

**APPENDIX TO TOURISM SCRUTINY REPORT
November 2023**

TOURISM PERFORMANCE

We measure tourism performance in a number of ways.

Individual attractions, hotels, venues and hospitality businesses use their own indicators to measure performance whether that be through ticket sales, room occupancy, revenue/profit generation and/or satisfaction ratings.

In order to measure the resort-wide impact, Blackpool Council (through its destination marketing arm, VisitBlackpool) uses two distinct methods:

- The annual STEAM report (an economic impact model used by many UK destinations) which generates an estimate of the overall number of visitors to Blackpool and provides an annual trend.
- The monthly Visitor Economy Performance Indicator (VEPI) report, produced by our own research team and comprising a basket of indicators including footfall, parking and tram usage and inbound rail journeys.

STEAM is an externally validated tourism economic impact model that analyses relevant local data including visitor attraction numbers, tourist accommodation bed-stock and occupancy levels, transport usage, attendance at events and levels of visitor expenditure.

That information is used to create an estimate of the annual value, volume and economic impact broken down into multiple categories including day visitors and overnight stays.

The annual STEAM report is usually published approximately 9-10 months after the end of the calendar year. Publication of the 2022 report is imminent and a verbal update will be provided at the meeting if it is available by then.

The last report, covering 2021, illustrated the speed and scale of Blackpool's post-pandemic recovery. It revealed that the resort attracted a record number of almost 19million visitors in 2021 – despite losing the first four months of the year to COVID lockdowns and restrictions.

The total figure of 18.81m was more than double the figure recorded in 2020 when pandemic restrictions on tourism were at the most severe level and 4% higher than the pre-pandemic year of 2019. It reaffirmed Blackpool's place as the UK's most visited seaside destination.

The report also showed that Blackpool accounted for almost 40% of all visits to Lancashire in 2021. It valued the resort's tourism economy at more than £1.4bn, supporting in excess of 20,000 jobs.

The monthly VEPI report is produced in-house with contributions from Blackpool Transport, Northern Rail, a selection of visitor attractions and town centre retailers (using a traffic light system rather than actual figures), as well as town centre and promenade footfall that is measured using mobile phone data. The figures for the main tourism season (April to August) are detailed later in this report.

Given the lag in production of the annual STEAM report, the VEPI reports give more of a "real-time" flavour of how key indicators are performing against previous year.

We also measure the impact of specific destination marketing activity that enables to assess the impact and value of marketing investment. This is highlighted later in this report.

VISITOR INSIGHTS

As part of our marketing and promotional activity, it is vital to monitor both long-term and short-term market trends.

A number of factors can have a direct bearing on tourism performance regardless of the quality of our distinct visitor offer.

Discretionary spend is a lifeblood of tourism and the wider visitor economy. When household budgets are squeezed, leisure and tourism tend to fall first, fastest and further than many other sectors.

The past two summer seasons have seen an almost perfect storm of rising interest rates (1.25% in June 2022, now at 5.25%), high inflation and increased fuel costs. This has led to higher household bills and mortgage costs and, as a direct consequence, reduced levels of discretionary spend for many families.

Inflationary pressures also have an impact on our tourism businesses. Whilst many continue to enjoy strong volumes post-pandemic, the same inflationary pressures, coupled with higher staffing costs, can erode profit margins.

Weather is another key factor. After an exceptional start to the tourism season in May and the first part of June on the back of a prolonged spell of good weather and an additional Bank Holiday, visitor numbers proved more volatile as we moved into the main school holiday season.

This was predominantly due to the poor weather in what turned out to be one of the wettest Julys on record. This particularly affected visitor numbers at outdoor attractions although, conversely, indoor attractions most likely saw an increase in patronage.

Overall visitor numbers in late June, early July, were also likely to have been adversely affected by the significant amount of negative media coverage we received over the sewage discharge that resulted in our bathing waters being deemed unsuitable for a period of almost three weeks.

As we moved into the second half of August, the weather gradually improved and stabilised coinciding with the launch of our major events programme, and we saw a significant improvement in visitor numbers. This trend continued into September.

Travel is another key influencer. A majority of visitors come to Blackpool by road (car and coach) and the cost of fuel has a direct bearing on people's appetite for leisure-based trips.

The continued unreliability of rail services remained an ongoing issue with the summer and early autumn season adversely affected by strikes and associated timetable disruption. A number of our key event days including Switch-On and two of the World Firework events were all directly impacted.

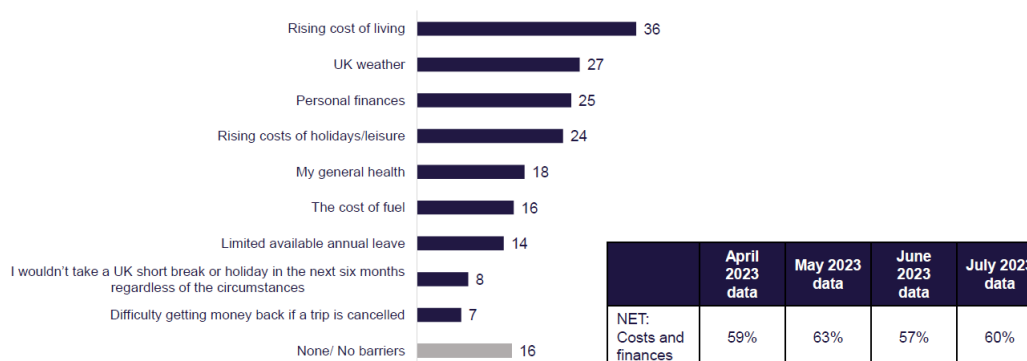
As well as monitoring trends on the ground here in Blackpool through our Visitor Economy Performance Indicator (VEPI) reports, we also have access to detailed national consumer reports produced by VisitEngland.

The two charts overleaf, taken from the latest Domestic Sentiment Tracker (which is based on a UK-wide sample of 1,500 adults) is intended to show public appetite for taking day and overnight trips when there are obvious external pressures, such as the cost of living crisis.

The summary findings clearly illustrate the impact that the squeeze on household spending is having on people's attitude towards travel.

The top potential barrier to taking overnight UK trips in the next 6 months is the 'rising cost of living' with other financial barriers also making the top 4

Figure 10. Top 10 Barriers to taking an overnight UK trip in next 6 months, Percentage, July 2023, UK



FOR THE FULL LIST OF BARRIERS, PLEASE SEE THE PUBLISHED TABLES.

Question: VB7b. Which, if any, of the following factors do you see as potential barriers to you taking a UK short break or holiday in the next six months?
 Base: All asked each question. July 2023 = 1,755. *NET: Cost and finances includes 'rising cost of living', 'personal finances', 'the cost of fuel', 'rising costs of holidays/leisure' and 'difficulty getting money back if a trip is cancelled'



In terms of UK day trips, 27% of UK adults intend to look for more free things to do. 34% will reduce the number of day trips – consistent with June 2023

Figure 13b. 'Cost of living' impact on day trips, Percentage, July 2023, UK, Full list



Question: VB7Cii. How, if at all, would you say the 'cost of living crisis' is likely to influence your day trips in the next few months?
 Base: July 2023 = 1,755.



Against this backdrop, it is essential that Blackpool continues to promote and market itself as an affordable family holiday destination offering both quality and good value for money.

That messaging is undoubtedly strengthened by our major events programme which gives visitors free access to high-quality events during the summer, autumn and winter months, including Air Show, Ride The Lights, Switch-On, World Fireworks, Lightpool Festival, Christmas By The Sea and the extended Illuminations season. The positive impact of those events is shown later in this report.

It is worth noting that Blackpool has repeatedly scored extremely well in national surveys on affordability. In a survey carried out by Travelodge at the start of the season, Blackpool was named among the top five stay-cation destinations alongside Cornwall, Devon, the Isle of Wight and Whitby.

In another survey, carried out by finance specialists, RIFT, Blackpool and the Lake District came joint top in a league table of the UK's most affordable staycation destinations, based on several factors including the cost of family days out, accommodation, fish and chips, and a pint of beer. Blackpool was the most affordable in each of the latter three categories.

The latest survey places Blackpool as the second most popular holiday destination to visit this autumn – beaten only by London. TripAdvisor's Autumn Travel Index put Blackpool ahead of the likes of Edinburgh, Liverpool, York, Manchester, Llandudno, Bournemouth, Windermere and Glasgow.

DESTINATION MARKETING ACTIVITY

Only In Blackpool

This year has seen a repeat of the "Only In Blackpool" destination marketing campaign developed in partnership with Merlin Entertainments and other resort partners.

The summer campaign once again featured resort "ambassador" Nigel C Gull (voiced by actor and comedian Johnny Vegas) giving TV viewers a whistle-stop tour of the resort.

The campaign seeks to highlight the resort's wide range of attractions and reaffirm its position as the UK's ultimate destination for families.

The marketing campaign, which ran from June until the end of August, represents a £600k investment by Blackpool Council, Merlin Entertainments and the Tourism Business Improvement District (TBID).



It included mainstream TV and Video On Demand advertising on ITV, Channel 4 and Sky, with targeted coverage in Scotland, the North East and key cities including Leeds, Sheffield, Nottingham, Stoke and Birmingham, along with audio coverage across Heart, Capital and Hits Radio, and digital activity on Meta (Facebook), Pinterest and YouTube.

Initial results

The full analytics/results and estimated economic impact of this campaign will not be available until mid-November. However, interim results show that all of the elements delivered or exceeded the planned reach.

Meta performed particularly well, reaching more than 1.7m users.

Merlin has also been undertaking its own customer surveys at its attractions to gauge what influenced their visit. This initial data showed that 46% of their visitors had seen the Only In Blackpool campaign with 70% of those stating that the campaign influenced their visit.

Autumn Marketing Campaign

Once the Only In Blackpool campaign finished at the end of August, it was immediately followed by a campaign aimed at driving visitors to the Illuminations. This campaign, which includes bespoke audio and video ads entitled “*Come For The Lights, Stay For The Night*”, ran across the Bauer radio network in the north of England. The video can be viewed here:



[Come For The Lights, Stay For The Night | Blackpool Illuminations 2023 - VisitBlackpool - YouTube](#)

That campaign, which is running alongside more targeted marketing for the Lightpool Festival (which includes an Art Trail map and printed brochure), will be followed from early November onwards with a bespoke marketing campaign for Christmas By The Sea.

VisitBlackpool Social Media Activity

The VisitBlackpool team is also responsible for promoting specific events and attractions through the website, social media and PR activity.

Social media activity is delivered in two ways – organic social, which is the regular posting to our newsfeeds, and paid activity where we enhance campaigns with paid-for activity.

These are some of the headline results (note that the Christmas By The Sea and Lightpool Festival figures relate to the 2022 events, Air Show and Fireworks relate to 2023):

- VisitBlackpool social media activity across all events generated nearly **20 million impressions**, both organic and paid (**19,827,214**). Impressions measure the number of times our content is displayed on people’s feeds. A total of **12,349,620** impressions were organic; **7,477,594** were paid.
- The most successful paid campaigns were Christmas By The Sea (**5,649,446** impressions), Air Show (**2,222,050**) and World Fireworks (**948,763**).
- The events that generated the most organic impressions were: Christmas By The Sea (**2,967,450**), Lightpool Festival (**2,286,682**), Switch-On (**2,610,905**) and Fireworks (**1,799,446**).
- One important metric for paid campaigns is Cost Per Click (CPC), which reflects the price we pay for each click on our ad. Although it is hard to give an average benchmark, Facebook estimates the average CPC is 78p. It is worth noting that World Fireworks has an exceptionally low CPC of £0.004p, which is less than a penny per click giving the best return on our investment.

VISITOR ECONOMY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS, April to August 2023

Footfall Monitoring

Footfall was previously monitored using half a dozen cameras located at key points in the town centre and on the Promenade. However, these only monitored footfall movements rather than individuals and did not pick up those on the western side of the promenade.

The figures below are taken from Visitor Insights, a method of monitoring that provides anonymised GPS and mobile phone tracking data, which can be used to identify the location and movements of pedestrians in the town centre and on the Promenade. There are a number of sensor sites that give the total number of unique individuals in a given area.

This method is much more insightful because it includes the entire Promenade and can provide information on where our visitors are coming from (*see item on Christmas By The Sea*)

Promenade Footfall

	2023	2022	2021	2020	2019	Change from 2022 to 2023
April	4,643,232	4,767,812	3,244,212	1,176,384	3,590,881	-3%
May	4,813,002	4,500,319	3,707,224	1,891,953	3,375,958	7%
June	4,631,047	4,288,916	4,093,743	2,229,668	3,128,874	8%
July	4,791,618	4,186,254	5,377,591	3,442,718	3,683,034	14%
August	4,637,400	4,045,321	6,674,877	4,767,857	4,804,086	15%
Total	23,516,299	21,788,621	23,097,647	13,508,580	18,582,833	8%

As you will see from the figures, the April to August comparison for 2023 vs the four previous years (including the pre-COVID year of 2019) are exceptionally positive. Only the month of April, which saw the tourism season get off to a relatively slow start, showed a deficit against last year.

Given some of the external pressures described at the start of this performance report, it is encouraging to see continued growth. Note that the exceptionally high figures in July and August 2021 illustrate the “staycation” effect that we experienced as the country emerged from pandemic restrictions, but overseas travel remained out of bounds for most holidaymakers.

Town Centre Footfall

	2023	2022	2021	2020	2019	Change from 2022 to 2023
April	2,896,024	3,041,248	1,599,444	480,490	2,447,262	-5%
May	3,008,050	2,863,035	2,043,897	730,605	2,327,217	5%
June	2,895,912	2,741,327	2,291,490	1,017,071	2,152,878	6%
July	2,989,556	2,729,428	3,194,429	1,888,844	2,663,691	10%
August	2,887,265	2,607,884	3,968,551	2,706,365	3,323,410	11%
Total	14,676,807	13,982,922	3,097,811	6,823,375	12,914,458	5%

Town centre footfall in April was also behind previous year, but performance over the following four months was particularly strong. The five months combined show growth of 5% over previous year as well as impressive growth over 2019, which is encouraging given that a number of town and city centres have not yet returned to pre-pandemic levels. Footfall counts for July and August within the Houndshell Shopping Centre show a similar positive trend with events such as Rebellion and Air Show having a strong positive impact according to tenant feedback.

Other Key Indicators

The tables below show performance on rail, tram passengers and visitor interest (measured through visits to the visitblackpool.com website and the Tourist Information Centre).

The rail comparisons show a downturn in total number of passengers coming through Blackpool North, Blackpool South and Pleasure Beach Stations, between April and August this year, with the school summer holiday weeks hardest hit. The month of July was particularly bad when a series of strikes, overtime bans and associated timetable disruption, saw us lose 24% of inbound passengers compared to the same month last year.

Tram usage got off to a strong start between April and June, helped by prolonged spells of good weather and the additional Bank Holiday weekend to mark the King's Coronation. However, patronage fell away in July and August compared to last year, leaving an April-August deficit of 6%.

Tramway Usage

Month	2023	2022	2021	2020	2019	Change from 2022 to 2023
April	394,384	387,728	101,164	-	407,784	2%
May	391,366	362,953	200,216	-	434,561	8%
June	410,253	412,764	329,393	-	321,022	-1%
July	506,162	595,739	524,759	66,505	572,024	-15%
August	588,012	674,506	692,238	253,359	646,040	-13%
Total	2,290,177	2,433,690	1,847,770	319,864	2,381,431	-6%

Inbound Rail

Period (month)	2023	2022	2021	2020	2019	Change from 2022 to 2023
PO1 (April)	112,066	125,550	57,101	1,590	106,397	-11%
PO2 (May)	110,143	102,653	77,643	4,951	92,822	7%
PO3 (June)	128,591	115,791	141,111	13,632	100,728	11%
PO4 (July)	117,502	155,302	136,929	55,053	126,820	-24%
PO5 (August)	167,057	184,574	160,545	106,251	162,588	-9%
Total	635,359	683,870	573,329	181,477	589,355	-7%

VisitBlackpool Website Visits

Month	2023	2022	2021	2020	2019	Change from 2022 to 2023
April	99,088	98,330	90,297	23,377	82,738	1%
May	107,597	117,171	128,200	40,365	96,779	-8%
June	102,141	127,153	122,055	59,872	100,570	-20%
July	149,691	149,928	171,332	126,614	157,156	0%
August	280,325	278,062	257,137	194,442	220,520	1%
Total	738,842	770,644	769,021	444,670	657,763	-4%

TIC Visits

Month	2023	2022	2021	2020	2019	Change from 2022 to 2023
April	3,262	3,071	1,253	-	4,363	6%
May	4,482	4,586	3,071	-	5,087	-2%
June	5,348	5,928	4,527	-	5,912	-10%
July	7,530	7,789	6,141	-	13,482	-3%
August	10,828	10,964	10,300	-	27,944	-1%

BLACKPOOL'S MAJOR EVENTS PROGRAMME SUMMER/AUTUMN 2023

VisitBlackpool delivers one of the biggest event programmes of any UK coastal destination.

Most importantly, these events are free-to-access.

Against the backdrop of some of the economic factors affecting household spend, the almost universal appeal of these high-quality family events cannot be over-stated. Over the past few months, we have seen record crowds at Air Show, Switch-On, World Fireworks and Lightpool Festival. Last year, the Illuminations extension and Christmas By The Sea also delivered record footfall to the promenade during the winter months.

Air Show

Blackpool's major events programme kicked off in August with the return of the two-day Air Show weekend.

With the Red Arrows and Typhoon display teams performing on both days and the added bonus of a Spitfire and replica Red Arrow within the Air Show village, the event attracted record crowds.

Mobile phone data showed that the footfall on the Promenade was more than 350,000 across the two days, outperforming what was a spectacular turnout last year.

The show also attracted national and international media coverage as two brave souls scaled the Blackpool Tower for a stunning selfie as the Red Arrows flew over to start their display (*pictured right*).



Wing Commander Adam Collins hung from the Tower's flagpole 518ft from the ground and saluted his RAF display team as they flew past. Russ Edwards, a rescue and training specialist at Arco Professional Safety Services, oversaw the amazing aerial photographs.

Ride The Lights

More than 10,000 cyclists of all ages took the once-a-year opportunity to ride beneath the Illuminations on a traffic-free promenade.

Bikes of all shapes and sizes took advantage of the seafront route in the free family event that is suitable for all ages.

Overspill parking was available at a pop-up car park at Blackpool Airport.



Illuminations Switch-On

The Switch-On moment returned to the outdoors for the first time since 2019 – attracting a huge crowd of more than 50,000 people, the biggest turnout in recent history.

The free event included a Nickelodeon float parade, live entertainment, a specially-commissioned light show on The Blackpool Tower and a fireworks finale.

The parade, which made its way along the Golden Mile from Central Pier, featured larger-than-life characters from SpongeBob SquarePants, PAW Patrol, Baby Shark, Monsters High and Transformers, as well as around 100 street performers and a Lancashire-based marching band. In conjunction with the Illuminations team, a 3D projection show featuring some of the same characters was created and is being shown throughout the Illuminations season.



Singer Sophie Ellis-Bextor then performed a medley of songs including her classic hit, Murder On The Dancefloor, before pulling the switch to trigger a four-month Illuminations season.



As part of the Nickelodeon partnership, a number of short videos were filmed in the run-up to and during the Switch-On event. These focus on family days out and are for use across the Nickelodeon network and our own social media channels. The first of these, focusing on the piers and Pleasure Beach, can be viewed on the link below. It has already had almost half a million views:

[Lee and Ellie Hinchcliffe Head To Nickelodeon Land @blackpoolpleasurebeach! | Nickelodeon UK - YouTube](#)

The main piece, *Nickelodeon Goes On A Blackpool Adventure*, will be premiered on Nickelodeon on November 20. There is also a highlights video featuring the Nickelodeon Float Parade and Switch-On celebrations. This can be viewed on the VisitBlackpool YouTube channel on this link: [Blackpool! Illuminations Switch-On 2023 - YouTube](#)

The crowds come out for Switch-On!



This remarkable drone shot taken by local photographer Gregg Wolstenholme shows the enormous crowds that turned up for the Switch-On parade and event between Central and North Piers.

The image was viewed by millions of people across social media and was featured by several national media organisations including the Sunday Mirror and Sunday People.

Gregg, who specialises in aerial and drone photography, has been nominated in the drone category of the British Photographer Of The Year Awards for one of his fireworks photos and provides many images for our marketing collateral.

World Fireworks

Tens of thousands of people turned out for each of the three World Fireworks Championship displays during September and October.

A pyrotechnics team from India were crowned champions after staging their country's first ever display in the UK.

Designed by Azan Morani, who has programmed some of the largest and most complex shows in the world, the winning display was praised for its use of pyrotechnics

never seen before and for the diverse selection of music that included a taste of Bollywood.

The World Fireworks Championship Blackpool is one of the resort's most spectacular events, with the displays, all synchronised to music, being launched from the beach in front of The Blackpool Tower. It is estimated that more than 50,000 people attended each of this year's free events.



Lightpool Festival

The award-winning Lightpool Festival returned for October half-term with an exciting, free-to-see programme of light installations, 3D projection shows, an art trail, and live performance.

The festival, which ran from October 20-28, included world premieres and installations never before seen in the UK, including artworks from Australia, France, the Netherlands and Spain.

The Art Trail featured larger-than-life jellyfish (shown in a five-minute slot on The One Show on BBC on festival opening night); a field of fireflies alongside the Cenotaph; a giant ball of wool made up of neon yarn on the roof of the Blackpool Church; a cube made up of 448 glass jars each containing a miniature tableau; and an exclusive preview of designer Laurence Llewelyn-Bowen's first digital installation in the Winter Gardens.

The Blackpool Tower building saw an alien-like "invasion" with giant tentacles seemingly breaking through the ballroom roof along with newly commissioned 3D projection shows. The Tower Ballroom also hosted a performance of Carnival Magic with giant illuminated puppets. The 1,000 free tickets were taken inside 12 minutes.



Lightpool is procured and produced by Festival Artistic Director, Philip Holmes, working in partnership with key sponsors and partners including Arts Council England, Blackpool Tourism BID, The Blackpool Tower, Blackpool Council, Winter Gardens, Blackpool FC Community Trust, LeftCoast, The Grand Theatre, The Old Electric, and VisitBlackpool. The light festival is the only one in the UK to be a part of the Arts Council's National Portfolio, ensuring funding support for the event until 2025.

Blackpool Illuminations Update

The securing of £4.5m of Town Deal funding for the Illuminations last year has enabled the team to deliver a step-change in the quality of the annual display – as well as making important upgrades to the lighting infrastructure.

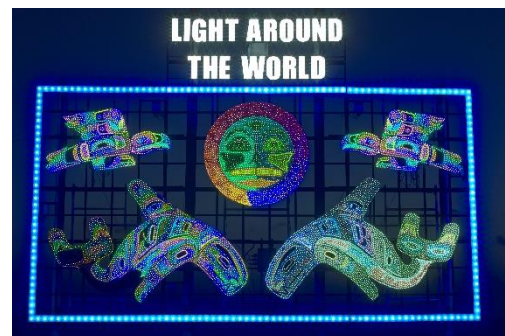
As a result, the 2023 display includes three spectacular new light installations – all of which have been manufactured at our own Lightworks factory in Blackpool.

The first is by Dr Chila Kumari Singh Burman, MBE. The Merseyside-born artist is celebrated around the world and has produced numerous high-profile works including installations for the Tate Gallery and Covent Garden in London, as well as special commissions for film companies, including Netflix.



In 2021, she produced an installation called “*Blackpool, Light Of My Life*” on the front of Blackpool’s Grundy Art Gallery and vowed to return to design something of scale for the main Illuminations display. The result is a 26 metre-wide animated tableau entitled “*Lollies In Love With Light*”, a kaleidoscopic celebration of Blackpool with a technicolour ice cream van at its centre (*pictured above*).

The second tableau (*pictured right*) is by Canadian-born artist Bruce Alfred who specialises in Native American art and has created an evocative design featuring hand-drawn images of eagles and Orca whales. It is the first Illuminations display to be designed by a North American artist and one of the first to be developed using new 3D printing technology at Lightworks.



The third large-scale installation is Spitfire Island, developed in collaboration with designer and Illuminations curator, Laurence Llewelyn-Bowen, and also built using new 3D printing technology.



Located on Gynn Roundabout (*pictured left*), it features replicas of three Spitfires - Progress I, II and III - all funded by Blackpool residents during World War Two.

The installation is sponsored by model kit company, Airfix, who as part of an innovative partnership have produced a special limited-edition Blackpool Illuminations Spitfire kit that is now on sale in the Tourist Information Centre.

Other new features in the 2023 display include a Hollywood-inspired BLACKPOOL sign illuminated with Cabochoon lamps and, by popular demand, a return of Spiro, an immersive 26m-long tunnel of light with individually-mapped LEDs (*both pictured right. Photo by Karl Houghton*).



New additions to last year's display included Odyssey, the largest installation ever created for the Illuminations; the 21 neon features above the road along the Golden Mile and the giant baubles/beach-balls that are located on the Tower Festival Headland during the autumn and winter season.

A key ambition within the Town Deal business plan was to be able to sustain the two-month extension of the Illuminations season, first introduced at the height of the pandemic.

We are now in our third year of that extended season. Last year, it resulted in Promenade footfall being 20% ahead of the previous year and 59% ahead of the pre-COVID year of 2019.

In addition to the delivery of new features, the funding has enabled the provision of new vehicles and equipment, including a large-format 3D printer, lorry-mounted crane, two purpose-built trailers and two access platforms.

Infrastructure improvements include an upgraded control system; installation of a supply network in Talbot Square and Talbot Road (which will facilitate the re-introduction of festoon lighting once the tramway extension is re-opened); upgrades to the network on the Tower Festival Headland; and power supplies and feeder pillars installed throughout the town.

Another key objective within the business plan was to bring in new skills and creative talent to "future proof" the Lightworks workforce.

At the start of September, that resulted in the creation of an apprenticeship scheme, in which three technicians for the future are being trained in maintenance and engineering. These apprentice engineers all featured in The One Show item on Lightpool Festival on October 20.

Outstanding Actions

There are a couple of outstanding actions relating to the Illuminations that we agreed to report on as part of this Tourism Performance Report.

1. Details of how archived Illuminations displays will be displayed to be provided to the Committee.

Response: These are now being managed by the Collections Team who are a part of the new Blackpool Heritage and Museum Trust, the charity that will operate Showtown.

2. Information on how gaps in the Illuminations caused by the Tramway Extension will be addressed to be provided.

Response: As reported earlier, the Town Deal package has enabled the installation of a supply network in Talbot Square and Talbot Road (which will, in turn, facilitate the re-introduction of festoon lighting once the tramway extension is re-opened).

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Return Of Strictly

The much-anticipated Blackpool edition of BBC's Strictly will take place at the Tower Ballroom over the weekend of November 18/19. The show generates an enormous amount of prime-time publicity for Blackpool before, during and after the show. The resort has already featured heavily in the launch show and early stages thanks to the involvement of celebrity contestant, Angela Rippon, who was, for many years, host of the original Come Dancing TV series filmed in the Tower Ballroom.

Strictly judges Shirley Ballas and Anton Du Beke are both hosting exclusive fan events at the Winter Gardens over the Strictly weekend.

Anton will be doing a Q&A on the evening of Friday 17 November as well as talking about his new novel, The Paris Affair. Shirley will be appearing at noon on Sunday 19 November to give fans an insight into her debut novel, Murder On The Dancefloor, a story that is set against the backdrop of the Blackpool Tower Ballroom.

Christmas By The Sea

Blackpool's spectacular Christmas village is returning this winter.

The hugely-popular outdoor village will open on Friday 17 November with an exciting range of new festive family attractions - plus extended opening hours for the free skating rink that will open every day until January 1 (barring Christmas Day).

In addition to the skating rink, this year's village will include festive light installations and projection shows, themed log cabins with food, drink and gifts, artificial snowfalls, Christmas trees and festive tram rides.

It will include a variety of themed children's attractions, the return of the Star Flyer which, at 196ft tall, is one of Europe's tallest swing rides, and new thrill rides including a 100ft-long snow slide.



Last year, Christmas By The Sea, which is staged on the headland opposite The Blackpool Tower, delivered the highest visitor numbers ever recorded on the seafront during winter months.

The chart alongside shows the origins of how far people travelled to visit the village.

The staging of the village is in association with the Tourism Business Improvement District (TBID), Blackpool Pleasure Beach and Triangle Attractions.

Christmas by the Sea 2022		
Distance Travelled	Total	%
0-20km	3430214	54%
21-100km	1595666	25%
101km+	1360334	21%
Total Tracked with Origins	6386214	
Total Tracked in Period	6768878	

BUSINESS TOURISM – MeetBlackpool

Whilst the primary responsibility for marketing Blackpool to leisure tourists sits with VisitBlackpool, business tourism is now managed within MeetBlackpool, a partnership comprising VisitBlackpool, Blackpool Council, the Winter Gardens and various resort partners who have a vested interest in the conference and exhibitions market.

This convention bureau-style approach, which was adopted following the opening of the new £30m Conference and Exhibition Centre, is intended to make best use of Council and Winter Gardens resources to attract new and lapsed conferences and events back to Blackpool.

Whilst the primary focus is on bringing business into the new conference centre, MeetBlackpool is also tasked with ensuring that enquiries for smaller conferences are directed towards resort partners who also have conference and meeting facilities. Since its formation, MeetBlackpool has:

- Established a Steering Group (chaired by Philip Welsh, Head of Tourism & Communications for Blackpool Council). It meets on a quarterly basis and has representation from the Winter Gardens team, large venues and attractions, and key accommodation providers.
- Appointed an external PR company (Davies Tanner) to spearhead communication of the new branding and build awareness within the MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions) industry through social media, blogs, case studies and press releases. The agency continues to communicate the message ‘Business in Blackpool, Always a Pleasure’.
- Established a new accommodation booking platform for conference delegates via a well-established provider, Convenus. So far, we have eight clients utilizing the platform. The purpose-built platform can be viewed here: <https://meetblackpoolres.bzon.uk>
- Attended various trade shows including CHS Leeds; CHS Birmingham; Confex as part of the MIA (Meeting Industry Association) The Meetings Show; North West Expo.

Update on recent conferences and confirmed forward bookings*:

Date	Organiser	Event	No of delegates/attendees
June 2023	Northern Premier Football League	AGM and dinner	400
September 2023	National Association of Retired Police Officers	Annual Conference (re-booked for 2025 and 2027)	800
October 2023	Hakim Group	Group meeting	300
October 2023	JD Outdoors	Annual Conference	450
November 2023	Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches	Annual meeting	1000
November 2023	Business In The Community	HALO e-gaming event	Numbers tbc
November 2023	United Utilities	Staff conference	300
November 2023	Labour Party	North West conference	700
December 2023	United Utilities	Staff conference	1000
February 2024	Vets4Pets	Group meeting	300
March 2024	Blue Diamond	Group conference	800
March 2024	Pavers	Group conference	300
April 2024	National Union of Students	Annual conference	1000
May 2024	Federation of Small Businesses	Conference/Expo	500
June 2024	Praxis/Auril	Group conference	500
June 2024	MSG Marketing	Group conference	500
June 2024	Civil Service Live	Annual conference	2000
April 2025	National Union of Journalists	Annual conference	500

***Note:** These are in addition to long-established events that take place in the Winter Gardens (including the new Conference & Exhibition Centre in some instances) such as the World Dance Festivals in November, January and May).

LOOKING AHEAD TO 2024

New Investment

The coming year will see a number of Blackpool's key regeneration projects completed bringing further improvements to the visitor experience.

Showtown

A brand new Golden Mile attraction that will give residents and visitors the opportunity to get up close with the entertainers who have helped place the resort on the map over the years – the comedians, dancers, acrobats, and larger-than-life characters who transformed Blackpool into the home of popular entertainment. The museum is expected to attract more than 200,000 visitors each year with its six interactive, fun and family-friendly galleries. It is due to open on March 15, 2024. VisitBlackpool is working closely with the Showtown team on joint marketing and ticketing opportunities.



Backlot Cinema & Diner

The new multiplex cinema featuring one of the largest IMAX screens in the country will add an extra dimension to the town centre economy. Situated alongside the Houndshill Shopping Centre, the state-of-the-art cinema and themed restaurant are due to open in spring 2024.

Blackpool Central Multi-Storey

The new 1300-capacity car park will offer a greatly enhanced experience for visitors arriving in central Blackpool. Due to open in the first quarter of 2024, the seven-storey car park will include 25 electric charging points, CCTV and bicycle storage. Its completion marks the first phase of the planned £300m Blackpool Central leisure development on the site of the current surface car park.

Holiday Inn & Marco's New York Italian/Tramway Extension

One of the main gateways into Blackpool will be transformed with the opening of a new four-star Holiday Inn and a Marco's New York Italian restaurant by award-winning chef, Marco Pierre White. With 144-bedrooms, this is the latest in a series of "next generation" hotels to open and will play an important role in future growth of the leisure and business tourism markets. It is located opposite Blackpool North Railway Station and next to the new tram terminus created as part of a multi-million pound extension of the existing seafront tramway. That extension will seamlessly link mainline rail arrivals at Blackpool North Station with the seafront attractions and hotels. The hotel is already taking bookings for early summer of 2024 but due to start trading ahead of that.

Houndshill

The retail experience is an important aspect of the overall visitor economy. The opening of the new Frasers department store towards the end of November will deliver a significant boost to a town centre offer that is already benefiting from the re-imagining of Abingdon Street Market where the hugely-popular contemporary food market will soon be complemented by more than a dozen independent retailers.

Elmer's Big Parade

Next year will see an exciting new addition to the events calendar. Brian House Children's Hospice – the charity behind Elmer's Big Parade Blackpool – has announced the date for the resort's first large-scale public art trail.

The free, family-friendly trail, which will see at least 30 large Elmer sculptures in key locations around Blackpool, will run for eight weeks from April 13 to June 9, 2024.

During that period, residents and visitors will be able use an App to "collect" the various Elmers, each of which will be individually designed and painted by artists, and earn rewards.



Similar trails held in other parts of the country have attracted tens of thousands of visitors.

Destination Guide

The 2024 Blackpool Destination Guide is now nearing completion and will be printed in early December ready for distribution from the start of the New Year – a period when people traditionally start to think about planning trips/holidays for the year ahead.