic beach attractions, with 12 donkeys dressed in 70s-inspired swimwear parading on a 16ft high platform, beneath a giant ice cream topped with a disco ball! Some of the completed donkeys are pictured right awaiting installation.



- A new overhead roadway section that pays homage to the hugely popular Aliens feature that graced the Illuminations display several years ago. The new section has been designed by students at Blackpool Sixth Form and includes 10 individual illustrations of Alien life!

- A brand new tableau, created by Leigh Francis (aka TV star Keith Lemon) featuring a wildly imaginative and colourful design incorporating a 12ft tall dinosaur, space ship, astronaut, an airborne BMX bike, and Leigh himself flying through the skies towards The Blackpool Tower! The tableau, which is the second to be created for the "Light Around The World" section at the northern end of the display, is based on Leigh's childhood memories. Part of Leigh's original artwork is pictured right.



- A larger-than-life Buzz Wire arcade game in which visitors will be able to test their skill and nerve on a specially designed installation reflecting Blackpool's famous skyline. Created by the Lightworks team, it will be located on the Golden Mile.
- Reimagined for 2024, the Chandelier Causeway roadway section features a series of stunning LED giant chandeliers and strobe lighting festoon, in a glamour and glitzy nod to the decadent chandeliers of The Blackpool Tower Ballroom.
- As a special tribute to mark the 80th anniversary of the D-day landings, all three of the replica Spitfires on Gynn Roundabout (Spitfire Island) will display special markings for the 2024 display.

The new features will be installed in time for the grand Switch-On event, which takes place on Friday 30 August, triggering an extended Illuminations season that will run until January 5, 2025.

ILLUMINATIONS GET NATIONAL RECOGNITION



The world-famous Blackpool Illuminations display has won a top accolade in a national travel awards scheme.

The annual display, which attracts millions of visitors to the resort during the autumn and winter months, was voted Best Event For Groups in the Group Leisure and Travel Awards, beating competition from other finalists including Royal Ascot, the BBC's Gardeners' World Live, Bournemouth Air Festival, RHS Malvern Spring Festival and the historical stage show, Kynren.

The result was announced at a ceremony at the Royal Garden Hotel in Kensington, London, in front of an audience of more than 300 coach and tour operators.

The winners were voted for by readers of Group Leisure & Travel, Britain's best-read magazine for people who organise group trips and holidays.

The Blackpool Illuminations display is one of the biggest and longest-running light-based festivals in the world. It started in 1879 with just a handful of carbon arc lamps creating what was described at the time as "artificial sunshine".

The first full display was launched in 1912 to mark the first Royal visit to the resort. More than a century on, it spans six miles of seafront and incorporates over a million lights.

The spectacular display is manufactured and maintained at Blackpool Council's bespoke Lightworks factory at Blackpool Airport.

Since 2020, the annual free event has been extended from two months to four months, delivering a huge boost to the resort's economy.

SWITCH-ON – RETURN OF BLACKPOOL INTRODUCES



Some of Blackpool's brightest young musicians are to take to the stage as part of this year's Illuminations Switch-On celebration.

The Upbeat Rock Academy, which organises rock music tuition for more than 300 students from across the Fylde Coast, will present Blackpool Introduces, an hour-long showcase of local talent ahead of the main Switch-On concert on the night of Friday 30 August.

The young people will be joined by Blackpool-based House of Wingz, an award-winning hip hop dance crew that has already been featured on prime time national television.

The Blackpool Introduces session will be followed by the main event, a two-hour show hosted by Hits Radio breakfast show presenters, Leanne and Joel, and featuring a line-up of some top music talent. The show will culminate in the iconic Switch-On moment when a celebrity will pull the switch to trigger four months of Illuminations.

The celebration, which will be held on the Tower Festival Headland, will once again be freely accessible to the public with no tickets required.

Last year's event, which marked a return to the outdoors after three years of being staged indoors due to pandemic restrictions, attracted a record crowd of 80,000 on to the seafront to watch Sophie Ellis-Bextor pull the famous switch.

More details on the live entertainment programme and, of course, the identity of who will switch on this year's Illuminations will be revealed in the coming weeks.

Note: A presentation on the work of the Upbeat Rock Academy will take place at the BBLG meeting on Friday 26 July.

LYTHAM FESTIVAL HAILS RECORD TURN-OUT



Lytham Festival has heralded this year's event as the most successful yet with more than 100,000 people attending over five days.

The festival included a line-up featuring headliners Hozier, Shania Twain, Courteeners, Madness and James. The Courteeners recorded the festival's biggest ever crowd with more than 25,000 people.

Shania Twain's invitation for local resident Ken Northall to join her on stage during her performance saw the 81-year-old superfan featured on news outlets in America and Australia.

TK Maxx presents Lytham Festival 2025 will return Wednesday 2 to Sunday 6 July.

BLACKPOOL'S TRIBUTE TO JAMES

A special tribute has been paid to the band James, 24 years after they first performed at Blackpool's Winter Gardens.

The plaque recognises their performances in the Empress Ballroom when they undertook their first major UK tour and the band's ongoing special relationship with Blackpool.

It will be installed in the historic venue. A replica plaque has also been presented to the band members.



PLEASURE BEACH UPDATES

TYSON FURY AT HOT ICE



The cast of Pleasure Beach Resort's Hot Ice Show received an unexpected visit ahead of their opening night – from boxing champion Tyson Fury.

The heavyweight boxer who was spending a day at the park with his family took time out of his visit to speak with the skaters as they prepared for the opening of Hot Ice Eternity on July 4.

This year, 12 of the skaters are performing in Hot Ice for the first time, so Fury shared some invaluable advice on maintaining composure under pressure and preparing for a stellar performance.

He shared personal anecdotes from his boxing career and emphasised the importance of mental preparation, focus and resilience – qualities that are equally crucial for athletes and performers alike.

Hot Ice combines sport and performance and features 30 of the world's best figure skaters, including Olympic skaters and stars of BBC's Dancing on Ice. This year's production runs until September 7.

PLEASURE BEACH KIT SPONSORSHIP

Pleasure Beach Resort has signed a new kit sponsorship deal with Blackpool Football Club, with its logo on the front of the official away and third kits for the upcoming season.

To announce the partnership, the BFC team headed to Pleasure Beach Resort to sample some rides, including climbing 235ft over the coast on the famous Big One!



JOY OF SUMMER!

A critically endangered orangutan at Blackpool Zoo has become a mother for the first time.

Summer, the Bornean orangutan, gave birth to a healthy baby boy. Both mother and baby, who is yet to be named, are doing well and living happily alongside another first-time mum, Jingga, and her son, Jarang.

The father of both youngsters is Kawan, who came to Blackpool Zoo in 2022, from Apenheul Zoo in the Netherlands as part of the European Endangered Species Programme.

The group of five live in Blackpool Zoo's £1m Orangutan Outlook facility, which has been specially designed to meet the complicated needs of the species.



PART OF GOLDEN MILE LANDMARK AT AUCTION

A large section of one of Blackpool's most iconic landmarks is being offered at auction for £1m.

The building in Bank Hey Street - which has a distinctive art deco clock - was once the largest Woolworth's store in the world, before closing in the 1980s and becoming home to Pricebusters for nearly three decades. Sports Direct recently vacated the building to relocate to the nearby Houndhill Shopping Centre.

The now vacant first, second, third, fourth and fifth floors – amounting to 73,000sq ft of commercial space - are available. The ground floor space is currently occupied by Poundland and Wetherspoons and is not included.

Earlier this year the building was acquired by property developers, the ALB Group. The building will be offered in a public auction on August 15 at Trent Bridge Cricket Ground in Nottingham.

AIRSLIDES INVESTMENT AT ASCENT

Ascent Adventure Park in Blackpool is the first in the North West to introduce an exciting new attraction – AirSlides!

The centre, off Cornford Road, already features more than 100 inter-connected trampolines, three huge foam pits, airbag, caving system, climbing wall and a three-tier ninja assault course.

The adventure park was acquired by the AirHop Group in March. Blackpool is the fourth park in the AirHop group to feature the AirSlides with others opening at Bristol, Warwick and Chelmsford.



2. Town Centre Update

NEW TALBOT GATEWAY OFFICE DEVELOPMENT

Plans have been submitted for a new £45m office development in Blackpool's Talbot Gateway.

Full planning permission is being sought for a 52,950 sq ft office building off Talbot Road, which would bring over 1,000 additional employees into Blackpool town centre.



The plot of land (pictured above) is on the site of the former Apollo 2000 store and sits within the boundary of the Talbot Gateway development around Blackpool North train station.

Blackpool Council is in advanced discussions with an organisation that wishes to develop and occupy a new office, with the new occupier covering the cost of the construction.

This office (artist impression shown here) would be the fifth phase of the £350m Talbot Gateway development, which is bringing over 8,000 workers and students into Blackpool town centre.



Phase One, including new Grade A offices, Sainsbury's supermarket and an upgraded 650 space multi-storey car park, was completed in 2014. Phase Two incorporates the new Holiday Inn hotel and Marco Pierre White New York Italian restaurant and the tramway extension.

Phase Three comprises a Civil Service Hub office for over 3,000 government workers, which is under construction and expected to open in 2025 and Phase Four is the Multiversity scheme described above.

GO BLACKPOOL APP

Blackpool Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) has launched GO Blackpool, a mobile app designed to enhance local business engagement and improve the visitor experience.

GO Blackpool will act as a platform for locals and visitors, offering the latest news, shopping deals, guides and insights into Blackpool's rich heritage.

It aims to strengthen the town's economy by connecting businesses with customers through a user-friendly app that provides real-time updates on events, offers and more.



GO Blackpool provides seamless navigation, detailed business listings and a wealth of resources to help users make the most of their time in Blackpool.

It offers everything local in one place, from news and shopping deals to a comprehensive area guide and information about local heritage. For businesses, the app incorporates cutting-edge technology like GeoAlerts, enabling them to advertise offers and events while gaining valuable local insights.

Additionally, for those within the Business Improvement Districts (BIDs), GO Blackpool offers insights into who is using the town centre, maps footfall trends and measures the effectiveness of local initiatives. The BIDs company comprises the Town Centre BID and Tourism BID.

Note: there will be a more detailed presentation on the GO Blackpool app at the September BBLG.

PET SHOP BOYS TO PERFORM AT FUNNY GIRLS

One of Blackpool town centre's most iconic shows celebrated its 30th birthday in style – and then announced that it had secured a concert by the legendary Pet Shop Boys!

Since its opening in 1994, the Funny Girls drag show has attracted visitors from far and wide. From its relatively humble beginnings as a show bar on Queen Street, it later became a fitting tenant for the magnificent art deco building that was once an Odeon cinema.

To mark the 30-year anniversary, a special celebratory show was staged at the venue. Two days later, it was announced the Pet Shop Boys would be playing an exclusive live performance on Friday 6 September.

It will see Chris Lowe return to his hometown along with band mate Neil Tennant to perform in what is a warm-up show ahead of their headline appearance at Radio 2 In The Park in Preston on the following Sunday.

Tickets go on general sale at 10am on Friday 26 July.



WINTER GARDENS HOTEL PLAN



Image – Artist's impression of the proposed hotel (credit Studio Moren)

Plans to build a new five-storey hotel in Blackpool show a new contemporary design with a nod to the resort's Art Deco heritage.

The detailed plans have been submitted to Blackpool Council for a 266-bedroom hotel on land currently used as a car park opposite the new Winter Gardens Conference & Exhibition Centre.

The hotel will provide a mix of accommodation some for leisure visitors and some for extended stay conference delegates.

The short-stay section will have an entrance and reception area on Adelaide Street with “a more youthful feel” with a more private entrance to the extended stay part of the hotel on Leopold Grove. Additional facilities include cafes, bars, restaurants and lounge areas.

It is intended that the facades will be built using off-white/cream materials to complement the original Winter Gardens building.

END OF BLACKPOOL'S REVOLUTION

Revolution bar in Blackpool town centre is to close at the end of August. It is among 12 sites that the parent company is closing as part of a rationalisation exercise. These include bars in Manchester, London and Edinburgh.

The Blackpool bar has entrances on both the Promenade and Market Street.

GRAND THEATRE FACELIFT UNDERWAY

Work is underway on bringing the historic Grand Theatre back to its former glory.

The Matcham-designed theatre, which celebrates its 130th birthday this month, will undergo extensive external repairs over the next five months including restoration of the dome, pediments and distinctive pineapple finial.

The discoloured stonework will also be cleaned and window frames replaced and repainted.

Scaffolding has been erected as part of the enabling works.

The work is scheduled to be completed in time for the start of the 2024 pantomime season.



. Photo Credit: Sean Conboy

GRUNDY SUMMER PROGRAMME



This summer, Grundy Art Gallery is presenting a major exhibition of newly-commissioned work by the acclaimed, Blackpool-based artist, Garth Gratrix.

Flamboyant Flamingos is Gratrix's largest and most prestigious exhibition to date. It is also the first time in recent history that a Blackpool born and Blackpool based artist has been invited to exhibit in Grundy's much-coveted summer season slot.

Alongside his body of new work, Gratrix and the Grundy have also worked together to bring the work of world-renowned artists Derek Jarman and Felix Gonzalez-Torres to the gallery.

The summer exhibition programme, which runs until September 7, will be supported by a series of exhibition tours, events and workshops.

3. General News

ELMER: A TOWERING SUCCESS!



Blackpool's first outdoor art trail generated a phenomenal public response over its eight-week run.

Elmer's Big Parade Blackpool saw 71 uniquely designed Elmer sculptures spread across the town. These included versions of Elmer designed as a stick of rock, the Mirrorball, Comedy Carpet, a circus clown, an ice cream and a Blackpool heritage tram.

Over the eight weeks, there were almost 14,000 downloads of the dedicated trail app (around double the number associated with similar trails in other parts of the UK). People enjoying the trail submitted more than 4,000 "selfies".

The Elmer pages on the VisitBlackpool website had more than 16,000 views from 12,000 unique visitors and the supporting social media content generated almost 850,000 impressions.

During the event, the VisitBlackpool Tourist Information Centre saw a 57% increase in footfall compared to the previous year, and generated £3,000 of Elmer merchandise sales for the hospice.

An auction of the Elmer sculptures took place at The Blackpool Tower on June 17, raising more than £143,000 for Brian House. Another trail is being explored for 2026.

D-DAY COMMEMORATION

Blackpool held a special commemoration to mark the 80th anniversary of D-Day. It included a tribute to the heroes of World War II using sand art (pictured right), a “seaside reflection” mile-long walk along the beach led by a lone piper, and the lighting of The Blackpool Tower in red, white and blue as part of the national Beacon Of Peace commemoration.



A short video of the event, produced by the VisitBlackpool marketing team, went viral on social media, generating 1.9m views, almost 200,000 “likes” and reaching 1.25m accounts.

EMPLOYMENT FUNDING

Blackpool has been awarded £2.3m to help get more of the town’s school leavers into jobs.

The cash, from the Youth Futures Foundation, will be used over three years for initiatives aimed at creating a more employment-focused curriculum for Blackpool’s secondary schools.

A town-wide database will also be developed to ensure young people get a more personal approach to helping them find work.

It follows a £380,000 project, which has been run over the past two years to understand the youth employment challenges in Blackpool. Figures from 2023 showed levels of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET), were at 4.4 per cent compared to 2.8 per cent nationally.

The programme is being run by the Blackpool Connected Futures Partnership, led by the education charity, Right To Succeed, working partners including Blackpool Council, Blackpool Football Club Community Trust and the Blackpool Youth Advisory team.

CLLR LYNN WILLIAMS MBE

The Leader of Blackpool Council has been honoured for her services to local government.

Cllr Lynn Williams has been appointed an MBE in the King’s Birthday Honours published in early June.

Cllr Williams, who is the Council’s first female leader, has been championing the local community for more than 30 years. She started as a volunteer for the Citizens Advice Bureau in Blackpool before standing as a councillor in Claremont ward in 2015.

Five years later in 2020, she was appointed as Leader of the Council. One of her first decisions was to undertake a review of all services available to children and young people in the town.

That has since resulted in a new youth provision partnership and development plan, which will see every young person in Blackpool within 20 minutes of a youth facility.

Cllr Williams was a founding member and volunteer of the Magic Club youth facility which was established six years ago in her own Claremont ward. It has since become a hub for more than 400 young people in a ward that includes some of the most deprived areas in the country.

HEYHOUSES LINK ROAD NOW OPEN



The long-awaited Heyhouses Link Road, which provides a link from Whitehills (close to the M55) to Cypress Point at Lytham, has opened to traffic.

The £27m road has been built by Lancashire County Council to support the commercial viability of local housing sites, existing employment areas and business development sites, with the improved link to the coast being vital to the Blackpool Airport Enterprise Zone and the Fylde Coast's leisure and tourism industry.

Construction of the road began in June 2021, with its completion marking the end of a determined effort over many years by local partners to develop the scheme, and work with national partners to secure the funding needed to build it.

BLACKPOOL FC EAST STAND

The first steps are to be taken to clear buildings to make way for a new spectator stand at Blackpool FC's Bloomfield Road stadium.

Blackpool Council has agreed to begin demolition of some of the premises on Henry Street that it has acquired as part of a wider regeneration scheme that includes a new East Stand at the ground.

The Council wants to begin demolition of some parts of the street because empty properties are attracting anti-social behaviour. The initial demolition will only involve garages and rear extensions at this stage.

The overall project includes community facilities within the planned new Revue Sports Village, which is due to be built on land next to the football club.

OPENING OF ECO HUB

Blackpool's first-ever Eco-Hub has now officially opened its doors.

The cutting-edge demonstration hub, located at Palatine Library, offers an opportunity to see low-carbon and renewable technology in action.

Environmental charity Groundwork won £100k of funding following a successful bid to the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero.

Groundwork, in partnership with Blackpool Council, manages the Eco-Hub with a mission to make homes more energy efficient.



The team of dedicated advisors can assist with:

- Advice and support with home retro-fit (work on an existing building to improve its energy efficiency)
- Renewable technologies such as solar panels and air source heat pumps and how they work
- Eligibility for grant funding and financing
- Advice and support with home energy use, smart meters, bills and tariff's
- Useful tips and advice for saving energy and water, and more!

In 2023, it was estimated that around 13 per cent of households in England (3.17 million) were unable to afford to heat their homes to an adequate temperature. For many people, this also had an impact on their health.

Visitors can explore the latest low-carbon and renewable technologies in action and learn how to transform their homes for a sustainable future.

FAMILY HUBS ONE YEAR ON

Blackpool Family Hubs are celebrating their first birthday this month after launching three hubs across north, central and south Blackpool last year.

To celebrate the milestone, each hub held birthday parties, with local families of all ages invited to attend, free of charge.

Offering free support to local families, the Family Hub network is home to Central Family Hub (formerly known as Talbot and Brunswick Children's Centre) on Gorton Street, North Family Hub (formerly known as Grange Park Children's Centre) on Dingle Avenue, and South Family Hub inside Palatine Leisure Centre on St Anne's Road.

To find out more about Blackpool Family Hubs, visit www.blackpool.gov.uk/FamilyHubs

LIFEBOAT RESCUE

Restoration work is underway to give one of Blackpool's historic pubs a new lease of life.

The investment is taking place at the Lifeboat Inn on Foxhall Road, which is one of the town's oldest buildings, dating back to the mid-19th century.

Originally called Wylies Hotel, the inn is thought to have been used as a meeting place for the men who manned the lifeboats in Blackpool.

A planning application has been submitted by Star Pubs and Bars Ltd applying for a sympathetic refurbishment of the building, which is locally listed.

In the meantime, urgent structural repairs are being undertaken to rebuild and stabilise an external wall.

4. Request for private sector support

ALCOHOL HARM REDUCTION SERVICES IN THE WORKPLACE

Blackpool Council's Public Health team is looking to roll out its alcohol harm reduction services into the workplace – and needs more businesses to get involved.

The service is particularly aimed at single men in employment in Blackpool who are at risk from alcohol-related issues.

Members of the Drug and Alcohol Assertive Outreach Team can attend any staff welfare days or events to talk about drug and alcohol consumption. They also have a range of information and advice for staff to take away. If organisations don't hold specific staff welfare days, the team can set up a stall in communal areas such as staff rooms.

A confidential advice service is also available.

If any business is interested in learning more about this service, contact Lianne Lee. Email: llee@ren-uk.com

Philip Welsh
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