

## CABINET MEMBER FOR TOURISM AND LEISURE – COUNCILLOR CAIN

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### Illuminations

The Illuminations season ended on 9 November, with promenade collections ahead of previous year. This year, the collections have been aided by the distribution of free illumination maps incorporating discounted parking and admission to attractions. Business collections are spread across a wider period than just the illuminations season and the final tally will not be known until early in the New Year.

The Illuminations team has undertaken displays for a number of other areas of the country. Christmas displays have been produced for neighbouring towns including Chorley. These contracts provide income for the Illuminations team and help support the development of the Blackpool show.

A £2m bid to develop the Illuminations has been submitted to the Coastal Communities Fund. The “LightPool” project seeks to deliver a radical transformation of the show and help create a sustainable commercial business model. If successful, the funding bid will provide new digital technology to project on to Blackpool Tower, new digital festooning and performance events on the promenade and town centre. It will also fund an improved marketing strategy to expand the current visitor base, encouraging overnight stays and return visits. The outcome of the bid should be known in early 2015.

### Leisure Management

#### Moor Park Health and Leisure Centre and Palatine Leisure Centre Refurbishments

Moor Park Health and Leisure Centre are undergoing a £414,000 redevelopment to greatly improve the already popular health and fitness facilities. The fitness suite will be extended to become a state of the art 60 station gym with a large dedicated free weights area. There will also be a brand new exercise class and dedicated spinning studios located on the ground floor. In addition, a meeting room will be developed located next to the large activity room. Following the huge success of the Feel Good Factory (toning suite) at Palatine Leisure Centre a similar facility will be built at Moor Park on the first floor. The work started on the 6 October and will be complete with all new facilities expected to open to the public on the 19 January 2015.

A refurbishment of Palatine Leisure Centre’s fitness suite will also commence through the Christmas period. The facility will undergo a face lift and have new, state of the art fitness equipment installed in the gym.

#### Free Swimming is a splashing success!

Sport Blackpool continues to offer free swimming during the school holidays to children and young people aged sixteen years and under at Palatine Leisure Centre and Moor Park Health and Leisure Centre. From family fun sessions through to large inflatable sessions at Palatine Leisure Centre, there is something for everyone. The summer holidays saw an increase in free swimming participation, especially at Moor Park Health and Leisure Centre, with 6,410 children swimming for free, an increase of 42% compared to 2013 and 6,771 free swims at Palatine Leisure Centre, bringing the total participation to over 13,000 young people.

### Blackpool Aquatics

Blackpool Aquatics Swimming Club, in partnership with Sport Blackpool has seen some fantastic successes in recent months;

- Blackpool Aquatics swimmer Shauntelle Austin captained Lancashire county swimming team against the rest of counties. The Lancashire team achieved a monumental consecutive 13th win at inter counties championship held at Ponds Forge International in October.
- Blackpool Aquatics swimmer Anthony Wood has been selected on to the ASA England Talent Swimming program for 2014/ 2015 season. Anthony's selection was based on performances at National competitions from the previous season and national ranking for his age.

### Swimtag

- 65 swimmers at Palatine Leisure Centre entered a Swimtag centre challenge to swim the distance from Blackpool Tower Headland to Douglas Isle of Man 103km. The challenge started 1 August and 18 swimmers have completed the swim so far. Mandy Ferguson raised £500 for charity in the process.

Mandy's testimony

"In August just when I came back from holiday, there was an email from Palatine Leisure Centre and Swimtag about a new challenge to swim the distance between Blackpool and the Isle of Man, which is 103km, so I thought that sounded quite good and I decided to start on the 8<sup>th</sup> August, after the first session of 104 lengths I had only swam 2.4 km, it then dawned on me that I had taken on quite a big challenge. But being a person who doesn't quit easily I persevered and decided to dedicate my swim to charity, so far I have raised £500, not only have I done some good, but I've made friends and lost weight in the process, with special thanks to the reception staff, Paul and Elaine, coaching staff, Grace and all staff at palatine who encouraged me to finish, I'm especially proud that I finished in 10th position. I'm now looking forward to another challenge next year."

### Active Blackpool / Feel Good Factory / Steps to Health

Active Blackpool is a supported physical activity programme designed to help encourage and motivate the participants into a more active way of life, thereby helping improve general health and wellbeing, below is one example how the Active Blackpool programme has helped a client achieve this.

'I joined Moor Park Leisure centre through Active Blackpool after finishing a Pulmonary Rehab course that the hospital referred me onto in March 2013. I have a lot of health issues and was waiting to have major abdominal surgery. I was 22 stone with chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and just told I had type 2 diabetes. My surgeon wouldn't operate as I was too high risk.

With the help of Geoff and the Active Blackpool scheme and James and Dax in the gym we developed a program to help achieve my goal of having my operation and improving my health. So 18 months later I have lost almost 9 stone. I improved my lung function from only 15% to 45% which meant I could finally have my surgery a few months ago which was successful.

I still have my health problems and some large hurdles to overcome. But having the wonderful facilities and staff at Moor Park has made a huge difference in my life. I am still enjoying Geoff's class and working with the gym staff to improve my abdominal area and lung capacity more.

The benefits have definitely made a huge physical difference in my life, but also a psychological one too. I've made some good friends. I get out of the house and socialise with people at Moor Park, where I used to be a prisoner in my own home previously. I can't praise the staff enough and I am really looking forward to the new developments underway at Moor Park!"

Thanks for everything, Neil".

The Active Blackpool programme has received 643 referrals in the last six months, with 6669 visits on to the programme in the same period. Some new Active Blackpool circuit sessions have now started at Gateway Fitness Centre and are increasing in numbers.

Steps to Health have had 41 new walkers in the last six months and 3975 visits. The walking programme took 55 walkers to the Lake District in September for their annual day trip out, with a long walk available in the morning or a short walk in the afternoon.

On 20<sup>th</sup> October, Steps to Health walked in aid of the Poppython Appeal along South Promenade in the pouring rain and raised £61.70.

#### Feel Good Factory

The Feel Good Factory at Palatine Leisure Centre organised a coffee morning in aid of the Macmillan cancer appeal on the 3<sup>rd</sup> October and raised a fantastic £772.31.

#### School and Community

With the first half term of the new school year over, Blackpool children and young people have continued to engage in high quality sport within and beyond the school day. Blackpool School and Community Team are once again working closely with schools to ensure that the provision of PE is delivered in a manner that allows for engagement, development and inclusivity for all participants. Sports Coaches have been delivering extracurricular sports clubs to provide an opportunity for greater levels physical activity with areas of focus including Change 4 Life, Indoor Athletics, Wheels 4 All Cycling and Multi-Skills.

Blackpool hosted the Lancashire Projectability Awareness Event which saw schools from across Lancashire attend a training workshop delivered by Highfurlong School and Blackpool School and Community Team. The event was delivered as part of the Inclusive Sport Programme within the School Games and provided practical based ideas to be taken back into schools in order to increase the sporting offer for children with Special Educational Needs. The workshop delegates were treated to an inspirational insight into how sport can have a positive impact on people's lives as Justine Moore described her journey from a Blackpool school pupil through to becoming a Paralympic Athlete.

Community Sport has continued to offer young people a range of activities to engage in at the Healthy Play Programme and the Community Tennis Programme both based within the local communities. Participants at the Healthy Play Programme have been taking part in a range of activities such as Cricket, Dodgeball, Football and Basketball. The Community Tennis Programme has now moved to South Shore Tennis Club for the winter months as we continue to search for the next Wimbledon Champion.

#### Cycling

A total of 977 school children in Year 5 and 6 received the national standard Bikeability cycle training in the academic year 2013/ 2014. Of those 788 achieved the Level 2 award of cycling proficiently on quiet/ single lane roads.

New cycle training sessions are set to start in the New Year called Urban Biking and will take place at the Palatine Cycle Track. The group sessions will last two hours and cover Bikeability Levels 1 and 2. The aim is to give cyclists the skills and confidence to cycle safely on the roads.

In partnership with the Police a working group was set up in the summer called Safer Cycling. Its first objective was to tackling cycling on the footway. As a result, 1000 referral cards will be printed promoting the Urban Biking course and issued by PCSO's to people they witness cycling on the footway.

## **Marton Mere Nature Reserve and Ecological Areas**

### Marton Mere Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) Project

The project is now fully underway as a Marton Mere Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) Steering Group has been developed with key stakeholders from Natural England, Environment Agency, local and regional natural history groups and Blackpool Council. Designs for the Year 1 major works elements of the project have now been agreed. The visitor centre construction started in November and will be ready to receive staff and visitors by February 2015. Marton Mere's lake island will be remodelled to include wetland, lagoon and pond areas to attract internationally and nationally protected bird and invertebrate species. A new elevated bird hide will be constructed to provide excellent views across the site and beyond. We shall also be constructing Lancashire's largest artificial Sand Martin Nesting Bank into the island periphery.

A Project Officer will be appointed to oversee the delivery of capital works, conservation management and community engagement programmes. They will be expected to develop and build effective relationships with key partners, community organisations and local people as well as design and deliver programmes of community events, activities and volunteer projects. An Environmental Volunteer Coordinator will be appointed to assist with a three year programme of volunteer and community involvement projects, coordinating volunteers in practical conservation and estate management projects in line with the project timetable.

## **Tourism and Marketing Services – VisitBlackpool**

### New entry-level scheme

A new entry level scheme for visitor accommodation is to be introduced in Blackpool in 2015. The Blackpool Approved scheme, which is accredited by VisitEngland, ensures that a property is "legal, safe and clean", meets all requirements with regard to health and safety and also demonstrates good customer practice.

Although it does not give an indication of a property's quality or facilities, it allows potential visitors to be assured that the accommodation they are considering is a correctly registered and properly-run business. The scheme allows accommodation providers to become part of a recognised accreditation standard at much less cost and with little intrusion and requires only a short visit from a trained assessor.

The introduction of the scheme means that accommodation providers who achieve the accreditation will be able to appear in a designated "entry level" section on the VisitBlackpool website, participate in a wide variety of marketing campaigns and feature in the annual Destination Guide. Until now, VisitBlackpool has only traded with star-rated accommodation approved by VisitEngland and/ or the AA.

In Blackpool, there will be three ways in which accommodation can get the Blackpool Approved entry-level accreditation:

1. Via Stay Blackpool, the hotel association which represents only nationally accredited accommodation businesses in Blackpool, which will have its own VisitEngland approved assessors.
2. Via Yes Hotels, an independent association, which will also have VisitEngland approved assessors
3. By applying directly to Quality In Tourism for a local assessment to be carried out.

Assessments/ visits will be carried out annually and assessors will check websites on a regular basis to ensure guests are not being misled. Accreditation in the Blackpool Approved scheme will cost about a third of the full national schemes.

#### Destination Management Plan

The first draft of a new three-year Destination Management Plan (DMP) for Blackpool is nearing completion. The DMP seeks to build on the substantial investment that has already been made in Blackpool over the past few years. The plan is underpinned by an aspirational re-positioning aimed at changing any negative perceptions of Blackpool by creating a high-quality, year-round family destination that is capable of supporting a wider economic regeneration.

#### Showzam!

The annual Showzam! festival will have a circus theme when it is staged in Blackpool during next year's February half term. For the first time, the festival will be a partnership between VisitBlackpool and LeftCoast. "Circus Town" will be held between 14 and 18 February with circus companies and performers from across the UK presenting shows in various event spaces. There will also be a new "fringe" programme of evening performances, as well as the annual Carnival Ball which will be held on the first night of the festival.

#### BBC television

Strictly Come Dancing returned to the Tower Ballroom on November 15 and 16, generating a huge amount of publicity for the resort. There was extensive coverage on TV in the lead up to the two shows, culminating in almost three hours of prime time coverage on the Saturday and Sunday nights. The BBC brought a 200-strong crew to Blackpool to stage the shows and a number of businesses benefited directly from the cast and crew staying over. The Strictly show usually commands a television audience of over seven million people. The resort was also featured extensively on the BBC on the eve of the Strictly weekend when the North West regional broadcast for Children In Need was staged at the Tower Circus, this was in addition to the coverage the previous week for the Rickshaw Challenge .

#### **Registrars and Coroner's Support**

Festival House (i.e. 'the wedding chapel') was shortlisted for an Award in the recently held Lancashire Tourism Awards for the best Wedding Venue. Unfortunately it was unsuccessful on this occasion, but it is proof of its growing reputation and popularity.

#### **Grounds Maintenance – community parks.**

##### Green Space Volunteer website

A green volunteer website has been designed by the Parks Service and Groundwork and a public launch is imminent. The new website will be a one-stop-shop for prospective volunteers, students and job seekers looking to get involved in Blackpool's green spaces to learn new skills, help care for the local environment, participate in outdoor activities and meet new people. The website will make it easier for local people to discover more green volunteering opportunities, apply to become a volunteer and learn about ongoing green projects. The website will help to bring in investment to

green causes by providing a portal for personal, charitable or corporate donations and gifts. The website will ensure that green volunteering in Blackpool is professionalised and coordinated in context of the big picture, helping both the environment as well as the individual. Park Friends Groups and Allotment Associations will find the website a useful mechanism for boosting membership.

### **Relationships with the Winter Gardens Company**

Negotiations are underway for the 2015 show season at the Winter Gardens following the box office success of MAMMA MIA! this year. A number of shows are being considered for the Opera House during the summer and autumn seasons. It is hoped that the line-up will be confirmed before the end of this year to enable marketing and promotion to get underway. In the meantime, the Winter Gardens has secured a number of high profile one-off concerts including comedians Peter Kay and Lee Mack, as well as a Christmas film season.

The Winter Gardens won two awards at the Lancashire Tourism Awards, being named as Cultural Venue of the Year and Meeting and Conference Venue Of The Year. The awards were judged by an independent panel and awarded in front of more than 500 industry professionals at the Tower Ballroom. The awards follow a record breaking year for the Winter Gardens which has seen the venue celebrate over one million visits and the summer season run of MAMMA MIA! break all box office records.