Blackpool
A three year prospectus for a transforming destination

The story unfolds...
A Destination Management Plan for Blackpool

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Welcome

Blackpool needs little introduction as a mainstream tourist destination. Loved and visited by millions, it occupies a unique place in the hearts and minds of the British people. It has achieved this position through an enduring relationship and strong emotional bond with generations of visitors, who have remained loyal to the resort offer in the face of increasing competition from both coastal and urban destinations.

The challenge is to maintain that status against a backdrop of a more aspirational family audience; a tangible lack of investment in some aspects of the visitor offer; and negative perceptions held by higher spending visitors who are unconvinced by Blackpool’s appeal.

If anyone doubts that such perceptions can never be overturned, then take a look at the remarkable season of 2014. This was a year in which Blackpool very visibly turned a corner. Investment in a substantial destination marketing campaign (including TV advertising), a programme of high-profile free events and the long-awaited return of the West End summer show to the Opera House created a positive vibe within the resort, the like of which has not been experienced for years, as well as an upsurge in visitor numbers.

The opportunity that now beckons is to build on that momentum by continuing to apply a subtle brand repositioning of Blackpool, one that creates a contemporary, family-oriented beach resort that is renowned for the breadth and quality of its visitor offer in terms of attractions, accommodation, leisure facilities, transport links, events and entertainment.

If we are to achieve that, there must be a clear commitment from all public and private sector stakeholders to continue to collaborate to reinvent Blackpool as an exemplar destination for new generations.

Without that commitment, Blackpool will continue to dwell on its past instead of looking forward to the future.

I am delighted to present this Destination Management Plan (DMP) which sets out a vision and strategic direction for the resort.

Instigated and managed by VisitBlackpool (the tourism arm of Blackpool Council), it is designed to be holistic, setting out how together we will deliver a step change.

The DMP has the needs of all investors and visitors at its heart and it seeks to provide an impulse for all stakeholders. Great destinations are great places to live and work as well as to visit.

Cllr Graham Cain
Cabinet Member for Tourism & Leisure

A Destination Management Plan For Blackpool

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Transforming Blackpool

This Destination Management Plan for 2015-17 seeks to build on the substantial investment that has been made in Blackpool over the past decade. It strives to create a place where visitors can enjoy an experience that matches their expectation of a modern resort destination.

The key outcomes are not merely to increase visitor numbers and target the higher-spending leisure seekers that other destinations are enjoying without the inherent attractions that Blackpool possesses, but also change some of the deep-rooted negative perceptions of the town.

The hundreds of millions of pounds worth of public sector investment in the promenade, tramway and in the acquisition of key leisure assets including the Tower and Winter Gardens, have created the opportunity to change the resort’s fortunes. This plan is underpinned by an aspirational brand positioning aimed at changing any negative perceptions of Blackpool by creating a high-quality, year-round family destination that is capable of supporting a wider economic regeneration.

The essence of the “City Life On The Beach” brand is that we seek to create a place with a contemporary city feel, a vibrant destination, a unique entertainment offer, complemented by better housing, sustainable employment and a tangible sense of civic pride.

HOW?

Retention of the resort’s “golden core” comprising world-famous visitor assets and attractions, and thus building on the positive perceptions of Blackpool as a place that evokes warmth, nostalgia and a strong emotional link to people’s family experiences.

Gradual elimination of poor-quality, sub-standard accommodation and facilities, combined with a shift away from a low-budget stag and hen culture that creates barriers and negative perceptions of our facilities, under the benefit culture that threatens the resort and reduce the over-supply of poor accommodation.

Securing of a range of high-quality entertainment, attractions, branded hotels, restaurants and leisure facilities, and improved conference facilities. All complemented by greatly enhanced customer service, a secure and clean environment, and effective proactive marketing.
Tourism is the economic lifeblood of Blackpool. It directly supports thousands of businesses and more than 24,000 jobs and indirectly supports employment and a myriad of businesses within the supply chain.
Tramway
A £100m scheme that has created a contemporary tram system between Blackpool and Fleetwood with state-of-the-art, European-style trams running alongside the famous heritage trams. The revitalised tramway has created the potential to give visitors a more sustainable way of moving around Blackpool and the Fylde Coast as well as opening up a fast and reliable commuter system for local residents.

Seafront
A six-year project that cost almost £200m and which has resulted in a complete transformation of the seafront, replacing the sea wall with a series of dramatic Spanish steps leading down to the sea and the creation of six new headlands. The reprofiling of the promenade has created one of the finest seafronts in Europe, providing an active landscape for visitors and residents, and providing new links between town and beach.

Tower Festival Headland
The first of the new seafront headlands to be developed, this is a spectacular open-air events space for up to 20,000 spectators which has already staged events featuring the likes of Elton John, Gary Barlow and Peter Kay. The headland is also home to the Comedy Carpet, one of the largest public artworks in the UK as well as Festival House – a purpose-built structure incorporating a beach-fronted bar and restaurant, The Wedding Chapel and Tourist Information Centre.

Creating a city vibe in an iconic beach location
Private Sector Investment

Over this same period, there has been significant private sector investment, including:

- The £15m investment at Blackpool Pleasure Beach, creating a Nickelodeon Land theme park and new Wallace and Gromit ride
- £3m investment in a new indoor Illuminasia exhibition within the Winter Gardens
- Year on year investment in Blackpool Zoo by its international owners, Parques Reunidos
- Sustained capital investment in new facilities and visitor attractions at Sandcastle Waterpark
- Substantial investment in other parts of the visitor offer including hotel accommodation, restaurants, bars and attractions
- The acquisition of the Winter Gardens has facilitated the start of a sympathetic regeneration of this remarkable building with the restoration and opening up of a number of venues. Installation of high tech cinema equipment and investment in programming including the long awaited return of the summer season show.

Acquisition of Key Leisure Assets

Blackpool Council’s acquisition of Blackpool Tower, Winter Gardens and other key leisure assets in 2010 brought the resort’s most famous attractions into public ownership, creating the opportunity for strategic, purposeful investment. The partnership between the Council and Merlin, the world’s second largest leisure operator, has helped create a significant cluster of visitor attractions outside London, including Madame Tussauds, Blackpool Tower Eye and the Blackpool Dungeon, as well as reinvigorating the historic fabric of the Tower and Winter Gardens.

Central Business District

A major mixed-use development scheme that seeks to revitalise one of the key gateways into the town.

Situated opposite Blackpool North railway station, the £70m first phase, completed in 2014, includes four key features:

- A 120,000 square foot glass-fronted Sainsbury’s supermarket
- A new office development, Number One Bickerstaffe Square office, which is now home to Blackpool Council and other businesses
- A fully refurbished secure and modern car park
- A new public square

The £220m masterplan for the area also includes proposals for a second phase which could include hotels, offices and leisure developments.

Marketing

A £1m marketing campaign jointly undertaken by Merlin and VisitBlackpool in 2014, including the first destination-based TV advertising in years, and aimed at changing negative perceptions of the resort. The “Blackpool’s Back” campaign also included extensive PR, press and social media activity.

Events

Blackpool has developed an annual programme of high-quality events capable of attracting large numbers of visitors and residents. The core programme, most of which is free to access, already includes Rock Challenge, Ride The Lights, World Fireworks, the Armed Forces Week and Ride The Lights. The £220m masterplan for the area also includes proposals for a second phase which could include hotels, offices and leisure developments.

Town Centre Retail

The first phase of the £150m houndsHill Shopping Centre has been completed and has transformed the shopping experience for residents who had defected to other shopping centres such as Preston. The £150m expansion was completed in 2008, bringing a significant increase in footfall space, attracting a wide variety of high street stores into Blackpool.

A new town square has been created outside the Winter Gardens, creating a pedestrianised piazza environment with street pavement cafes, fountains and an outdoor events space. The arrival of branded restaurants in this vicinity is helping us to move towards a more balanced and attractive night-time economy.

Brilliance

This town centre lighting installation brings the illuminations concept into the town centre, encouraging visitors to explore the town and centre and thus providing additional visiting opportunities to the local business community. The enterprise is the largest, a large scale sound and light show in Birley Street.

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2014 also saw the return of the summer season show, with the international production of MAMMA MIA! being staged at the Opera House within the Winter Gardens over a 12-week run, selling over 100,000 tickets with a value of £3.5m – the highest grossing show in the resort’s history.

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**Strengths**

- Well-established national profile as a mainstream visitor destination
- Increasingly diverse tourism product for different market segments
- Large number of high-quality visitor attractions
- Key leisure assets (Tower and Winter Gardens) in public ownership
- Visible leverage of visitor accommodation
- Long-established reputation as a conference destination
- Blackpool Illuminations extend tourism season into November
- Wide range/price of visitor accommodation
- Long-established reputation as a conference destination
- Blackpool Illuminations extend tourism season into November
- Strong programme of established free events
- Easy access to the M55 and national motorway network
- Good rail links, with electrification of routes from Blackpool to Preston and beyond due in 2015
- Updated tram network provides good internal connections across the Fylde Coast

**Weaknesses**

- Negative perceptions of Blackpool as a place
- Audience profile dominated by lower-spending visitors
- Over-supply of low-grade holiday accommodation leading to market failure and proliferation of HMOs
- Seasonal nature of tourism-related employment
- Lack of strategic investment in Blackpool Illuminations display
- Over-reliance on bars/clubs, lack of recognised family-focused restaurant brands
- Under-performing town centre – lacks of higher-end retail brands
- Lack of appropriate facilities for coach drivers and passengers
- Visitor car park infrastructure not fit for purpose
- Declining local government finance and ability to deliver transformational factors

**Opportunities**

- Conversion of large volumes of day visitors into staying visitors
- Development of Central Station site as a major mixed leisure destination
- Development of new/revamped conference and exhibition facilities
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- Conversion of Tower Lounge into family-based attraction
- Creation of a town centre cultural quarter with the Winter Gardens as the focal point
- Development of a heritage-based visitor attraction
- Use of Tourism Academy funding to improve hospitality standards and other skills within the visitor economy
- Rejuvenation of early evening economy with new family-based leisure offer
- Working with private sector partners to co-fund marketing campaigns
- Repackaging of Blackpool Airport to support business growth/industrial tourism
- Rebranding of the Blackpool Illuminations
- Growth in domestic tourism
- Expanding investment in arts, culture and heritage tourism
- Promotion of the Blackpool to Preston rail line and expansion of direct London services
- Expansion of tramway from Thornton to North Station
- Potential reduction in VAT on tourism product
- Development of Stanley Park as a mainstream visitor attraction

**Threats**

- Further market failure within the visitor accommodation sector, leading to more derelict sites along Promenade
- Persistent poor external portrayal of Blackpool
- Further competition from major urban centres of Manchester and Liverpool as day visit destinations
- Failure to meet new EU bathing water standards
- Tourism market price sensitive, particularly during ‘off peak’ periods
- Sustainability of Blackpool Illuminations without significant private sector support
- Private sector fails to invest and improve quality in the tourism sector
- Further public sector funding reductions leading to a lack of funding to support improvements and retaining of physical infrastructure in town centre
- New and emerging markets for visitor economy are not identified and tapped
- Diminishing levels of marketing resource against backdrop of reduced local authority funding
This is about engineering change and creating a destination that will be compelling to new generations of visitors.

**Product**

Physical development of key sites, attractions and facilities that contribute to an unrivalled destination experience.

- **Former Central Station site:** Facilitate relocation of police and court buildings to create a viable development site that can be marketed as a major new leisure attraction
- **Enhancement of conference facilities:** Agree short and long-term strategies for rejuvenation of conference offer
- **Syndicate:** Development proposal to be determined for the currently derelict Syndicate nightclub
- **Talbot Gateway:** Progression of Phase 2 of Central Business District regeneration scheme including new four-star hotel development
- **Tramway:** Confirmation of tram extension to Blackpool North Station, creating an integrated transport hub
- **Promenade headlands:** Facilitate development of new visitor attractions to animate the new headland areas between South and North Piers
- **South Beach:** Revision of planning uses for future development of the Crescent areas of South Shore to address derelict hotel sites
- **Blackpool Tower:** Completion of Tower structural renovation work. Further activity to identify additional commercial development opportunities including alternative use of ‘Tower Lounge
- **Blackpool Winter Gardens:** Development of existing use parks and introduction of additional exhibition space. Identification of further leisure and retail opportunities. Enhancement of existing conference offer
- **Heritage-based visitor attraction:** Securing of Heritage Lottery funding for development of a Museum for Blackpool within the Winter Gardens
- **Creative Cluster:** Establishment of a creative cluster within the town centre with the Winter Gardens at its heart
- **Retail and restaurant offer:** Inward investment activity to attract higher end restaurants in both the retail and restaurant sector to enhance existing evening economy and overall town centre offer
- **Attractions:** Practical working with private sector operators to invest in new attractions
- **Summer shows:** Confirm programme of West End quality shows for summer season runs at Opera House 2015-17
- **Blackpool Illuminations:** Identification of new funding streams and application of new technologies to rejuvenate the Illuminations offer
- **Former Yates’s site:** Sympathetic development of town centre landmark site for leisure and retail use
- **Hotel accreditation:** Roll-out of VisitEngland entry level accreditation scheme to accommodation sector to increase numbers of graded guest houses that have a ‘safe, legal and clean’ quality mark
- **Town centre zoning:** Progression towards town centre “zoning” identified and agreed within the Blackpool Town Centre Strategy
- **Stanley Park:** Progressive development of new facilities that make Blackpool’s Showcase Park compelling for residents and visitors

**What Next?**

2014 proved a turning point in Blackpool’s fortunes with an upsurge in visitor numbers and the conversion of tens of thousands of day trippers into staying visitors. Much of this success came on the back of an ambitious “Blackpool’s Back” destination marketing campaign that sought to reposition this huge investment in infrastructure made in the resort and that start to cast an attractive spell on visitors.

With success comes confidence—the sort of confidence that encourages existing businesses to invest and take a place in the resort’s future.

The following pages of this plan seek to build on the momentum that has been achieved to bring about a further change in the quality and consistency of the visitor offer. This is reflected throughout the Product, Place & Promotion proposal and is based on the opportunity that lies ahead of us.
Promotion

Without effective marketing, the challenge of repositioning and changing negative perceptions about Blackpool will be difficult to overcome. This DMP sets out for comprehensive marketing activity that promotes the “new Blackpool” to existing, lapsed and new visitors across the UK and overseas.

• Destination marketing strategy: Establish innovative destination marketing strategy incorporating events, TV, digital and PR activity with a key focus on changing visitor perceptions of Blackpool

Place

Provision of a visitor-friendly experience in terms of infrastructure and environmental management

• Roads: Completion of Weather Way maintenance project prior to start of 2015 season
• Rail: Completion of Blackpool to Preston electrification scheme. Remaining of Blackpool North Station: Further expansion of direct Blackpool North to London services, targeted at inbound leisure visitors
• Car parking and pricing policy: Development of innov-ative on-park pricing policy and reduction of reinvestment payment facilities. Identification of potential new car parking sites to offer potential rate of access at East Topping Street and South Car Park
• Airport: Reinvention of Blackpool Airport as a commercial airport focused on inbound tourism and business growth

• Roads:
  - Completion of Yeadon Way maintenance project prior to start of 2015 season
• Rail:
  - Completion of Blackpool to Preston electrification scheme. Remodelling of Blackpool North station. Further expansion of direct Blackpool North to London services, targeted at inbound leisure visitors
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The Brand Values
The brand is underpinned by a set of values that differentiate Blackpool from other destinations:

Love of the Different
There is nothing beige or dull about Blackpool. It’s a place that is wonderfully unique, surprising and challenging.

Genuine
There is nothing false about Blackpool. We are sincere, true to our roots, no pretence. We are open and glad to see you.

Big WOW! Little WOW!
We have some famed, internationally-renowned ‘wow’ attractions, but also some surprising ‘little wows’ that add real value to the Blackpool offer.

Make Relaxing Easy
We are a great natural host. We work hard to take care of you so you can enjoy the best of what Blackpool has to offer.

Positive Energy
The people of Blackpool have a positive, can-do attitude, they make things happen. We are enthusiastic and exuberant.

The Brand Position
The “City Life On The Beach” brand position is an aspirational one. It is not a marketing slogan – more a touchstone to ensure the city is remembered. Innovation and working together to draw up the quality of life for residents and the attractiveness of the offer to visitors.

Within this, Blackpool should be perceived as a happy brand, viewed as a place where memories are made, a much-loved classic, reinvented for a new and more demanding audience.

The Hygiene Factors
Whilst the brand values are what differentiate Blackpool from other places, there are also three crucial hygiene factors that don’t differentiate, but are critical to the repositioning of Blackpool.

Without these hygiene factors in place we will not overturn the negative perceptions of the resort:

Quality
Blackpool must strive to deliver a quality product across all areas, not just in terms of accommodation, food and drink, and attractions, but also in terms of car parking, public realm and customer service.

Safety
Any perceptions that Blackpool is an unsafe place to visit or a place where the focus of the visitor offer is skewed towards a late-night drinking economy are seriously damaging to Blackpool’s brand aspirations.

Cleanliness
Clean and tidy streets; public realm that is well maintained; beaches that are free from litter and detritus; bathing waters that comply with European standards; hotel stock that complies with accreditation standards and visitor expectations – these are givens for a resort that promotes itself as a contemporary, quality destination.

This is a place that is wonderfully unique, surprising and challenging...
The value of tourism is often measured in volumes of visitors. Whilst that is an important statistic, it only tells part of the story. Some of the purpose of this plan is to deliver physical change, the sort of transformational change that changes perceptions and delivers tangible economic impact.
A New Horizon

Take a look at the five-year timeline and the scale of what this Destination Management Plan seeks to deliver can be clearly seen.

Collectively, these objectives have the potential to provide the impetus that will create a destination that engenders immense civic pride, attract new generations of visitors and reaffirm Blackpool’s status as the most popular beach resort in the UK.

The key objectives set out opposite are both challenging and aspirational, but eminently achievable if Blackpool can harness the change that has already been achieved and use it to create a real sense of impetus.

With that will come investor confidence and a sea change in any residual negative perceptions about what Blackpool stands for and about its future.

2015
- Completion of Yeadon Way maintenance project ahead of 2015 season
- Opening of four new branded family restaurants within Blackpool Town Centre
- Reintroduction of town centre CCTV monitoring
- Opening of new Blackpool Pleasure Beach Red Arrows-themed SkyForce attraction
- Revitalisation of Blackpool Airport with small commercial flight operations
- Blackpool South and Bispham achieve EU bathing water standards
- Roll out of Blackpool Approved entry level accreditation scheme for hotels and guest houses
- Completion of steelwork replacement, Blackpool Tower

2016
- Conversion of Tower Lounge into family restaurant/attraction
- Development of new retail attraction for Central Station site
- Planning guidance consultation for The Creations/Blackpool Pleasure Beach
- Revitalisation of Blackpool Villages
- Launch of Blackpool’s Blackpool’s Best destination marketing campaign
- Establishment of three-year programme of West End quality shows for Open-Air House
- Development of new Christmas in Blackpool destination marketing campaign

2017
- Achievement of World Host accreditation for Blackpool
- Installation of variable message signage to improve visitor navigation and parking
- Work commences on Museum of Blackpool
- Preparation works commence on Central Station site development
- Creation of 60 additional bed spaces at 3 or 4-star standard in town centre
- Identification and development of additional visitor car parking facilities

2018–20
- Completion of budget hotel and family restaurant on site of former Yates’s pub on Talbot Square
- Remaining Blackpool bathing waters reach EU quality standards
- Completion of new elephant house facility, Blackpool Zoo
- Completion of rail electrification, Blackpool to Preston
- Development of new coaching facilities
- Work commences on tramway extension from North Pier to North Station

2018
- Completion of Museum of Blackpool project
- Completion of first phase of Central Station site development
- Blackpool North station remodelling completed
- Classic hotel sites on South Promenade replaced by new residential and commercial property
- Next phase of Talbot Gateway scheme completed

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