

CABINET MEMBER FOR TOURISM AND LEISURE – COUNCILLOR CAIN

Illuminations

A very busy run-up to the Christmas period saw the Illuminations service provide Christmas displays in Blackpool, Chorley and St Annes, as well as a number of trees across the borough, funded from ward budgets. In addition, the service has supplied equipment to other localities including Scotland, Bradford and Sheffield.

Plans for the 2015 Illuminations are now progressing, although the overall structure of the display depends on the outcome of the bid to the Coastal Communities Fund, which seeks to reinvent the Illuminations offer around the Tower Festival Headlands. The outcome of the bid is expected in late January.

Leisure Management

Blackpool's sporting talent is set to be showcased in a celebration of community sport. The awards, which are a Blackpool Community Sports Council event, have taken place for over 25 years. They will showcase the dedication and commitment of coaches, teams and volunteers as well as recognising outstanding achievement, which will culminate in a presentation ceremony in the Sponsors Lounge at Blackpool Football Club on Thursday 12 March 2015.

Three young, local leisure workers have secured full time jobs with Blackpool Council after completing successful apprenticeships after completing a year of dedicated on the job learning, training and work experience in a number of different fields from lifeguarding to activity leadership. They achieved certificates in leisure operations, exercise and fitness, circuit training instruction, activity leadership, instructing adolescents, employment awareness and function skills as well as a Level 2 NVQ in exercise and fitness and the National Pool Lifeguard Qualification.

The School Games has continued to engage children and young people from Blackpool Schools in high quality school sport competition with over 2,500 young competitors taking part in School Games Level One Competitions. The autumn term has seen over 200 young athletes competing in the School Games Level Two Indoor Athletics Competitions, which feed into the Blackpool and Lancashire Finals in 2015. A highlight of the term was the Primary School Festive Fun Run, which saw almost 200 children, put on their Christmas Jumpers and Santa Hats to raise money for Save the Children as part of National Christmas Jumper Day.

The Healthy Play Community Sports Programme is now engaging children and young people five evenings every week with the introduction of sessions taking place at Moor Park Health and Leisure Centre on a Monday and Stanley Park on a Friday. The new sessions compliment the sessions already being delivered at Mereside on a Tuesday, Talbot and Brunswick Sports Barn on a Wednesday and Revoe Park on a Thursday.

Bikeability Schools Programme

In the period September to December 2014, the cycle training team visited 10 Primary Schools and trained 376 Year 5 and 6 pupils. Of these 318 achieved level two standard, proficient in cycling safely on the road, 39 achieved level 1 standard, basic bike control skills.

Learn to Ride Programme

Learn to Ride sessions were launched in November at Norbreck Academy. Delivered at the same time, their year group participates in Bikeability, this avoids pupil exclusion and full participation across the year group. Our aim is to engage all pupils no matter what their riding ability and providing the opportunity to take part in a cycling activity.

Early Years Cycling Programme

An Early Years programme has been established to combat the current issue we are faced with at Year 5 with bikeability and learn to ride. The programme is aimed at children who have the fundamental walking skills, this can start from two years and will be offered to all children through to five years to introduce them to fundamental skills of cycling. The programme uses specialised Balance Bikes (bikes without pedals) to make learning to ride fun and easy. The sessions have been piloted at West Park and Marmadukes Kindergarden with positive feedback from both.

Wheels for All Schools Programme

Woodlands (25 children), Park (24 children) and Highfurlong (16 children) Special Schools each receive weekly one hour cycling sessions using the specialised Wheels for All bikes. The sessions take place at Blackpool Sports Arena every Friday morning in term time.

Urban Biking Cycle Training

From Saturday 10 January, a new cycle training course called Urban Biking started at Palatine Leisure Centre. The course is designed to give trainees the skills and confidence to cycle on the roads to Bikeability level two national standard. The class ratio will be one trainer to four trainees with two hours of on road training.

Dr Bike Cycle checks and Police coding

A partnership with community safety and our own Dr Bike, has been offered to community residents. A full maintenance cycle check and police coding will be available to anyone who wishes to purchase, keeping our cyclists safe and their bikes secure.

Stanley Park and Showground

Stanley Park contains the biggest and the best children's playground in the North West and is about to get even better through the inclusion of more new toddler focussed equipment. Further to securing a further £3,000 Area Forum funding for interactive play panels, eight of the new features have now been installed and include a 'Make it Rain', 'Farmyard Sounds', 'Animal Jigsaw', 'Interactive Car' and 'Bongo Drums' theme. Play panels are beneficial to children from two to five years, encourage mental stimulation and make play more accessible to children with special development needs, creating a more inclusive, sensory and engaging play experience. The panels compliment the brand new animal themed playground, which was installed back in May using funding from SITA Enhancing Communities Fund. The playground and the wider park have received excellent reviews from visiting customers posting comments on the travel website Trip Advisor. We are seeking further funding to expand the range of the equipment and facilities on the site include more ride-on springies, climbing frames and picnic areas.

Marton Mere Nature Reserve and Ecological Areas

Phase One of the Marton Mere's New Visitor Centre project is now fully underway. A project steering group, attended by Natural England, Bourne Leisure, Fylde Bird Club, Nature Watch and Blackpool Council has been successfully formed and meets monthly to advise and support on the completion of the project delivery plan. A Project Officer and Environmental Volunteer Coordinator have now been appointed and they will be immediately tasked with developing a volunteer engagement and activity programme.

A twenty-year lease has now been agreed for the new visitor centre facility and contractor Eclipse Developments have started works to demolish the shell of the former Ranger Station and start to develop the new centre framework. The anticipated completion date is 31 January 2015 and the building will be a key local tourism attraction, staff and volunteer base for the site. Construction on a new elevated bird hide will start February 2015 and a significant volume of spoil will be used to landscape it into the surrounding landscape.

All design, consultation and tender work associated with the project ground works has been completed. The lake island will be significantly remodelled to include a variegated edge and complex channels and lagoons to encourage and accommodate national protected bird and mammal species including Bitterns and Otters. The largest artificial Sand Martin nesting bank in the North West will be constructed on the south end of the island to attract and accommodate these nationally important birds. New, accessible ponds will be constructed to home Great Nested Newts as well as provide for school education pond dip sessions.

A volunteer management day was arranged by the Parks and Open Spaces Service and Groundwork to clean-up and complete vital conservation work at Weymouth Road Open Space on the 26 November 2014. Fifteen volunteers from DWP Community 10000 joined the team's regular volunteers for the clean up. This was also part of Keep Britain Tidy's campaign 'The Big Tidy Up'. Eight bags of rubbish were collected from site, site entrances widened to improve visibility and personal safety, old infrastructure removed to clean up site aesthetics and 500 bulbs planted to bring some colour in spring. The team also undertook a programme of woodland management to thin and improve the perimeter shrub belt and build 40 meters of dead hedge to build an effective boundary barrier, benefit wildlife and enabling the recycling of cut material.

The Parks and Open Spaces Service staff and volunteer rangers as well as Groundwork have been busy undertaking an intense programme of woodland management, meadow cutting and opening up glade areas to increase biodiversity and extend varied wildlife habitats during the past two months. All three miles of the Heron's Reach bridleway have had the edges cutback, strimmed and cleared. A new suite of timber bins and benches funded by Ward Councillors have been installed and improved drainage, new way marking and interpretation boards are planned for 2015.

Tourism and Marketing Services – VisitBlackpool

Resort Pass

The Blackpool Resort Pass is to be re-launched for 2015 with a credit card style pass used by leading destinations across Europe including London, York, Paris and Amsterdam. The pass will allow customers to pre-book the resort's main attractions at a heavily discounted price. More than 13,000 passes were sold during the 2014 season.

Showzam! Circus Town

The programme for this year's Showzam! festival is now nearing completion. The festival, which runs from 14 to 18 February, has a Circus Town theme and will feature the high-energy Columbian circus company, Circolumbia, which is coming to Blackpool ahead of its official premiere at London's Roundhouse.

Showzam! will also include the popular Carnival Ball on the opening night and there will be a wide range of circus performance and street theatre in and around various venues including the Winter Gardens. This year's festival is a partnership between VisitBlackpool, Left Coast and Sea Change.

2015 Events Programme

The VisitBlackpool events programme for 2015 has now been agreed in principle. The programme includes the two-day Blackpool Airshow on 9 and 10 August, Ride The Lights on 1 September, Switch On Festival Weekend between 4 and 6 September and four nights of world firework championships

commencing on 11 September. The 2014 events programme was credited as one of the reasons for a surge in visitor numbers during the summer months.

Initial discussions have taken place with a number of prospective media partners over the format for the Illuminations switch-on weekend. The aim is to build on the successful 2014 format which saw the return of the free switch on event on the Friday, followed by two commercial concerts on the Tower Festival Headland on the following two nights.

Blackpool To London Rail Services

VisitBlackpool worked closely with Virgin Trains on the launch of the new Blackpool to London direct service. Virgin has agreed to stock copies of the Blackpool Destination Guide and the Blackpool Conference Guide in the lounge areas at London's Euston Station. Further partnership working will be undertaken in coming months to ensure that the new direct services add value to Blackpool's leisure and business tourism markets.

Cemetery and Crematorium

In January 2014, the Executive agreed to appoint the specialist company ATI Technologies to refurbish fully the three cremators at Carleton Crematorium after the original contractor went into liquidation. The original timescale was for the work to be completed by the end of September 2014. However, due to unforeseen problems with the machines, delays have occurred which have been out of our control. The delay in completing the work has been frustrating for all involved, however this is extremely specific work on complicated technical equipment. The Crematorium has been open and operating daily with two out of our three cremators operating nearly every working day last year and the crematorium dealt with over 1,500 cremations in 2014. To ensure minimal disruption officers have been communicating regularly with funeral directors and colleagues at Lytham crematorium to ensure bereaved families are aware of their options. Testing is taking place on the final machine this month and we hope to have it up and running soon.

Grounds Maintenance – community parks.

A SITA Environment Trust Fast Track £20,000 funding bid is being prepared to upgrade Watson Road Park's under stocked and aging children's playground. Parks and Open Spaces Service staff have been working with the Park Friends Group and Playground Engineer to formulate a number of different new play designs, which will form the basis of a site base consultation in January 2015. The Fast Track stream of the grant enables a quick turnaround and if successful will spearhead improvements for next April, ready for the new season.

Parks and Open Spaces Service staff, New Langdale Community volunteers, as well as local councillors have been busy throughout November providing a dose of tender loving care to the memorial woodland within Kingscote Park. The volunteers, made up of adults with learning disabilities, gave up two full days of their time to improve the park and ensuring it was made as accessible as possible, thinning the trees to increase visibility, as well as cleaning up piles of mess that had been left behind and removing some of the dead trees. The green-fingered volunteers were helped by the park based Blackpool Stanley Rugby Club, who opened up their central pavilion to all of the workers and provided refreshments free of charge while they carried out the improvements.

Relationships with the Winter Gardens Company

The line-up for the 2015 season is now starting to take shape with three top quality shows already announced and more to follow in the early part of the New Year. The shows already confirmed are Jesus Christ Superstar from 10 to 14 March 10-14, a revival of Tommy, The Rock Opera from 11 to 26 September and the hit musical, A Christmas Carol from 4 December to 3 January 2016.

The 12 Films of Christmas promotion saw the first season of activity using the new state-of-the art cinema equipment within the Opera House. The programme proved extremely popular with a total of 5,670 paying customers, with 2,300 of those attending two performances of Disney's Frozen Sing-A-Long.