Blackpool bids for government's Future High Streets Fund

Blackpool Council is ready to bid for significant government funding up to £25m that will help to renovate, transform and strengthen the future of the town centre as the next phase of its ambitious Town Centre Regeneration Strategy.

Blackpool is one of 100 towns that has been shortlisted across the UK to develop plans to reinvent the high street, where a portion of the £1bn Future High Streets Fund could be used in a number of ways:

- To improve transport and access to the town
- Convert empty retail units into new homes, workplaces or places of leisure
- Upgrade vital infrastructure such as new public spaces or improving new smart digital technology for a vibrant, modern retail and leisure experience

The Future High Streets Fund is a government scheme launched in 2018 as part of the £6.5bn Towns Fund designed initially to support and fund 50 local areas’ plans to make their high streets and town centres fit for the future and to respond and adapt to change more easily. In August 2019 the scheme was expanded to include 50 more areas, Blackpool being one of them.

The scheme will help to address some of the major challenges faced by Blackpool town centre such as high vacancy levels and reducing levels of footfall, transforming the town centre into a more attractive to place to live, work, shop, be entertained and visit, driving economic growth, attracting further investment, creating more sustainable jobs for local people and improving living standards.

11 schemes have been identified across the town centre in a multi-faceted integrated programme that will help to tackle some of the many challenges the town faces:

1. Houndshill extension
   To create a new multiscreen Imax-style cinema, two restaurants and a relocated Wilko

2. Redevelopment of the old post office
   To secure the refurbishment and re-use of this prominent vacant building for a private sector hotel development

3. Abingdon Street Market
   To secure the rejuvenation of the Abingdon Street Market to make it more appealing to a wider resident and visitor base

4. Property acquisition on King Street
   Ensuring availability for a potential major office development
5. Creative business incubation
To acquire and refurbish three vacant units in the town centre to create new retail/maker units for small businesses including pop ups and art and culture businesses

6. Adelaide Street Transport Hub and access improvement
To improve public and other transport access including bus shelters, taxi, cycle and pedestrian access facilities

7. Developing an innovation partnership
Working with a retail consumer specialist, investment and innovation firm using their expertise and contacts to pilot innovative digital retail technologies in high street businesses, improving businesses’ understanding of their customers

8. Digital infrastructure
To provide the high street businesses and shoppers access to better broadband and the substantial digital infrastructure available to Blackpool

9. Customer analytics
To develop and design a monitoring system to more clearly understand visitor footfall, how people move around, the places they visit and the time they spend, to help support businesses adapt to change, and identify new opportunities to enhance the visitor experience

10. Fylde coast rail study
This is a technical feasibility study and outline business case to support an extension of the current Blackpool-Fleetwood line to increase frequency and improve connectivity across the Fylde coast.

11. Application technology for marketing and promotion
Involving the introduction of a town centre gift card and loyalty programme to stimulate economic activity through increased footfall and local spend.

The 11 schemes amount to a FHSF ask of £25m with public co-funding of £18.4m and private funding of £16.1m. The bid development has been overseen by the Future High Streets Fund Board chaired by independent chair, Peter Cole former Chief Investment Officer of Hammerson and comprising Blackpool business and community partners.

Peter Cole said:

“The town centre is at the heart of our community and we need to ensure it remains an attractive place where people want to be, to enjoy, to shop, to work and in the future live, ensuring businesses grow and thrive. Our plans are ambitious but ambition and innovation is what keeps Blackpool strong, resilient and willing to evolve.”

“The additional funding and help from government is desperately needed for our high street, now more than ever, as we start to recover from the current pandemic. If we are successful in securing funding then with the involvement of the community considerable more work is required to deliver these, but we are confident that the proposals will attract new business, boost local growth and create new jobs, and combined with the other major projects underway, secure the long term prosperity of the town.”

The final bid for Blackpool will be submitted this month and a decision is anticipated this autumn.

To find out more about ongoing regeneration projects across Blackpool or to sign up to our regeneration newsletter please visit our Making Blackpool Better page.

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