

**APPENDIX 7(a) TO TOURISM SCRUTINY REPORT****30 MARCH 2022****TOURISM RECOVERY 2021****Background**

As the tourism, retail and hospitality industry began to emerge from COVID lockdowns and restrictions during the first half of 2021, the Council committed a £1m investment in events and marketing to kick-start the recovery process.

This included a two-month extension of the Illuminations season, an extensive autumn marketing campaign and the most ambitious Christmas events programme ever launched in the resort.

The Christmas By The Sea village, which ran on the Tower Festival Headland from November 19 to January 3, included a free skating rink, artificial snowfalls, light projection shows, log cabins, and large-scale light installations.

In the town centre, a Winter Wonderland was created with food stalls and family entertainment around St John's Square and the Winter Gardens.

Both events were complemented by a heavily discounted parking offer across most Council car parks.

**Results**

The two-month extension of the Illuminations, coupled with Blackpool's biggest ever Christmas campaign, delivered record footfall across the resort.

Footfall figures for the town centre and Promenade show exceptional increases across all four months of the autumn/winter season compared to 2019, the last year unaffected by the pandemic.

The Christmas By The Sea campaign resulted in a 75% increase in footfall on the seafront compared to 2019.

The additional Christmas activity around St John's Square and the Winter Gardens, combined with discounted parking, resulted in town centre footfall increasing by almost 28% over the same period.

#### Promenade Footfall

	2021	2020	2019	2018
September	4,230,460	3,305,710	2,997,048	3,016,977
October	6,314,918	3,305,710	3,516,766	3,393,376
November	3,471,686	1,367,556	2,095,888	1,980,209
December	3,202,584	1,703,969	1,857,419	1,877,807
<b>Total</b>	<b>17,219,648</b>	<b>9,682,945</b>	<b>10,467,121</b>	<b>10,268,369</b>

#### Town Centre Footfall:

	2021	2020	2019	2018
September	2,902,003	2,278,259	2,531,173	2,527,674
October	4,145,177	2,115,648	2,894,629	2,721,229
November	2,598,018	914,430	1,970,406	1,875,572
December	2,555,608	1,383,238	1,903,537	1,995,875
<b>Total</b>	<b>12,200,806</b>	<b>6,691,575</b>	<b>9,299,745</b>	<b>9,120,350</b>

#### Footfall during the Christmas campaign (November 19 to January 3)

	2021-22	2019-20	% change from 2019-20 to 2021-22
Town centre	3,924,036	3,068,688	<b>+27.9%</b>
Promenade	4,966,570	2,835,421	<b>+75.2%</b>

#### Visitor Interest

The footfall figures are supported by record amounts of visitor interest recorded on the VisitBlackpool website over the extended Illuminations season with all four months showing huge increases over 2019 (the last full year of tourism activity):

### Unique Website Visits on VisitBlackpool

	2021	2020	2019	2018
September	366,224	263,529	179,004	183,415
October	408,025	262,361	194,366	214,405
November	231,564	66,381	73,108	74,828
December	179,213	98,763	45,808	51,893
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,185,026</b>	<b>691,034</b>	<b>492,286</b>	<b>524,541</b>

### Page views on VisitBlackpool website

	2021	2020	2019	2018
September	1,030,044	765,971	611,544	697,654
October	1,239,013	696,907	722,253	821,841
November	651,865	141,859	232,075	249,597
December	457,825	232,786	131,575	161,607
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,378,747</b>	<b>1,837,523</b>	<b>1,697,447</b>	<b>1,930,699</b>

### Car park patronage

There was a similar picture on parking usage during the Christmas campaign with both town centre and Promenade showing large increases in patronage. For most of this period, car parking was offered at a special rate of £1 for three hours across most Council car parks.

	November - December		% change from 2021 to 2019
	2021-22	2019-20	
Town Centre	37,893	23,681	<b>37.50%</b>
Promenade	10,199	4,879	<b>52.20%</b>

## TOURISM RECOVERY 2022

### January/February Performance

#### Footfall

2022 has started well with significant increases in footfall on the Promenade and in the town centre compared to the same months in 2020 (the last year to be unaffected by COVID lockdowns and restrictions).

The Promenade footfall figures for February are particularly encouraging given that the main half-term week was heavily disrupted by a series of storms. This was partly offset by some areas of the UK having a later half-term week than usual and this effectively gave us two half-term weeks. During the second week, the weather was much kinder and a number of tourism and hospitality business reported strong trading figures.

#### Promenade Footfall

	2022	2021	2020	2019
January	2,456,409	1,118,051	1,716,674	1,795,353
February	2,658,926	1,251,873	1,946,396	1,859,344
<b>Total</b>	<b>5,115,335</b>	<b>2,369,924</b>	<b>3,663,070</b>	<b>3,654,697</b>

#### Town Centre Footfall

	2022	2021	2020	2019
January	1,867,827	674,882	1,809,279	1,856,634
February	1,967,118	780,223	1,905,308	1,831,720
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,834,945</b>	<b>1,455,105</b>	<b>3,714,587</b>	<b>3,688,354</b>

#### Visitor Interest

Similarly, the levels of visitor interest on the VisitBlackpool website over the first two months are very encouraging, with unique visits in January and February ahead of 2019, which was our last full year of tourism.

#### Page views on VisitBlackpool website (year to date)

	2022	2021	2020	2019
January	287,645	71,814	188,437	242,312
February	225,559	90,117	193,167	241,178
<b>Total</b>	<b>513,204</b>	<b>161,931</b>	<b>381,604</b>	<b>483,490</b>

#### Unique Website Visits on VisitBlackpool

	2022	2021	2020	2019
January	96,346	26,768	59,848	63,307
February	69,393	29,493	57,017	66,766
<b>Total</b>	<b>165,739</b>	<b>56,261</b>	<b>116,865</b>	<b>130,073</b>

### New Tourism Season

To mark the start of the new tourism season we are planning a Season Launch event for the first time since 2019. This will be held on March 31 at the new Conference & Exhibition Centre and gives VisitBlackpool, the Winter Gardens, Merlin and other key partners an opportunity to showcase new events and attractions for the forthcoming season.

Attendees will receive a copy of the new 2022 Events Guide, which includes comprehensive month-by-month listings from the beginning of April to the end of December. The guide has been funded using the Government's Welcome Back Fund which is aimed at helping tourism recovery.

### New Destination Guide

At the end of last year, we launched the new destination guide for the 2022 season.

The guide showcases the return of major events including the annual Air Show, a vast range of top-quality shows and entertainment, and a two-month extension of the annual Illuminations season.

The guide, illustrated with stunning photography, also celebrates a very special milestone - the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Blackpool Zoo – as well as featuring an extensive range of hotel and guest accommodation to suit all pockets.

Highlights within the 88-page glossy publication include:

**World Class Events:** A sneak peek at the resort's multi-million pound events programme including some established favourites such as Air Show Weekend, Rebellion Punk Festival, Ride The Lights, World Fireworks, Lightpool Festival, Illuminations Switch-On weekend and Christmas By The Sea.

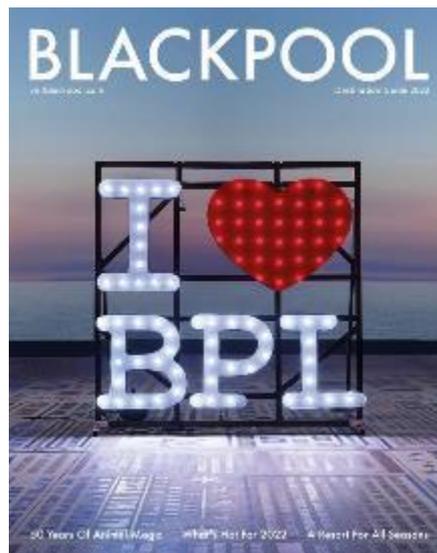
**Curtain Up:** A chance to book ahead for a brilliant line-up of shows at venues including the Opera House, Grand Theatre and Blackpool Pleasure Beach. Shows already announced include The Osmonds, A New Musical; The Cher Show; Jersey Boys; Dream Girls The Musical; Strictly Ballroom The Musical; Gangsta Granny and Rapture, a brand new production of Hot Ice.

**Child's Play:** A list of kid-friendly things to do in Blackpool including family attractions such as the Sandcastle Waterpark, the Blackpool Tower Circus, three piers, donkey rides, Marvel superheroes – and not forgetting the miles of glorious beaches.

**Insta-worthy Locations:** A visitors' guide to how to create the best photographic memories of a trip to Blackpool. Images of our glorious sunsets over the Irish Sea are definitely high on the list of favourites!

**Baywatch, Blackpool-style:** Spotlight on Blackpool's Beach Patrol team who work tirelessly, around the clock, 365 days a year, to protect the hundreds of thousands of people who flock to our beaches every year.

**Access All Areas:** A visitor guide to how Blackpool rolls out the welcome mat to make the resort accessible for everyone whether people have physical, sensory, mental health or learning difficulties.



**Check Out, Check In:** A must-have guide to Blackpool’s diverse accommodation ranging from traditional guest house to luxury hotel, from budget bolthole to boutique chic – there is something to suit all tastes and pockets and all carrying the Blackpool seal of approval.

To view the guide online, please head to [visitblackpool.com/guide](https://visitblackpool.com/guide)

### Illuminations Extension

As referenced above, we have already confirmed that the Illuminations display is to be extended by two months for a third consecutive year.



Photo Credit: Gary Mitchell

This year’s Illuminations season will now start on Friday 2 September and run until Monday 2 January, 2023. Although the Illuminations were extended for the first time in history in 2020, the final part of the year was heavily disrupted by tier restrictions and lockdowns.

The extension of the Illuminations season was intended to give the resort’s tourism industry an added boost after the pandemic created severe disruption over the first few months of the year.

It was repeated in 2021 as part of a £1m Council-led investment in marketing and events to help kick-start Blackpool’s tourism recovery plans.

This year’s Illuminations display will include the new Odyssey installation which has been created by international designer Jack Irving and Lancaster University. It will be situated on the Tower Festival Headland.

## Destination Marketing

This year will see the reinstatement of the annual collaborative destination marketing campaign. The large-scale campaign, which will include elements of TV and radio advertising, digital and PR, will be led by Blackpool Council and Merlin Entertainments as senior partners, with support from the new Tourism Business Improvement District (TBID). It is intended that the campaign will run from late May until the end of July.

## Major Events Programme

### **Platinum Jubilee Celebrations (June 2-5)**

While there is much focus on community events such as street parties for the four-days of celebrations, we are also exploring how we can maximise the tourism opportunity given that there are two consecutive bank holidays ahead of the weekend. VisitBlackpool, the TBID and other partners are actively exploring a celebratory event on the promenade. The Illuminations team is also working on ways in which we can capitalise on our part in the national beacon lighting programme.

### **Air Show**

The two-day air show will return to the Tower Festival Headland on August 13 and 14 for the first time since 2019. We are still awaiting final details of the aircraft that will fly on each of the days. As always, this is a free event.

### **World Fireworks Championships Blackpool**

We have now announced dates for three World Firework Championships. These free to access events will be held on alternate Saturdays – September 17, October 1 and October 15. The fireworks will again be launched from the beach with the Tower Festival Headland providing a large-scale viewing area.

### **Lightpool Festival**

The festival continues to gather momentum each year and the 2021 event featured a record number of light installations including some never seen before in the UK. The provisional dates for this year's festival are October 14 to 29. Details of the programme will be finalised over the second quarter of this year.

### **Christmas By The Sea**

After the outstanding success of the 2021 festive programme, we are working with the TBID and other resort partners on how we can build on that this year. The launch date has been provisionally set for November 18 with the village remaining in place until the end of the Illuminations on January 2, 2023. The full programme of content will be finalised over the next two to three months.

## Tourism Recovery Group

The group that was established during the first lockdown in 2020 continues to meet on a weekly basis with representation from attractions, venues, and transport and accommodation providers. It remains an invaluable forum for sharing performance (and particularly booking trends) and common issues such as recruitment and staff training.

Tourism Business Improvement District (TBID)

The TBID was established in July 2021 and is now firmly established with a management steering group in place. Its mandate is to support destination marketing as well as establishing new events. It has a five-year mandate and has the potential to generate around £1.5m to support the tourism industry over that period.