

CABINET MEMBER FOR TOURISM AND LEISURE – COUNCILLOR CAIN

Illuminations

Blackpool's world-famous Illuminations are to be reinvented following the award of a £2m Government grant. The Coastal Communities Fund has confirmed that Blackpool Council's bid to transform the Lights show has been accepted in full.

With further contributions from the Council and from Left Coast, it means that the Illuminations will benefit from a £2.4m investment over the next few years. Proposed new attractions within the "Lightpool" project will include:

- Digitally mapped projections on to the Blackpool Tower building, enhanced by bespoke audio tracks.
- Digital festooning leading people from the Promenade into Brilliance on Birley Street, where there will be a new sound and light event space.
- New gateways at the promenade and Central Car Park arrival points with illuminated kiosks and navigational signage.
- A new artistic light installation at the Grundy Art Gallery.
- Employment of Illuminations "ambassadors" to improve the overall visitor experience.

Work on the scheme will commence from April, with some elements in place by the start of this year's Illuminations season. It is estimated that the investment could generate an additional two million extra visits to Blackpool over the next five years.

Business Support

A new brochure aimed at driving up the levels of business support for the illuminations has been produced. It was launched at a business event at the Winter Gardens on 26 February, hosted by Illuminations creative curator and TV personality Laurence Llewelyn-Bowen.

External Work

A large-scale project is underway with Sunderland Council with designs and presentations being made to them mid-March for a display which will build on the highly successful 2014 show.

Tourism and Marketing Services – VisitBlackpool

SHOWZAM!

Blackpool welcomed performers from across the globe when Showzam! 2015 rolled into the resort with a "Circus Town" theme. Highlights of Showzam!, which ran for most of the February half-term holiday included the Columbian-based Circolumbia, which performed daily at the Tower Circus, Carnival Ball at the Tower Ballroom, 100 free performances in Showzam! Central in the Winter Gardens' various venues and street theatre throughout the town centre.

This year's festival was programmed by Left Coast in association with VisitBlackpool.

Blackpool's Back

The Blackpool's Back destination marketing campaign, which played such an integral part in the resort's highly successful season in 2014, is to be repeated this year. Blackpool Council and Merlin Entertainments have agreed to part-fund the £700,000 campaign, with contributions being sought from other businesses within the visitor economy.

The campaign will again comprise a mix of TV advertising, digital activity and PR. It is anticipated that the TV ad will be largely based on the 2014 ad with some minor changes to the content. This year, the campaign is expected to start earlier than last year's July launch.

The new joint campaign was announced by Nick Varney, the Chief Executive of Merlin, who also revealed that the 2014 campaign had helped his Blackpool attractions out-perform all of his other UK-based operations in terms of increased revenue.

In 2014, the marketing campaign was credited with helping Blackpool grow its visitor numbers by over 200,000 visitors during the May to August period and growing the number of overnight stays by 30% compared to previous year.

Relationships with the Winter Gardens Company

2015 Shows Programme

The programme for the 2015 season is building well with most of the shows between Easter and the October half term in place. The principal show for the summer is expected to be announced in March. The latest addition to the 2015 Opera House line-up is the world premiere of a new musical, Last Night A DJ Saved My Life, starring David Hasselhoff. It will run during the October half term. Other shows already confirmed include The Sound Of Music, A Christmas Carol, Jesus Christ Superstar and the UK premiere of the revival of Tommy The Rock Opera.

Winter Gardens Trust

A formal launch of the second edition of the Blackpool Winter Gardens book by Professor Vanessa Toulmin was staged at the venue at the end of February. The new edition contains an additional chapter on the restoration and future of the complex, as well as new photography. The launch event was staged by the board of the Winter Gardens Trust.

Theatre Bar

The former Bar Red building in the St John's section of the Winter Gardens has been refurbished to create a new bar and eating establishment. It will now be known as 'The Theatre Bar' and opened at the end of February.

Cemeteries and Crematorium

All three cremators have now been refurbished and are operational on a daily basis. From April, bookings can now be made for services in the crematorium for a 30-minute period or a 45-minute period (currently just the 30-minute period is offered). Services will also be offered for booking on a Saturday in the Crematorium, which is an addition to the current Monday to Friday.

Leisure Management

This year began in great style for School and Community Sport, schools from across Blackpool competed at the School Games Indoor Athletics competitions at Blackpool Sports Centre. Over 300 young athletes competed in track and field events with the honour of representing Blackpool at the Lancashire School Games County Finals. Anchorsholme, Highfield, St Georges and Montgomery took the titles and will now take on the rest of the county at the next rounds in Hyndburn later this year.

Sport Blackpool has joined forces with Street Games to offer a young person's sports club hosted at Blackpool Sports Centre on a Friday evening. The new sporting offer has been recognised by Street

Games and has seen Sport Blackpool be awarded the Street Games Quality Mark Award the first provider of Street Games to receive this accreditation locally.

The sessions are a welcomed addition to the existing community sports offer in Blackpool, which now provides engagement opportunities every weekday evening.

The school cycle training programme continued through winter delivering Bikeability road safety training to a total of 113 Year 5 pupils at Waterloo, Claremont and Holy Family Schools throughout January and February. During the same period, Learn to Ride sessions were delivered at Waterloo School to 15 Year 5 pupils who lacked the skills and confidence to ride a two-wheeled bike. The Schools cycle training programme achieved high pupil engagement at Holy Family (100%) and Waterloo (92%).

In January, six adults received 'on the road' cycle training as part of a programme to equip riders with the skills and confidence to cycle in traffic.

As part of the Palatine Leisure Centre Open Day a Dr Bike safety check and local Police team security bike coding event was arranged as part of the cycling promotion. The yellow bikes were free to hire and the cycle track made available all day.

Three bikes donated by the Police have been booked in for refurbishment for the Fulfilling Lives project as a means to help people improve their mobility.

The Wheels for All programme currently provides for Park, Woodlands and Highfurlong schools, Age UK and Active Blackpool clients to access cycling sessions weekly. The session offers a mentally and physically stimulating activity to engage with friends and have fun.

Blackpool's Early Years Physical Activity Programme for children aged 0 – 5 years has got off to a flying start this past year. We have worked across 20 private and school based nurseries delivering our Early Start programme, which looks to deliver high quality physical activity provision for Blackpool's future generation. The programme is delivered over a six-week period and covers a wide range of multi-skills, games and activities, which have strong connections with the Early Years Foundation Stage Framework (EYFS) and adhere to guidelines set by nationally recognised organisations. As part of the programme we have helped develop the awareness and knowledge of over 70 early year's professionals, whilst encouraging and supporting parents and carers with appropriate physical activity based activities.

Our School Transition programme has also seen similar success, aimed for students in Year 6 and 7, we have helped encourage and increase levels of physical activity by increasing opportunities and removing social and emotional barriers. We have increased the activity rate of pupils by over 20%, and sign posted students to our community and local sports clubs to continue their desire to participate in sport.

'Learn to Cycle' is a unique and exclusive programme for two year olds and older to get an early start into cycling. Sport Blackpool has a range of balance bikes on offer to provide the confidence, have fun cycling and understand the basics of road safety. Having an early start can only speed up the cycling skills and having them riding around on two wheels in no time.

Stanley Park and Showground

The Parks and Open Spaces Service submitted a bid to Barclays Bank Spirit of the Community Awards to enable the creation of the largest man-made wildflower meadow on the Fylde Coast.

Busy Bee Meadows will be a stunning, bee shaped wildflower experience in the heart of Blackpool's urban metropolis. Fed up of staring at excessively mown lawns and grassland areas that add little

colour or habitat for insects and birds, our vision is to develop the Fylde Coast's very first purpose made wildflower meadow experience that brings nature to the doorstep of the community and provides a hugely important habitat for bees and butterflies. With a meadow guide and interpretive signage, the meadow will go a long way to enhance people's appreciation of Blackpool's green heritage.

Busy Bee Meadows will be developed within Stanley Park. The meadow will be situated on an existing field overlooking a number of key park facilities and will be accessible through an existing path network. The meadow will contain a series of mown paths enabling people to explore up-close. The visitor centre at Stanley Park as well as the planned new visitor centre at Marton Mere Nature Reserve will serve as superb hubs to promote the meadow and distribute information.

The construction, management and conservation of the meadow will enable an excellent range of volunteering projects, including the inclusion of volunteers to assist in the preparation and seeding of the site, as well as keeping pernicious weeds in check. Seasonal seed collecting events (such as National Seed Gathering Sunday) will spearhead a Blackpool Seed Hub, where park visitors can purchase bags of native, local wildflower seed to sow at home.

Stanley Park's five-year strategic management plan, created in partnership and consultation with a comprehensive range of stakeholders including Natural England, English Heritage, Blackpool Civic Trust and local group Nature Watch, outlines a clear need for implementing sustainable grassland management practices within the park. This will facilitate a wildflower legacy, benefit local biodiversity, reduce uneconomical and labour intensive grass cutting regimes, enable volunteer involvement and benefit local schools. It is hoped the scheme will set the precedent for town wide wildflower creation schemes, which are a colourful and creative way to reduce grass cutting.

Marton Mere Nature Reserve and Ecological Areas

The official launch of the Marton Mere Heritage Lottery Project occurred Thursday 5 February 2015, giving local media the opportunity to discuss the project details. Publicity from the Blackpool Gazette, Radio Lancashire and Granada has boosted interest from local schools, colleges and volunteers who are signing up to get involved. Progress of the project can be followed on Twitter and Facebook, where we are showing a photographic diary and promoting opportunities for people to get active on the site.

A series of volunteering taster days was organised throughout February, attracting over 40 participants who are signing up to become permanent volunteers. Volunteers will play a key role in supporting staff with specialist habitat management, wildlife surveys, nature walks, education with schools and the running of the new visitor centre. A new Marton Mere Volunteer Information Pack has been designed which will be promoted, circulated and uploaded on websites to encourage new applicants and guide people through the process of becoming a fully fledge project volunteer.

Contractors are now on site and work has commenced on the island and hide in the northeast corner of the reserve. The works will include re-profiling the island to make better feeding habitat for wintering wildfowl and encourage breeding of our ground nesting birds. The removed spoil will be used to create higher ground on which a brand new hide will sit, giving views across the island and the reserve. A temporary causeway across water to the island has been created to allow machinery on to undertake the works. Things are about to get even busier as we head towards March, when large areas of meadow are cut ready for spring, reed control works begin, an artificial Sand Martin Nesting Bank is built and our visitor centre building will be completed.

Sport, Physical Activity and Play.

A new Feel Good Factory facility, which is aimed at supporting clients to lose weight, get in shape, improve mobility, tone up and improve strength, has opened at Moor Park Health Leisure Centre. The new facility has already attracted 55 new members after only two weeks of opening.

The Active Blackpool team has introduced two more cardiac rehabilitation phase IV classes at Moor Park Health and Leisure Centre due to a further increase in demand from clients wishing to attend from the NHS Cardiac phase III rehabilitation team.

A new partnership with England Golf and Tee Time Golf will provide Feel Good Factory and Active Blackpool members with an alternative activity to try with friends.

A total of 60 people from the walking group enjoyed a very informative tour of the illuminations workshop in January. They were amazed at all the hard work to operate the illuminations at Blackpool. Members felt that having had a behind the scenes tour of the factory, 'they would appreciate the illuminations a lot more in the future'.

In partnership with the Amateur Swimming Association, Sport Blackpool was the first adopters of the centre based swimming technology 'Swimtag' in the North West region. The Swimtag system was installed at Palatine Leisure Centre in January 2014 for a 12-month trial period and over this time, the swimming challenges that were created received coverage in both the Blackpool Gazette and on BBC Radio Lancashire.

In the first year over 550 customers created a Swimtag account and the number of swims often exceeded 1,000 Swimtag swims per month. At the end of the 12-month trial period feedback was sought from the Sport Blackpool Swimtag users as to how they felt about the Council investing in the Swimtag technology permanently. As a result of the overwhelming feedback the decision was made to purchase the equipment for Palatine Leisure Centre.

Less than a month on from the permanent installation, the number of users has now exceeded 620 with new initiatives such as Swimtag Swim fit sessions, School engagement and Active Blackpool referral programmes being introduced.

Sport Blackpool has recently revised the Liquid Assets adult learn to swim programme to offer a price reduction for adult swimming courses, increased flexibility for pay and play customers and incorporated half price swimming lessons for all adult Sport Blackpool members and parents paying for their children to learn to swim. It is hoped that by addressing the barriers to participation we will reduce the number of non-swimming adults in Blackpool and encourage more families to swim.

The importance of school swimming provision in Blackpool has never been higher as the percentage of children entering primary school swimming with little or no prior experience of swimming is currently at an all time high of 62%. 31 primary schools participate in the local authority School Swimming Programme.

Sport Blackpool whilst focused on primary school pupils achieving and exceeding the minimum standards at Key Stage 2, has developed an Early Years intervention programme 'Tiny Tadpole' engaging parents and their children. The new partnership with the Better Start Team will support the development of pre-school swim classes with children centres. Grange Park, Talbot and Brunswick and St Cuthbert's and Palatine Children's Centres will be provided with the opportunity to learn to swim after half term utilising both Moor Park Health Leisure Centre and Palatine Leisure Centre Swimming Pools.

Sport Blackpool introduced 'Kayaking Come and Try' sessions at Moor Park Health Leisure Centre, starting on Saturday 7 March 2015. These sessions were aimed at providing individuals with an initial kayaking experience in a safe and warm environment with the aim of encouraging them to progress onto the water-sports programme on Stanley Park lake due to start in summer 2015.

New partnership with the Boathouse Youth Group has provided over 32 young people with an opportunity to learn to climb utilising the indoor climbing facility at Blackpool Sports Centre.

A new partnership with Age UK and the University of Central Lancashire has created an opportunity to explore the outdoor activities for 50+ age group with an initial focus on climbing and the high ropes facility.

Work has started on the high ropes course being built at the side of Blackpool Sports Centre near Stanley Park. The high ropes course is due for completion in mid-April, with it expected to open to the public at the beginning of May. Residents can register to be kept up to date on opening information and special offers at www.blackpoolhighropes.co.uk. A new underground caving experience is also close to completion at the back of Blackpool Sports Centre close to the high ropes course. The new facility known as the 'mole hole' will provide a fantastic opportunity for children and young people to explore 'underground' crawling through small tunnels using a head torch and helmet and taking part in fun team building activities and games as part of the new outdoor experience being brought to Stanley Park.