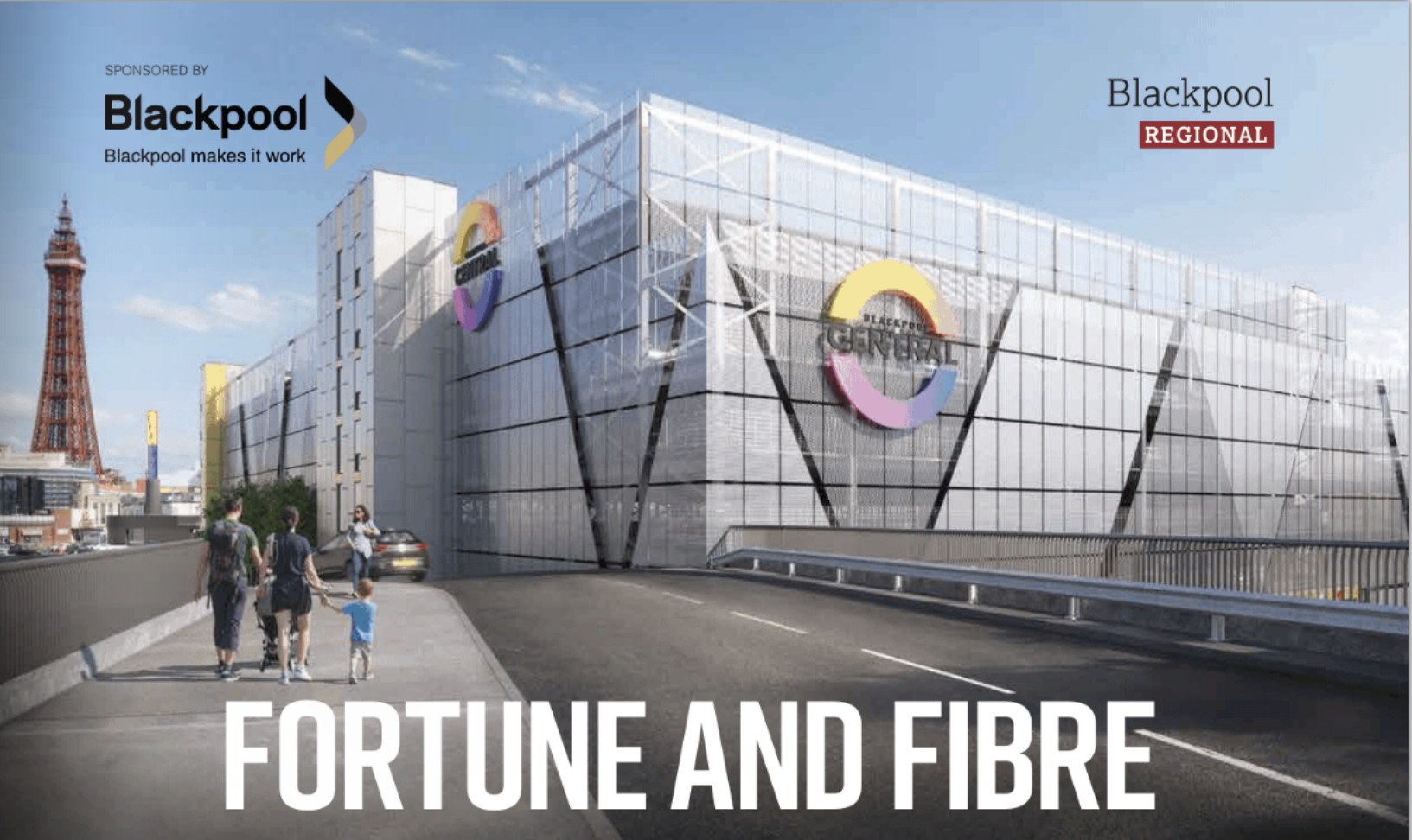




# FORTUNE AND FIBRE

Forget the Pleasure Beach, sticks of rock, and fortune tellers, it doesn't take a mystic to know the Golden Mile has a golden opportunity, and Blackpool needs to make the most of its role in fibre connectivity. **Alex Bell** looks at the what the future holds for the town

The air that now blows in off the Irish Sea, sweeping across Blackpool's Golden Mile, moves through a town undergoing a unique resurgence.

A dozen or so years ago this wasn't the case. Blackpool had for a long time been associated with stalled investment, a knock-on effect of the decline in its tourism fortunes from the 1980s onward.

But with a list of regenerative projects almost as long as its famed tower is high, Blackpool's connection to the North Atlantic Loop arguably offers the highest level of reassurance when it comes to assessing just how positive and bright the town's future can be.

Blackpool Council's Mark Smith is cabinet member for enterprise, business and job creation. He believes that now the town is connected to the North Atlantic Loop – undersea fibre data cables linking the UK to the US and Northern Europe – that Blackpool's digital ecosystem capability has unlimited potential.

Put simply Smith sees no reason why Blackpool can't become the centre of the North Atlantic Loop.

"We don't just want the data to pass through Blackpool from America to Europe," says Smith.

The King Street plan



"We want to put Blackpool at the Centre of the North Atlantic Loop and not just physically. The business case for refining data in Blackpool is growing, and with the Fylde Coast's renewable energy assets, the opportunity is huge.

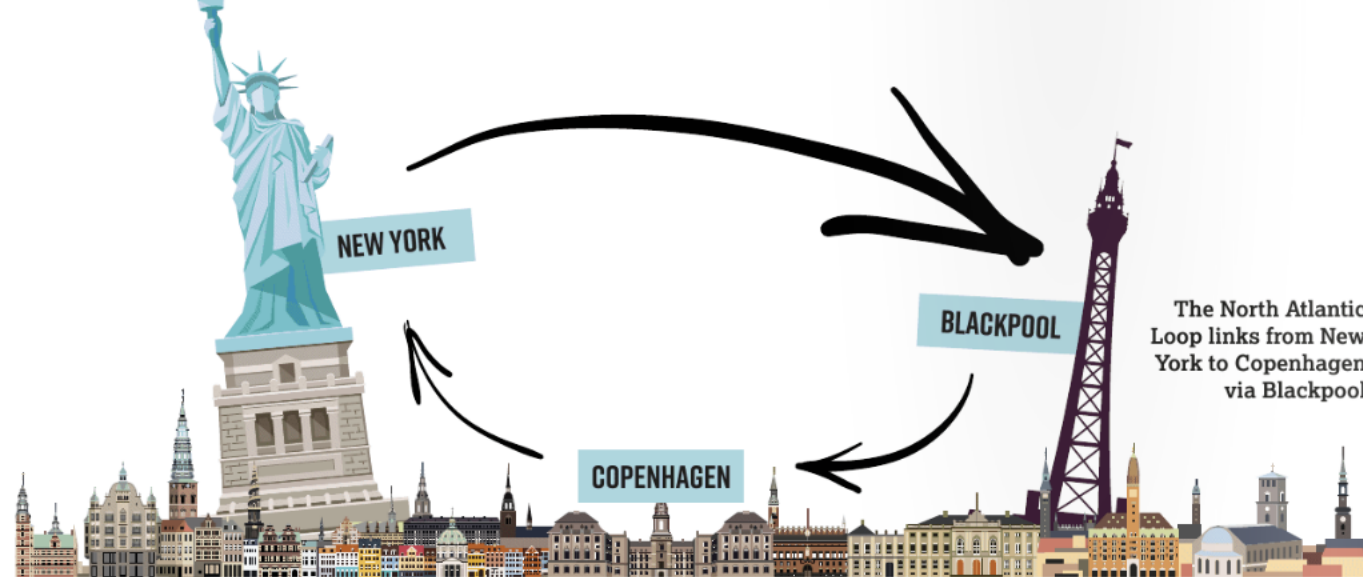
"To put that into context," he adds. "I would suggest that we see the International Fibre as being a huge catalyst to grow Blackpool's digital ecosystem alongside the investment in local fibre which is now in excess of £100m."

Representing the largest single investment for over a century – £300m – the now approved regeneration of Blackpool

Central railway station brings with it game-changing predictions of 600,000 additional visitors each year, a spending boost of around £75m annually and 1,000 new jobs.

Hailed as a world class, year-round leisure destination, future visitors can expect a thriving Heritage Quarter containing an artisan food hall, restaurants and outdoor dining, a new pub, hotel and aparthotel, three entertainment venues, a public events square and a 1,306 space multi-storey car park.

"We are now looking forward to getting spades in the ground to build the car park ➤



and Heritage Quarter, which are the catalysts for delivering our wider vision," says Nikal chief executive officer Richard Fee.

Nikal, along with Media Invest Entertainment, are behind the redevelopment, and believe the project will future proof Blackpool's tourism offer.

Norbert Reichart, chief executive officer, Media Invest Entertainment, says: "Blackpool is the undisputed entertainment capital of the UK, and our scheme will help cement the town as a must visit, year-round destination for generations to come.

"The resurgence of staycations and the UK opening back up to international tourists creates huge opportunities moving forward to attract more visitors and encourage tourists to stay longer on their trips to Blackpool."

Merlin, Pleasure Beach and Blackpool Zoo are investing more due to big ticket investments such as Blackpool Central, according to Cllr Lynn Williams, leader of Blackpool Council and cabinet member for tourism and culture.

Off the back of a bigger and better than ever Christmas season, she's in no doubt that people's perceptions of Blackpool have changed for the better over the past year.

"We have a cultural offer too that's just as fun out of season as it is in season," she says. "And we want to entice people to keep coming back, and rediscover what we have on offer, enjoying new restaurants, cinemas, our first museum, and new leisure attractions, all of which are in the pipeline to keep the Blackpool experience fresh and exciting for our visitors."

"What's important is that we continue to promote our assets on behalf of our residents and businesses who depend on hospitality and tourism for their livelihoods."

Stephen Knowles is special project manager for Eric Wright Construction which last year completed Lotus School.

The school aims to ensure that students who have struggled accessing mainstream



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**Cllr Lynn Williams**  
leader, Blackpool Council

education are fully supported to succeed and develop.

He says: "We need to change the myth within the youth of Blackpool that in order to be a success you must leave the town."

Smith and Cllr Jo Farrell, cabinet member for adult social care and health, aren't in disagreement with Knowles.

They add that maximising economic growth, and creating stronger communities, are the council's two main priorities, committed to via its more than £1bn Growth & Prosperity Programme.

Farrell tells *Insider* that housing, drugs and alcohol issues, and the wellbeing of young people are her three most pressing challenges.

"It's our responsibility to make sure the welfare and health of our children is pushed to the foreground in every aspect of the collaborative work we do, to reduce the risks and pitfalls for our young population as they grow into adulthood," she says.

"Seasonal employment and high levels of low cost, multiple occupancy accommodation are an ongoing issue that Blackpool's housing strategy is continuing



to tackle," says Farrell. "We're making great headway in improving housing stock and the council's objectives are to deliver new housing, improve the rental sector, and to stabilise and prevent homelessness."

She adds: "It's vital that the council and other organisations continue to work together alongside the community to tackle the town's higher than average rates of alcohol-related conditions, substance misuse, and suicide, and to improve the opportunities for our young people."

Creating sustainable employment is crucial to Blackpool's future, and is the overall objective of creating up to 5,000 jobs on the Airport Enterprise Zone (EZ) site and its link to the North Atlantic Loop.

EZ is a 144-hectare site that includes Blackpool Airport (now owned by the council), Blackpool Retail Park, Blackpool Business Park, and surrounding land up to the border of Common Edge Road. It secured EZ status for 25 years from 2016.

Smith, a firm believer of Blackpool's position and ability to assist digital industries to go net zero due says: "With the cabling (North Atlantic Loop) landing at the Airport Enterprise Zone, this makes the EZ a very interesting site for data centre development and jobs growth in the digital sector.

"Also with the announcement of GCHQ building the National Cyber Force at Samlesbury, we see huge opportunities in future jobs and we are keen to build up the digital skills in our young people for the future jobs that the North Atlantic Loop and the National Cyber Force is going to bring to the area and the wider region."



"IT IS ESTIMATED THE MOVE WILL BOOST THE TOWN CENTRE ECONOMY BY UP TO £8M A YEAR"

Blackpool's Talbot Gateway will soon house 3,000 Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) staff, making it the third-largest building in the UK for the Government department when it comes to headcount.

Clive Anderson, head of real estate major projects, DWP, spoke to *Insider* about the deal recently agreed with Muse Developments and Blackpool Council to relocate civil servants into the 215,000 sq ft building designed by Make Architects, and how it will bolster Blackpool's future.

**Economically, what will the move mean for Blackpool over the next 25 years?**

DWP signed a 25-year lease to occupy the highly-sustainable, purpose-built offices as part of a strategic plan to centralise civil service jobs in the heart of Blackpool. The council has been negotiating this deal for several years as part of its stated ambition to rejuvenate the town centre by the introduction of high-quality office developments that will create and protect local jobs, drive footfall, and breathe new life into the retail economy. Initially, the development will create opportunities for local business partners and increase employment during the two-year construction programme.

This new hub in Blackpool will consolidate jobs and the department's services under one roof, making the public estate more efficient. The relocation of just over 3,000 DWP employees will bring considerably more footfall into the area, with a

massive boost to local businesses, retailers, restaurants, cafes, and leisure facilities, but also bringing new, high-quality job opportunities for local residents. Talbot Gateway, Blackpool's central business district, offers an ideal location, being highly accessible, well located and supported by excellent transport links. The sustainable location and the long list of environmental credentials and innovative design associated with this building will also have a positive contribution to our climate agenda and promote employee wellbeing. It is estimated the move will boost the town centre economy by up to £8m a year.

**Are you looking to recruit a certain quota of young people from the Blackpool area?**

The move to the Talbot Gateway site will be an inclusive relocation for all our people currently based at Warbreck House and Ryscar House. The new Blackpool central business district offers an ideal location, and we therefore anticipate this will contribute to the attraction for young people to join and develop their long-term careers in the Civil Service.

Social value is a requirement in all public sector procurement, and as a result, our supply chain partners will work in accordance with a social value plan. The main contractors will place orders with sustainable local businesses that support the DWP Kickstart Scheme, modern day apprentices, NVQs and undergraduate placements. In this way, the two-year construction of the £100m development will benefit the employment opportunities for young people living in and around the Blackpool area.