

Report to: Blackpool, Fylde and Wyre Economic Prosperity Board

Report Author: Nick Gerrard, Growth and Prosperity Programme Director (Blackpool Council)

Date of Meeting: 25 March 2021

TOURISM RECOVERY

1.0 Purpose of the report:

1.1 To receive an update on progress with the Lancashire Tourism Recovery Plan from Marketing Lancashire and the work being undertaken on a Blackpool, Fylde and Wyre basis, and to discuss the scope for further collaboration to facilitate the tourism economy's recovery post-Covid pandemic.

2.0 Recommendation:

2.1 To note the progress made and discuss the potential for further areas of collaboration to accelerate the recovery of the tourism economy on the Fylde Coast.

3.0 Background

3.1 Marketing Lancashire

Rachel McQueen, Chief Executive, Marketing Lancashire to present.

Pre-pandemic, Marketing Lancashire had been working with public and private sector partners to develop a new Tourism Growth Strategy, part funded by the Lancashire Economic Partnership. All the evidence gathering and initial consultation had taken place and we were just about to consult on the proposals and priorities when the first lock-down began. Since then, Marketing Lancashire has been looking to review that strategy, again in partnership with the Lancashire Economic Partnership and working alongside a Tourism, Culture and Place Sector Group that they established as part of their overall strategic framework.

The intention was that this group would inform and direct this strand of the framework to help the sector move from survival, through stabilisation and on to recovery. Understandably though, it was a challenge to pull this group of private sector representatives together during the tier restrictions and lock down. Also, the process that was being followed to create these sector strategies is of a type that is working well for industries such as energy and low carbon or aerospace, but is not easily applied to a completely diverse and wide-ranging sector such as tourism, culture and hospitality.

Marketing Lancashire continues to work with that group to look at a longer term sector development strategy, working from the original foundations of the Tourism Growth Strategy but with a real assessment of the impact the pandemic has had and what needs to be done to help it build back sustainable. However, in the meantime we felt it was critical for Marketing Lancashire to move forwards with the development of a recovery plan even with major uncertainties still on the horizon. Utilising the intelligence gained from business surveys, the group workshops that took place, our discussions with partners and consumer insights from Visit England, Marketing Lancashire created 'Redefining the Rule of Six – a Recovery Plan for Lancashire Tourism and Hospitality'. This plan was shared with the Marketing Lancashire Board, with all Lancashire local authorities and the Lancashire Economic Partnership, with Department for Culture, Media and Sport (who are currently working on their own national recovery strategy), and with Marketing Lancashire partners for review and feedback before being published on 15 February 2021 (see link below)

Now that the country has the roadmap out of lockdown and much of the additional support that Marketing Lancashire and partners had been calling for has been confirmed within the budget, Marketing Lancashire can begin to work together in earnest to deliver against all of the identified objectives.

<https://www.marketinglancashire.com/covid-19/a-recovery-plan-for-lancashireourismand-hospitality/>

3.2 Blackpool Council

Much activity is continuing on the future strengthening of the tourism product in Blackpool including the construction of several new hotels and the Conference and Exhibition Centre and the the major Blackpool Central investment. Support has been provided to companies through the various Government grant regimes, with the latest scheme launched on 15 March 2021.

Destination Marketing 2021/22

VisitBlackpool is working closely with partners on a multi-channel campaign for 2021. This will focus on a number of phased elements that reflect the milestones in the Prime Minister's roadmap. This is an outline of the plan for the year ahead:

Initial phase (March to mid-April) – *Ready and waiting, start planning*

Focusing on the need to get people to respect restrictions prior to the opening up of some outdoor attractions (including Blackpool Pleasure Beach and Zoo) and self-catering accommodation on 12 April 2021, but also encouraging them to plan ahead and book attractions and accommodation as the tourism industry recovers. This initial phase seeks to build consumer confidence by using the Visit Blackpool website ([Tourist Information & Things To Do In Blackpool | Visit Blackpool](#)) to give people as much information as possible about the COVID-safe measures that are in place before they book. This part of the campaign will utilise PR and outdoor advertising,

but will be primarily social media-based to give the Council maximum flexibility if there is any slippage in roadmap dates.

Second phase (mid-April onwards) – *Find your freedom*

Recognising that the area will have a much more comprehensive tourism offer with the opening of indoor attractions, hotels and hospitality from May 17. Again, this campaign will be a mixture of PR, outdoor and social, showcasing the breadth of Blackpool's family attractions and accommodation. The messaging will become increasingly upbeat as we move towards the end of the roadmap and will major on the myriad of things that people can do during the summer as the resort returns to something akin to business as usual. This element of the marketing campaign will also incorporate promotion of any large events over the summer months (subject to them being allowed to go ahead).

Third phase (June onwards) – *Bring On The Light*

As we move into the summer months, the Council will start to roll out an autumn/winter campaign that will see a two-month extension to the Illuminations season; high-profile events over October half-term including Nickelodeon SLIMEFEST and the Lightpool Festival; and a new and much more compelling Christmas offer. This phase will be the mainstay of Blackpool's 2021 destination marketing activity with a multi-channel campaign incorporating TV, radio, outdoor, PR and social. The key objective here is to drive volumes of visitors to the resort over the traditional Illuminations season, but also generate additional visitation and spend in the final two months of the year to enable businesses to recoup some of their losses from the first few months of this year.

Fourth phase – preparing for 2022.

Blackpool's destination marketing partnership has already started looking at a new campaign for 2022, when it is envisaged that the resort will be able to reintroduce a comprehensive package of shows, entertainment, large-scale events, and conferences and exhibitions across the entire year. The preparation work will likely include a new TV creative for roll-out in the early part of 2022.

Tourism Recovery Group

This group was established by VisitBlackpool/Blackpool Council in June 2020 and has met on a weekly basis ever since. It comprises key attractions, venues, transport operators and accommodation providers. It will continue to meet for the foreseeable future to provide real-time customer insights, provide feedback on destination marketing activity, to help lobby for further Government support for our tourism businesses and to help develop sustainable funding streams for the resort's longer-term recovery.

3.3 Fylde Borough Council

Whilst the pandemic since March 2020 has caused severe pressures on the tourism industry, travel, leisure and hospitality, Fylde Borough Council has been continuing to support the industry in different ways – administering a range of government grants to tourism businesses, business support on legislative and environmental health matters, advice on how to open safely, plus sharing messages via social media where businesses have diversified during the various lockdowns – e.g. hospitality businesses diversifying to a take out model. Fylde Borough Council has continued to financially support Marketing Lancashire through their tourism marketing and support initiatives, plus keep strong dialogue and some joint activity with both Visit Blackpool and Discover Wyre.

The Heritage Lottery Fund developments at Fairhaven Lake will offer a year round destination and prove to be a valuable location for a range of events with its new water sports centre, recruitment of a new activities officer to engage with new groups and co-ordinate events, plus the potential development of a wind sports centre on St Annes beach with keen interest already gained from a variety of sports organisations, including kite surfing and sand-yachting. There are developments of rural walks and trails and these will be extended to work with Wyre to highlight where joint working can benefit. Fylde Borough Council will also further strengthen links to key Blackpool and Wyre operators to ensure strong links to tourism providers.

Support will be given to event organisers which annually account for approximately 250 events of all shapes and sizes on Council and private land from a charity fund raising event to the Lytham Festival. Some funding, plus support and advice is available through the Tourism Officer. The Tourism Officer is actively seeking new events, particularly out of season and a Town Centre Member Working Group are looking at opportunities for year-round events in each of the borough's three town centres.

Through targeted marketing via the ever growing [Discover Fylde web](#) and social media channels and continuing to participate in Marketing Lancashire promotional activities, Fylde will further add to the destination marketing mix, plus additional promotional activities with Discover Wyre and Visit Blackpool. Thematic marketing campaigns will be undertaken to highlight the heritage, coastal, food and drink offers. A new mobile Tourism Information unit (due summer 2021) will offer the opportunity to undertake roadshows / visits to key target markets, such as the North East and Yorkshire – this could be undertaken in conjunction with Blackpool and Wyre. Fylde Borough Council will attend trade shows and exhibitions where relevant to promote the tourism offering and potentially in partnership.

3.4 Wyre Borough Council

During the lockdowns, Wyre tourism focussed on:

- Promoting Health and Wellbeing, Parks and open spaces, Coast and Countryside and on things that were walking distance from home.
- Developed an online campaign utilising our www.discoverwyre.co.uk to support businesses '10 Ways to support businesses'

The Council also utilised its Visit Garstang Centre (Tourist Information Centre) as a community support hub, calling vulnerable and isolated members of the community to offer assistance.

During the small summer window when the Council area was out of lockdown, Wyre developed a 'ReDiscover 'Wyre Campaign which was about awareness raising about what is on offer in Wyre and was very well received. Wyre Tourism carried out the following activity:-

- 'Stay Local, Stay Safe Message'
- Supporting and promoting the 'Eat Out to Help Out scheme'
- Healthy Wyre – Enjoy the great outdoors in your support bubble
- Online Business Spotlight Campaign – Attractions, Services, Hospitality
- Creation of a Virtual tour of Marsh Mill Windmill (all year around campaign)
- Involvement in virtual Fylde Coast Food and Drink Festival in August.
- Development of 3 Digital Display Systems (2 in Cleveleys and 1 for Fleetwood) to promote Wyre
- Bespoke advice for businesses in light of the challenges presented by the pandemic
- Reopening high streets safely