

**THE POLITICS OF PLEASURE:
LOCAL GOVERNMENT, TOURISM
STRATEGY AND PROVISION
IN LANCASHIRE SEASIDE RESORTS
BEFORE AND AFTER 1974**

This thesis is submitted for the degree of PhD in History,

by: Steven William Birkett, B.A., M.A.

Lancaster University

History Department

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The Politics of Pleasure: Local Government, Tourism Strategy and Provision in Lancashire Seaside Resorts Before and After 1974

Steven William Birkett

Abstract

This thesis examines the critical role of local government in the development and transformation of Lancashire's major seaside resorts: Blackpool, Morecambe and Heysham, and Lytham St Annes. Through a detailed historical analysis, spanning from the early twentieth century to the present, it investigates how local authorities have navigated shifting political structures and evolving tourist markets, helping to shape the fortunes of these coastal destinations. The research contributes to the understanding of English seaside resort evolution by focusing on localised, place-specific factors, particularly the decision-making processes within local governments. Utilising a comparative approach, this thesis analyses the pivotal transitions in governance, especially post-1974, where increased centralisation altered the dynamics of local decision-making. It delineates how these shifts impacted the resorts' ability to adapt to changing tourism demands and socio-economic pressures.

A key finding of this research is the demonstration of the long-term implications of local government actions on resort towns. It highlights that effective local governance, characterised by proactive, innovative strategies and strong public-private partnerships, can significantly influence the resilience and regeneration of tourist destinations. Conversely, inconsistent or ineffective local governance can lead to stagnation and decline, as illustrated in the varied experiences of the studied resorts. The thesis also addresses a notable gap in historiography by providing an in-depth exploration of the post-1974 period, a less examined era in the context of seaside resort development in the UK. In doing so, it offers new insights into the complexities of governance and its direct impact on local economies and cultural landscapes.

This thesis draws upon a wide range of archival materials from across Lancashire, as well as utilising various digital collections. By combining historical survey data, policy analysis, and contemporary observations in both local and national media, this study not only adds depth to scholarly discussions in history, tourism studies, and public policy, but also offers insights for present and future urban and tourism planning. It highlights the crucial importance of local autonomy and community involvement in the preservation and regeneration of seaside resorts, underscoring the impact of localised decision-making on creating thriving and sustainable tourist destinations.

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List of Abbreviations

Name	Abbreviation
Associated British Cinemas (Television) Ltd	ABC
Authorised Heritage Discourse	AHD
Blackpool History Centre	BHC
Blackpool Transport Services	BTS
Business Improvement District	BID
Borough Council	BC
British Broadcasting Corporation	BBC
Casino Advisory Panel	CAP
County Borough	CB
County Council	CC
Destination Management Plan	DMP
District Council	DC
Elizabeth Roberts' Working Class Oral History Archive	ERWCOHA
Electric and Musical Industries	EMI
English Tourist Board	ETB
English Tourist Council	ETC
European Commission	EC
Geographic Information System	GIS
Heavy Goods Vehicle	HGV
Houses of Multiple Occupancy	HMO
Housing Benefit	HB
Lancashire Archives	LA
Lancaster City Council	LCC
Lancaster City Transport	LCT
Lesbian, Bisexual, Gay and Transgender+	LGBT+
Light Rail Transit	LRT
Local Government Boundary Commission for England	LGBCE
Local Enterprise Partnership	LEP
London, Midland and Scottish Railway	LMS
Morecambe Bay Independents	MBI
Morecambe Hotel and Caterers Association	MHCA
Morecambe Library Local Collection	MLLC
Municipal Borough	MB
North West Tourist Board	NWTB
Regional Development Agency	RDA
Royal Society for the Protection of Birds	RSPB
Single Resolution Board	SRB
Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises	SME
St Annes Library Local Collection	StAL
Tourist Area Life Cycle	TALC
Trust House Forte	THF

Urban District Council
Visitor Economic Strategy
World of Music, Arts and Drama

UDC
VES
WOMAD

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Authors Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted in substantially the same form for the award of a higher degree anywhere.

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Aims and Research Questions – Why Study the Seaside and Local Government in Lancashire?

The origins of seaside tourism in the United Kingdom date back to the eighteenth century. From this time, people began to regard the seaside as a place to escape crowded and polluted cities and to enjoy the benefits of sea bathing and fresh sea air. Although the nature of these visits and the motivations for people to make them have changed, tourists continue to visit the seaside in vast numbers seeking relaxation, fun, and natural beauty. In 2018, a University of Exeter study estimated that 270 million visits were made to English coastlines yearly.¹ This evidence confirms John Hassan's verdict that the demise of the English seaside holiday is often exaggerated.² In addition to visitors, seaside towns accommodate more than ten per cent of the UK's population. These resorts have played a significant role in UK society for generations, providing tourism and employment opportunities.³ Despite this popularity and increasing interest from scholars in recent decades, traditional English seaside resorts have, in the last fifty years, often been portrayed in popular culture as, at best old-fashioned and, at worst, an embarrassment. Recent social and economic trends have reinforced this negative image, with many coastal towns now listed among the most deprived areas in the UK.⁴ John Walton, one of the leading figures in research into the history of seaside tourism in Britain, argues that by studying the history of seaside resorts, significant insights can be gained into their futures.⁵ By focusing on a localised historical analysis, this thesis sheds new light on the instrumental role of local government in the development of

¹ BlueHealth, *270 million Visits Made to English Coastlines Each Year* (2020), <<https://bluehealth2020.eu/news/coastal-visits/>> [accessed 13 March 2023].

² John Hassan, *Seaside, Health and the Environment in England and Wales Since 1800* (Aldershot: Routledge, 2003), p. 2.

³ Select Committee on Regenerating Towns and Communities, *The Future of Seaside Towns* (2019), <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201719/ldselect/ldseaside/320/32004.htm#_idTextAnchor006> [accessed 12 March 2023].

⁴ Patrick Butler, 'English Coastal Towns Have Some of Country's Worst Health, Report Says', *The Guardian*, 20 July 2021, <<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2021/jul/21/english-coastal-towns-have-some-of-countrys-worst-health-report-says>> [accessed 13 March 2023].

⁵ John K. Walton, 'Histories of Tourism', in *The SAGE Handbook of Tourism Studies*, ed. by Tazmin Jamal and Mike Robinson (London: SAGE, 2011), pp. 118-19.

seaside resorts, a topic that is often generalised or overlooked in broader historical studies.

In particular, the history of Lancashire's seaside resorts provides important lessons about how local government can function as both a positive and negative agent in promoting coastal tourism. It clearly illustrates the complexities involved in managing and promoting tourism at a local level, and the challenges and changes faced by local councils over the decades. Although local authorities deliver other essential services, I focus on this tourism provision and governance in relation to the function of these towns as holiday destinations. In Blackpool, Morecambe and Lytham St Annes it was tourism that primarily led to the rapid growth and development of these towns in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This thesis offers an original contribution by blending historical analysis with policy evaluation to provide a nuanced understanding of the role of local governance in the development of tourism. I also suggest that local governments could consider a multi-pronged strategy for revitalisation. Lancashire's seaside resorts have a rich history and unique attractions that if effectively managed, as noted by Marketing Lancashire in 2023, can attract a new generation of visitors.⁶ The role of local government will be key in navigating this balance between the past and the future. This lies in the ability to adapt while still preserving the unique characteristics that make each resort special, in a collaborative effort between local government, private enterprise and the communities they serve.

Lancashire's coastal authorities are now faced with the task of revitalising their resorts, meeting the twin challenges of attracting tourists and social inclusion. A widespread perception of decline developed among those writing about seaside towns, summed up in 2023 by John Houghton, who argues that English coastal resorts have suffered from 'fifty years of decline and disconnection, at the end of which seaside towns were officially among the poorest places in the country.'⁷ While this is an over-generalisation, Blackpool and Morecambe are regularly reported as being among the most extreme examples of this trend, providing a primary reason for their selection as

⁶ Marketing Lancashire, *Lancashire Year of The Coast 2023* (2023) <<https://www.marketinglancashire.com/news/spotlight/lancashire-year-of-the-coast/>> [accessed 31 January 2024].

⁷ John P. Houghton, 'Solving the Riddle of the Sands: How to Regenerate England's Struggling Seaside Towns', *Journal of Urban Regeneration & Renewal*, 16.3, (2022), 246-256 (p. 247).

case studies in this these.⁸ Sheela Agarwal has highlighted that the decline of such resorts became noticeable from the 1970s, influenced by changes in holiday preferences, demographic shifts, and various supply-side changes.⁹ However, the response to these trends and the levels of resilience shown by resorts has varied considerably. Thus, while it is challenging to isolate governance as the sole factor in the extent of decline and the effectiveness of restructuring efforts, this thesis posits that local governance played a pivotal role in the fate of Lancashire's three major resorts: Blackpool, Morecambe, and Lytham St Annes. The nature and scale of the decline in seaside resorts have varied considerably, and understanding these place-specific outcomes requires an analysis of local-level changes.¹⁰ Therefore, the case-study-based approach can help inform regeneration strategies, especially in regions facing of high socio-economic challenges. I will also fill a gap in the historiography by addressing the relationship between local government and decision-making within these Lancashire resorts. Although scholars from various academic disciplines have addressed other aspects of resort development, the role of local government and decision-making needs to be sufficiently appreciated and examined. I have positioned my thesis at the intersection of three historiographies, the regional history of Lancashire, the history of English local government, and the dynamics and development of seaside resorts.

Although the appeal of each resort is unique, each has had to attract visitors within the broader context of the English tourism market. Seaside resorts were the first mass tourism destinations to emerge, especially during the building of the railway network in the nineteenth century.¹¹ Until the arrival of the railways, with a few exceptions such as Margate, coastal tourism was reserved for a wealthy minority.¹² As

⁸ The 2021 census showed that 63.4 per cent of Morecambe West End households were deprived in at least one dimension, although this was a fall from 71.5 per cent in 2011. In Blackpool South Promenade and Seaside Way, 73.9 per cent of households were deprived in at least one dimension, down from 84.9 per cent in 2011. See Office for National Statistics, *Household Deprivation Variable: Census 2021* (2023), <<https://www.ons.gov.uk/census/census2021dictionary/variablesbytopic/demographyvariables/census2021/householddeprivation>> [accessed 14 March 2023].

⁹ Sheela Agarwal, 'Restructuring Seaside Tourism', *Annals of Tourism Research*, 29.1 (2002), 22-55, p. 33.

¹⁰ Anthony Leonard, 'Seaside Town Regeneration and the Interconnections Between the Physical Environment, Key Agencies and Middle-Life Migration', *Journal of Policy Research in Tourism, Leisure and Events*, 8 (2015), 107-26 (p. 111).

¹¹ John K. Walton, *The British Seaside: Holidays and Resorts in the Twentieth Century* (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 2006), p. 15.

¹² Hassan, p. 34.

Kathryn Ferry has argued, it is hard to overestimate how vital rail travel was in the history of seaside holidays. Trains were the most popular mode of holiday transport from the 1840s to the 1940s.¹³ The 1950s was arguably the high point for domestic seaside resorts when these destinations had little or no competition from alternatives abroad.¹⁴ This post-war boom in visitor numbers marked the height of popularity for many resorts, including those in Lancashire. Against this background, local authorities successfully marketed Lancashire's seaside resorts throughout most of the twentieth century. As a result, a variety of popular seaside resorts thrived along the Lancashire coast, offering, in the words of Martin Easdown, 'an enticing arcadia for all classes.'¹⁵ By exploring the pre-1974 era I demonstrate that these local authorities played a crucial role in developing resorts which appealed to a broad cross-section of society. This thesis extends over a significant period, from the early developmental stages of these resorts to the present day, to provide a more comparative approach that is often missing in tourism studies, which tend to focus on shorter periods. Following the post-Second World War boom, by the end of the 1960s, there were increasing signs that some long-established resorts were losing their appeal.¹⁶ Despite maintaining a loyal base of visitors, by the 1970s and 1980s, as Ferry points out, British seaside resorts had become deeply unfashionable.¹⁷ Seaside resorts saw the problem of uncertain weather compounded by decaying infrastructure and worsening transport connections. The rail closure programmes of the 1960s and 1970s and a lack of effective road alternatives left seaside resorts, such as Morecambe, challenging to visit.¹⁸ Although visitor numbers were still buoyant in larger resorts, the seeds of decline had become evident. Older resort attractions, such as piers and pavilions, suffered long-term under-investment. Victorian and Edwardian buildings were expensive to maintain and upgrade to

¹³ Kathryn Ferry, *The British Seaside Holiday* (Oxford: Shire, 2009), p. 9.

¹⁴ Julian Constantine Demetriadi, 'English and Welsh Seaside Resorts 1950-1974, with Special Reference to Blackpool and Margate' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Lancaster University, 1994), p. 51.

¹⁵ Martin Easdown, *Lancashire's Seaside Piers* (Barnsley, South Yorkshire: Wharncliffe Books, 2009), p. 13.

¹⁶ David Jarratt, 'The Development and Decline of Morecambe in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries: A Resort Caught in the Tide', *Journal of Tourism History*, 11.3 (2019), 263–83 (p. 272).

¹⁷ Ferry, p. 124.

¹⁸ Julian Demetriadi, 'The Golden Years: English Seaside Resorts 1950-1974', in *The Rise and Fall of British Coastal Resorts*, ed. by Gareth Shaw and Allan Williams (Guildford: Biddles Ltd, 1997), p. 52.

contemporary expectations and regulations.¹⁹ To improve accommodation standards and promote UK tourism, the British government became more directly involved in the tourism industry, for example, with the 1969 Hotel Development Incentive Scheme. Even more significantly, the Development of Tourism Act (1969) created regional tourist boards, which attempted to encourage private sector involvement in towns increasingly lacking investment.²⁰ The North West Tourist Board (NTWB) was created to promote tourism in the North West of England. This area includes popular tourist destinations such as the Lake District and Lancashire's seaside resorts. These tourist boards were established to promote tourism and stimulate economic growth while traditional industries declined. These boards intended to coordinate and promote national and regional tourism and provide information and support to tourists and businesses in the industry. Before this time, the UK government had been content to leave tourism management to local authorities. This was part of broader trend of centralised policy making which would accelerate during the late twentieth century. By examining this shift from local to more centralised decision-making post-1974, this thesis contributes to the broader discourse on government and decentralisation, highlighting the impact of such shifts on local economies and community identities.

Against this background, by the 1970s and 1980s, the media presented British seaside towns as increasingly shabby and old-fashioned.²¹ The decline in the popularity of seaside resorts was among the most significant changes in British society during the late twentieth century. Fewer tourists took a week or fortnight-long holiday in English resorts, impacting the demand for holiday accommodation. In the decade between 1978 and 1988, thirty-nine million nights were lost at seaside resorts, representing half the staying market.²² This decline in staying visitors led to a surplus of bed spaces in resorts and increased the number of HMOs (Houses in Multiple Occupation). There was also a decline in housing quality in some resorts, as property owners often did not maintain properties to a high standard if they only rented to short-term tenants or those receiving state benefits. This trend away from holiday accommodation was especially evident in

¹⁹ Chris Cooper, 'Parameters and indicators of the decline of the British Seaside Resort', in *The Rise and Fall of British Coastal Resorts*, ed. by Gareth Shaw and Allan Williams (London: Cassell, 1997), p. 88.

²⁰ Demetriadi, p. 67

²¹ Allan Brodie, *The Seafront* (Swindon: Historic England, 2018), p. 28.

²² Cooper, p. 84.

Blackpool and Morecambe. In addition, as staying visitors tended to spend more at each resort, this loss had the most significant impact on the financial viability and the level of investment available for other resort attractions. Tourist amenities such as pleasure palaces, theatres, and piers, mostly dating from the 1880s or 1890s, also deteriorated physically, reinforcing the increasingly negative public image. By the end of the twentieth century, these trends threatened the very purpose of these towns as holiday destinations. The distinctive heritage of the mass seaside holiday in England, was, as a result, often undervalued by the local authorities responsible for these resorts.

With their mixture of Victorian, Edwardian and inter-war architectural styles, Blackpool, Morecambe and Lytham St. Annes boasted a wide range of buildings and amenities created to meet the needs of millions of tourists. However, as Duncan Light and Anya Chapman have argued, seaside heritage (until recently at least) did not align with the 'Authorised Heritage Discourse (AHD)' for a variety of cultural and aesthetic reasons.²³ The term AHD was significantly developed by Laurajane Smith, who argues that grand narratives of Western national and elite class experiences underpin innate cultural value.²⁴ By applying Smith's approach to seaside heritage, Light and Chapman, explain why the built heritage of coastal resorts and its mass culture, were assigned little value by elites. During the post-war era, this antipathy to working-class seaside culture was often shared by the business and political elites of Lancashire's resorts too. Pre-First World War buildings were rarely valued by resort authorities, illustrated by their strong support for developments based on a concept of 'modernisation'. In addition, the cost of maintaining and adapting older buildings often discouraged both local authorities and the private sector from investing public money. As a result, the physical infrastructure of these resorts deteriorated, impacting the demand for domestic seaside holidays. With this physical deterioration, the socio-cultural construction of the English seaside town, that as David Jarratt notes, is framed by the built environment, was also severely diminished.²⁵ In addition, from the 1960s, there was a shift from blue to white-collar employment and a weakening of group and class identities. Tim Gale argues that the

²³ Duncan Light and Anya Chapman, 'The Neglected Heritage of the English Seaside Holiday', *Coastal Studies & Society*, 1.1 (2022), 34-54 (pp. 42-46).

²⁴ Smith, Laurajane., *Uses of Heritage*. (Florence: Taylor & Francis Group, 2006), p.299.

²⁵ David Jarratt, 'The Importance of Built Heritage in the English Seaside Experience', in *Routledge Handbook of the Tourist Experience*, ed. by Richard Sharpley, (London: Routledge, 2021), 481-97 (482).

change in class structure had profound implications for the popularity of traditional entertainment offered at resorts primarily designed to appeal to working-class visitors.²⁶ An example of shifting popular culture was seen in the rapid decline in variety theatre entertainment from the 1960s and 1970s, which particularly impacted seaside resorts. By the 1980s, a contraction in the entertainment industry was evident as failing businesses inhibited further investment, accelerating the decline.²⁷ However, even during this period, there was considerable evidence, not least in Blackpool, that effective marketing and local decision-making could halt this decline. This thesis demonstrates that even during a period of reduced autonomy, local government decisions still have a significant impact and the study of them is essential for understanding the evolution of tourist destinations.

Resort authorities had built expertise in tourism management during the first half of the twentieth century with increasing levels of public intervention. Each town had a considerable level of self-government, with either a county or municipal borough council representing its interests. Map 1.1 shows the local government administrative boundaries in 1969, shortly before reorganisation. These were little changed following the combination of Lytham and St Annes in 1922 and Morecambe and Heysham in 1928.

²⁶ Tim Gale, 'Modernism, Post-Modernism and the Decline of British Seaside Resorts as Long Holiday Destinations: A Case Study of Rhyl, North Wales', *Tourism Geographies*, 7.1 (2005), 86–112 (p. 95).

²⁷ Richard Voase, *Tourism: The Human Perspective* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1995), p. 125.

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Map 1.1 - North Lancashire Local Government Administrative Areas, 1969.²⁸

However, following the local government reorganisation of 1974, the coastal resorts of Grange-over-Sands and Southport were no longer part of the administrative arrangements of Lancashire. Grange became part of Cumbria, and Southport part of Merseyside. Fleetwood, to the north of Blackpool, although also a holiday destination with a municipal borough council, was primarily a fishing town until the 1960s.²⁹ I will, therefore, focus on Lancashire's largest remaining resorts where tourism continued to play a significant role, namely Blackpool, Morecambe (and Heysham), and Lytham St Annes. Focusing on the relationship between local government and tourism in these resorts makes it possible to examine the problems of adapting to societal changes. I also follow an approach that may be tested by others elsewhere. New local authorities took responsibility for each resort from 1974 onwards, as seen in Map 1.2.

²⁸ National Library of Scotland, *View Map: Ordnance Survey, Lancashire. Diagram Showing Administrative Boundaries - Administrative Areas Rev... - Half-Inch to the Mile, England, Wales. Administrative, 2023* <<https://maps.nls.uk/view/241243156>> [accessed 22 May 2023].

²⁹ Luke Brown, *Cod Wars to Food Banks: How a Lancashire Fishing Town is Hanging On* (2020), <<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/feb/21/cod-wars-to-food-banks-how-fleetwood-lancashire-fishing-town-is-hanging-on>> [accessed 14 March 2023].

Map of Lancashire removed for copyright reasons. Copyright holder is Wikimedia Commons.

Map 1.2 - Lancashire County Council and districts since 1974. Since 1998, Blackpool (3) and Blackburn and Darwen (13) have had unitary council status.³⁰

Facing common challenges, the local authorities representing Lancashire's these resorts (Lancashire County Council, Lancaster City Council, Blackpool Council, and Fylde Borough Council) have attempted to respond with markedly varying levels of success to a rapidly changing tourism market. Although separated by only a few miles, the diversity of outcomes across these resorts is striking and worthy of study. While not the only

³⁰ Wikimedia Commons, *Lancashire UK District Map, English: Numbered Districts of Lancashire County* (2020), <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Lancashire_numbered_districts.svg> [accessed 22 May 2023].

factor responsible for these outcomes, the findings in this thesis demonstrate the long-term consequences of local government policymaking on resort towns. The comparative study of different seaside towns within the same geographical area (Lancashire) offers an original contribution by highlighting how varied local government decisions can lead to divergent developmental paths, even among nearby locations facing similar external pressures.

In the late nineteenth century, Blackpool became one of the most popular seaside resorts in the UK, attracting millions of visitors each year. Unlike the other resorts under consideration, it maintained its own local authority after 1974. In addition, further independence was obtained after Blackpool was granted a unitary authority in 1998. Still, despite showing greater levels of resilience than other resorts, by the mid-1990s, Blackpool Council faced many of the problems that other resorts had twenty years earlier. Blackpool still maintained a large tourist business, but one facing an increasing range of social, economic, and environmental problems.³¹ In 1993, for example, the European Court ruled that all of Blackpool's beaches had unacceptable levels of coliform bacteria.³² Despite these challenges, local government action has recently enabled Blackpool's tourism industry to grow strongly. Overall, the work of Blackpool Council has been crucial for the success of tourism in the town and ensured that Blackpool remains a significant tourist destination in the UK, attracting millions of visitors each year and boosting the local economy.

In contrast, while Morecambe also became a popular seaside resort in the late nineteenth century, it experienced a decline in tourist numbers earlier and to a greater extent than Blackpool. This decline was strongly connected to its post-1974 local government arrangement, which deprived the resort of a local authority that could focus on its tourist industry. A rapid decline in visitors and a loss of tourist attractions was compounded by negative media coverage. Morecambe's appeal to visitors fell rapidly, with the town described by Roger Bingham in the late 1980s as 'derelict' and 'dreary'.³³ As a result of this dereliction, the town became increasingly unappealing to potential

³¹ Allan Brodie and Matthew Whitfield, *Blackpool's Seaside Heritage* (Swindon: English Heritage, 2014), p. 117.

³² Walton, *The British Seaside*, p. 138.

³³ Roger Bingham, *Lost Resort? The Flow and Ebb of Morecambe* (Milnthorpe: Cicerone Press, 1990), p. 309.

visitors and has struggled to remain a significant tourist destination. Despite the scale of these challenges, the response from Lancaster City Council, especially from the 1970s to the 1990s, helped to accelerate the decline of Morecambe's tourist industry. Ineffective decision-making and political infighting undermined regeneration strategies. The role of Lancaster City Council has been crucial in the decline of tourism in Morecambe.

Lytham and St Annes-on-Sea provided quieter alternatives to Blackpool and Morecambe for more affluent tourists. In contrast to Morecambe and Blackpool, Lytham St Annes (as it became known in 1922) has remained prosperous and attractive to older visitors. Lytham St Annes has maintained its social cachet with a more regulated infrastructure and an internationally famous golf course. As Niall Finneran argues, golf was a leisure pursuit of the middle and upper classes, and Royal Lytham St Annes exemplifies this with its exclusivity.³⁴ The resort's marketing has traditionally emphasised its distinctiveness from and social superiority to its neighbours. As a result, unlike Morecambe and Heysham Council, Lytham St Annes Council made little direct attempt to compete with the attractions of Blackpool. Although not experiencing the same levels of social deprivation, after 1974, Fylde Borough Council struggled to adapt Lytham St Annes to appeal to new generations of tourists, as its attractions were suited to older, returning visitors. In recent years, however, the local authority has successfully supported various initiatives to increase the resort's appeal. Fylde Borough Council has been working on regeneration projects in Lytham St Annes to enhance the visitor experience and promote economic growth.

In this thesis, I focus on the attempts by Lancashire's local authorities to adapt their resorts to changes in British society and culture. Through reviewing the approaches of these councils, evidence of the role of local authority agency strongly emerges. Local government intervention was especially significant in providing entertainment and tourist amenities. Although macro factors such as global economic restricting were also at play, the relative significance of local factors and their relationship to these wider changes in explaining resort decline is established by isolating place-specific factors. I also highlight the considerable challenges for resort planners, managers, developers,

³⁴ Niall Finneran, 'Beside the Seaside. The Archaeology of the Twentieth-Century English Seaside Holiday Experience: A Phenomenological Context,' *International Journal of Historical Archaeology*, 21.3 (2017) pp. 553-57 (p. 542).

and marketers.³⁵ Anthony Leonard's study of Bexhill-on-Sea in Sussex concludes that places, like people, have personalities, which play a role in people clustering together. He highlights that resort destinations are not only the victims of global forces but are also determined by the impact of local politics and their decision-making. A case-study approach will also demonstrate why some resorts have succeeded and others have failed when subject to the same exogenous forces.³⁶ I follow this approach by analysing how the local authorities of Morecambe and Heysham, Blackpool, and Lytham St Annes adapted very differently to similar social, cultural, and political challenges in the late twentieth century. Overall, local authority decisions have significantly shaped the history of these resorts.

Although there have been subsequent achievements, the legacy of decline during the late twentieth century has yet to be overcome. Lytham St Annes, under the stewardship of Fylde Borough Council, also saw the loss of key attractions between the 1970s and 1990s, but these did not bring into question its future as a tourist destination. A mixture of smaller-scale entertainment options, supported by local government investment and higher-quality hotels, has provided an effective platform for expansion in the last two decades. In Blackpool, most of the main tourist attractions have come under the control of a dynamic unitary local authority. As a result, the local authority saved vital attractions and formed long-term partnerships with the private sector. The key lesson, acknowledged in the current regeneration plans of all three resorts, is that collaboration and understanding between private enterprises and local government can have a lasting impact on the success of tourist attractions. Strategic, well-considered plans that take into account the long-term viability, public interest and competitive landscape can set the stage for mutual success. These lessons could serve as valuable case studies for communities and local authorities looking to engage in similar endeavours.

³⁵ Sheela Agarwal, 'Relational Spatiality and Resort Restructuring,' *Annals of Tourism Research*, vol. 39, no. 1, 2012, pp. 134–54 (p. 151).

³⁶ Leonard, pp. 107-26.

1.2 Historiography and Literature Review

Although there has been considerable research in recent years into English seaside resorts, few researchers have located their studies on the intersection of regional, tourism and local government histories. Scholars have separately studied the regional history of Lancashire, the history of English local government, and the development of English seaside resorts. However, the critical inter-relationship between these three has yet to be the focus of analysis. By outlining these historiographies, it is possible to trace out the key elements of each debate and highlight the links between them that inform the rationale for this thesis.

1.2.1 Regional Histories of Lancashire's Seaside Resorts

Most research on Lancashire's resorts has focused on a specific location or aspect of the tourist industry, such as Martin Easdown's work on leisure piers.³⁷ Surprisingly few scholars have taken a comparative approach to studying Lancashire's seaside resorts. In addition, a range of transport histories relating to Lancashire's railways and public transport systems have also been produced, although their focus is only occasionally on the tourist industry.³⁸ Sydney Moorehouse made an early attempt to provide a comparative approach in *Holiday Lancashire*, published at the height of the popularity of Lancashire's resorts.³⁹ Research related to specific resorts dominates the recent regional history of Lancashire tourism, with most academic research focussed on Blackpool.

John Walton dominated the academic study of Blackpool from the 1970s to the early 2000s. Walton has examined Blackpool's cultural and social significance, examining how the resort has been represented in literature, film, and other media. His work also covers the role of Blackpool in the development of British popular culture, including the rise of seaside entertainment such as music halls, variety shows, and amusement parks. His wider contribution will be discussed later, but the central focus in his earlier work was Blackpool. In *The Blackpool Landlady: A Social History*, Walton developed a detailed

³⁷ Easdown, p. 5.

³⁸ For example, see Mike Rhodes, *Municipal Transport in Lancashire Since 1974* (Stroud: Amberley Publishing, 2021).

³⁹ Sydney Moorhouse, *Holiday Lancashire* (London: Robert Hale Limited, 1955).

history of the role of holiday accommodation providers in the resort and helped establish the legitimacy of serious academic research in this area.⁴⁰ Walton's investigation of the resort culminated in *Blackpool*, encompassing its emergence as the leading national resort and its adaptation to changing patterns of holidaymaking.⁴¹ In this thesis, I will analyse how Blackpool has continued to do this in the twenty-five years since Walton's book appeared.

Allan Brodie and Matthew Whitfield provide a critical account of Blackpool's recent history in the English Heritage-sponsored *Blackpool's Seaside Heritage*.⁴² In particular, the role of Blackpool Council in recent decades is dealt with in greater depth by these authors. Vanessa Toulmin's books covering the Winter Gardens, Blackpool Illuminations and Blackpool Pleasure Beach offer more analysis of these attractions while at the same time being funded by Blackpool Council for tourism promotion in the resort. In addition, many local histories have been written about Blackpool, often extensively illustrated, and the general tone in these publications is usually celebratory and nostalgic. Typical of this genre of local histories are the recent publications of Allan Wood and Chris Bottomley, *The A-Z of Blackpool and Lost Blackpool*.⁴³ Although providing valuable insights into each location's past, these are usually not written to give a developed analysis of their resort's history. Both Blackpool Council and English Heritage have also commissioned other studies of Blackpool. Since the 1990s, other scholars have examined essential aspects of Blackpool's social, cultural, and economic life, but they have yet to make local government their primary focus.

The most influential history of Morecambe and Heysham is Roger Bingham's *Lost Resort*, published in 1990. Despite the limitations of Bingham's study, other scholars and journalists who have written about Morecambe's history have used his work as their primary reference point. Bingham identifies external factors that account for Morecambe's decline as a tourist destination. The growth of package holidays, changing working patterns and a cold climate are among the broader factors that explain the loss

⁴⁰ John K Walton, *The Blackpool Landlady: A Social History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1978).

⁴¹ John K. Walton, *Blackpool, Town and City Histories* (Keele: Keele University Press, 1998).

⁴² Allan Brodie and Matthew Whitfield, *Blackpool's Seaside Heritage* (Swindon: English Heritage, 2014).

⁴³ See Allan W Wood and Chris Bottomley, *A-Z of Blackpool* (Stroud: Amberley, 2018), Chris Bottomley and Allan W Wood, *Lost Blackpool* (Stroud: Amberley, 2019) and *Blackpool in 50 Buildings* (Stroud: Amberley, 2022).

of Morecambe's tourist market between the 1960s and 1980s. Bingham suggests an absence of local agency as he argues that 'a town is no more than a person in control of its destiny.'⁴⁴ By taking this determinist view, he implicitly absolves local decision-makers from primary responsibility, instead highlighting wider societal changes. However, while these factors were important, they were also present in other resorts, such as Blackpool, which did not experience a loss of tourism to the same extent or at the same time. In contrast to Bingham, I will argue that local factors explain the timing, scale, and size of Morecambe's decline.

David Jarratt's recent research has also explored important aspects of the history of Morecambe as a seaside resort. Proposing a 'seasideness' model, he argues that people continue to visit Morecambe primarily because of the relationship to its coastal location and a constructed socio-cultural heritage.⁴⁵ In contrast to Bingham, in examining the resort's history, Jarratt reveals that many of the acutest challenges were resort specific and related to Morecambe's unusually turbulent history.⁴⁶ More generally, his conclusions relate to the importance of both the natural and built environment to a distinctive 'sense of place' which can be found in traditional English resorts. Crucially, he argues that this is an essential element of visitor appeal and should be used to inform destination marketing. Until the 1950s, the unique coastal location of Morecambe and Heysham was enhanced and celebrated by public and private development. In contrast, later developers neglected this seaside heritage to the detriment of the resort and its attractiveness to visitors. Only in recent years have Lancaster City Council planners realised that the failure to develop a specific Morecambe approach significantly undermined attempts to regenerate the resort in the late twentieth century.

As with Blackpool, several illustrated local history publications have been produced regarding the history of Morecambe, including the work of local journalist Terry Potter.⁴⁷ This brief survey has been supplemented by an in-depth study of the Midland

⁴⁴ Bingham, p. 310.

⁴⁵ David Jarratt, 'A Socio-Cultural Analysis of the Traditional Seaside Resort and Its Contemporary Meaning to Tourists with Specific Reference to Morecambe, U.K.' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Central Lancashire, 2013), p. iii.

⁴⁶ David Jarratt, 'The Development and Decline of Morecambe in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries: A Resort Caught in the Tide', *Journal of Tourism History*, 11.3 (2019), 263-83 (p.263).

⁴⁷ Terry Potter, *Magnificent Morecambe* (Preston: Carnegie Press, 1989).

Hotel by Barry Guise and Pam Brook.⁴⁸ A history of the Super Swimming Stadium by Barry Guise and Lesley Guise followed this study.⁴⁹ In addition, unpublished MA History dissertations have also been produced, primarily at Lancaster University, on the development of Morecambe. These include Paul Nelson's study of pre-1974 Morecambe, where he argues that Morecambe was not in decline before 1974 and adapted to meet visitors' requirements.⁵⁰ Also, Sonya Dryden's study of Morecambe following the 1919 local election saw the emergence of a 'progressive' coalition, who won council seats in the so-called 'new blood' election, with these new councillors making the most of their resources and forging links with private enterprises to enact a civic vision for the town.⁵¹ As I argue in this thesis, these successful interventions contrast with the failure of local government following the 1974 reorganisation.

Less has been written about the history of Lytham St Annes than either Blackpool or Morecambe. Kath Brown and Kathleen Eyre have produced short local accounts of Lytham St Annes alongside photographic publications.⁵² Both histories emphasise the determination of leaders in Lytham St Annes to maintain the resort's exclusivity in relation to neighbouring Blackpool. The role of the St-Annes-on-Sea Land and Building Company dominates the history of St Annes, written by company chairman Gabriel Harrison in 1971, *Rage of Sand: The Story of the Men Who Built Their Own Seaside Town*.⁵³ In his later chapters, there is also a sense that while the resort will continue, traditional features of the seaside holiday will inevitably decline. The early development of St Annes is also the key focus for Peter Shakeshaft in *St Anne's on the Sea*.⁵⁴ Shakeshaft's discussion of post-Second World War developments is minimal compared to that of the early development of the resort and the recent history of St Annes

⁴⁸ Barry Guise and Pam Brook, *The Midland Hotel: Morecambe's White Hope*, 2nd ed (Lancaster: Palatine Books, 2008).

⁴⁹ Barry Guise and Lesley Guise, *In the Swim, Morecambe's Super Swimming Stadium* (Thame: Broadlands Press, 2022).

⁵⁰ Paul Nelson and Lancaster University, *A Paradox of Prosperity? Morecambe in the Post-War Era* (Unpublished MA Dissertation: Lancaster University, 2004).

⁵¹ Sonya Dryden, 'The New Blood Election of 1919 and Morecambe between the Wars' (unpublished master's dissertation, Lancaster University, 2016).

⁵² Kath Brown, *Lytham and St Annes: The Reluctant Resorts* (Preston: Lancashire County Books, 1992).

⁵³ Gabriel Harrison, *Rage of Sand: The Story of the Men Who Built Their Own Seaside Town*. (London: Benn, 1971).

⁵⁴ Peter Shakeshaft, *St Anne's on the Sea: A History* (Lancaster: Carnegie, 2008). Pages 3-284 cover the period before 1922, whereas the years 1922-2007 are dealt with in just fifteen pages.

neglected. I will fill this gap by including Lytham St Annes alongside Blackpool and Morecambe.

1.2.2 Histories of English Local Government

Just as the nature and extent of decline dominated the historiography of English seaside resorts in the late twentieth century, a similar discussion emerged amongst scholars studying English local government. Allan Cochrane, for example, argues that there has been a significant decline in the role of local authorities over the last thirty years, despite elements of continuity.⁵⁵ This declinist view is underpinned by the argument that local government autonomy has been eroded with increased centralisation of services and attempts at 'modernisation' to deal with perceived inefficiency and corruption in local government.⁵⁶ Especially after the 1974 reorganisation, as Colin Copus argues, local government boundaries were increasingly constructed around population quotas rather than geographic or community considerations.⁵⁷ The primary rationale for reform was increased efficiency rather than local democracy. These reorganisations have led, in many instances, to artificial boundaries, which created a disconnection between the communities of smaller seaside towns and the local authorities which represented them. The creation of Lancaster City Council in 1974 is a prime example of artificial construction, as two towns with quite different histories and economies were fused. The merger, I argue, has been to the detriment of Morecambe as a seaside resort. Although this new authority seemed to make geographic sense to central government planners, it failed to serve the interests of Morecambe and Heysham as the resort constituted only one-third of the new City Council.⁵⁸ Despite a loss of autonomy, decisions made at local government level were still critical to the future of seaside resorts. Peter John has, for example, warned against declinist thinking leading to sweeping generalisations about

⁵⁵ Allan Cochrane in Kevin Ward, et al. 'Whatever Happened to Local Government? A Review Symposium.' *Regional Studies, Regional Science*, 2.1 (2015), 435–57.

⁵⁶ J.A. Chandler, *Explaining Local Government: Local Government in Britain since 1800*. Manchester University Press, 2007 and David Wilson and Chris Game, *Local Government in the United Kingdom*, 5th edn (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 24.

⁵⁷ Colin Copus, 'The Current State of English Local Government: Will Structure Solve All Problems.' *Political Insight*, 9.2 (2018), 29-31.

local government.⁵⁹ In this thesis, I will highlight that the recent experiences across Lancashire's resorts demonstrate the continued importance of local government decision-making.

The link between local government and seaside tourism was cemented in the late nineteenth century following the Local Government Acts of 1888 and 1894, which created a framework that would be essentially unchanged until the 1970s.⁶⁰ Following the creation of county and municipal boroughs, seaside amenities came under public control during the twentieth century as local councils intervened to subsidise or run them directly.⁶¹ Richard Roberts highlights in his study of Bournemouth before the First World War that the initiatives of the local authority were parochial responses to local conditions.⁶² Local authorities could invest in the infrastructure of seaside resorts and promote them as they wished to a significant degree. Dominated by business interests, under the banner of the Conservative Party, this 'municipal conservatism' in seaside resorts was driven by the desire to attract more tourists and regulate mass tourism. In this thesis, I will analyse how these interventions helped transform Lancashire's seaside towns into popular tourist destinations. Municipal conservatism laid the basis for local government working with private enterprises. As a result, Lancashire's resorts grew, especially before the Second World War and established these resorts' 'golden age'.⁶³ The actions of local government were supported during the interwar period by the growth of paid holidays for those in work. In addition, an effective rail network helped facilitate this expansion. However, the growth rate was strongest when local government invested in new tourist facilities, such as in Blackpool and Morecambe.

An extended period of administrative stability ended with the Local Government Act of 1972, implemented in 1974. Reflecting on the subsequent history of local government in England, John Stewart has argued that the almost continuous changes of the next

⁵⁹ Peter John and others. 'Whatever Happened to Local Government? A Review Symposium' *Regional Studies, Regional Science*, 2.1 (2015), 435–57 (pp. 441-43).

⁶⁰ P. W. Jackson, *Local Government*, 3rd ed (London: Butterworth, 1976), pp. 12–15.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 169.

⁶² Richard Roberts, 'The Corporation as impresario: the municipal provision of entertainment in Victorian and Edwardian Bournemouth', in *Leisure in Britain 1780-1939*, ed. by John K. Walton and James Walvin (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1983), pp. 138-57.

⁶³ John Urry and Jonas Larsen, *The Tourist Gaze*, 3rd edn (London: SAGE, 2011), p. 46.

forty years created an atmosphere of uncertainty and instability.⁶⁴ For seaside resorts, the Act's primary impact was the creation of a two-tier system of local government consisting of county and district councils. This new structure replaced the previous system of county boroughs, municipal boroughs, and urban and rural districts. The new system would theoretically provide a more coordinated and efficient approach to local government, with responsibilities shared between the two tiers.⁶⁵ However, the atmosphere of instability was made worse in authorities such as Lancaster City Council, as the authority fragmented between those councillors representing Morecambe wards and those from Lancaster. For larger seaside towns, this reorganisation meant demoting their council to district status. In addition, the 1972 Local Government Act significantly reduced the number of authorities in England's structure, so smaller resort authorities were usually amalgamated into larger non-tourist areas to meet a minimum population target. When seaside towns were amalgamated with non-tourist areas, it weakened the tourism management in the resort.

As the decline in UK seaside accelerated in the mid-1970s, these newly created local authorities faced decisions about how best to invest in and market their resorts. Ageing tourist infrastructure in seaside resorts needed significant investment and innovative marketing strategies, but these authorities also had to address issues and demands in areas not traditionally associated with tourism. In addition, there was a gradual reduction in the ability of local government to fund capital projects from the 1970s due to increased restrictions by central government.⁶⁶ The growing complexities of local government funding and the range of organisations involved provided significant obstacles to regeneration. With further structural reform in the early 1990s following a report by the Banham Commission, local government administration became more fragmented. However, the Banham Review also opened opportunities for new unitary authorities like Blackpool, as outlined by John Nickson.⁶⁷ Although lacking the powers of

⁶⁴ John Stewart, 'An Era of Continuing Change: Reflections on Local Government in England 1974–2014', *Local Government Studies*, 40.6 (2014), 835–50.

⁶⁵ Tony Byrne, *Local Government in Britain: Everyone's Guide to How It All Works*, 2nd ed (London: Penguin, 2000), pp. 46-8.

⁶⁶ Voase, p. 39.

⁶⁷ John Nickson, *Our Common Good: If the State Provides Less, Who Will Provide More?* (London: Biteback Publishing Ltd, 2017), pp. 226-55.

the old county borough, this unitary model has given a level of focus and independence that has significantly aided decision-making and planning in the resort.

The 1997 election, led to the creation of regional development agencies (RDAs) as part of Labour's 'new regionalism' agenda. Lancashire was part of the Northwest Regional Development Agency, and this led to a gradual absorption of the regional tourist boards. RDAs across England first funded the functions of the boards and later progressively assumed their roles. RDAs made decision-making more complex, creating another level of bureaucracy for local authorities. Also, as Tim Coles and others argue, a well-understood structure of public sector support for tourism was significantly disrupted by the election of a new coalition government. The Conservative-led administration abolished the RDAs in 2012, believing they represented 'big government' and were poor value for taxpayers' money.⁶⁸ Although this transferred strategic authority back to the county level, these rapid reforms had destabilising effects. New localism, sub-regional bodies, and a desire in central government to reduce public contributions to a minimum have introduced complexity and uncertainty to the system of tourism development.⁶⁹ Over the last few years, a loosely defined 'levelling up' strategy has emerged concerning local government and devolution. It is too early to say if the 'levelling up' strategy will be more effective or longer lasting than previous approaches by central government. A recent paper by Matthew Bristow and others on the subject suggests that for levelling up to be successfully implemented, it should be understood to incorporate local histories, traditions and a sense of place.⁷⁰ In support of the critique, I argue that the past disruptive churn of institutions and strategies has meant that central government policies, although well-intentioned, have often been underfunded, inconsistent and inadequately tailored to the needs of particular coastal resorts.

⁶⁸ Tim Coles, Claire Dinan, and Fiona Catherine Hutchison, 'Tourism and the Public Sector in England since 2010: A Disorderly Transition?', *Current Issues in Tourism*, 17.3 (2014), 247–79 (p. 251).

⁶⁹ Coles, Dinan, and Hutchison, p. 247.

⁷⁰ Matthew Bristow and others, *'Creative Repurposing' and Levelling Up: History, Heritage and Urban Renewal, History and Policy* (2023), <<https://www.historyandpolicy.org/policy-papers/papers/creative-repurposing-and-levelling-up-history-heritage-and-urban-renewal>> [accessed 28 February 2023].

1.2.3 The Dynamics and Development of English Seaside Resorts

The historiography of the extent and nature of resort decline in the late twentieth century has involved scholars from various disciplines. Significant similarities and connections exist between the 'declinist' view of seaside resorts and those of local government. The Tourist Area Life Cycle was developed by Richard Butler in 1980 as a model to explain the stagnation and decline of British seaside resorts. Over the last forty years, this framework and its applications and modifications have formed a basis for understanding seaside resorts and their development. It has proven to be one of the most influential models in shaping the investigation of tourism development. Butler believes that further studies and the data on which they are based have substantiated his general arguments.⁷¹ His model has been applied to a wide range of case studies worldwide. Butler has modified the original model, and many scholars have questioned its validity. However, the TALC has continued to inform the debate on the past and future of tourist destinations.⁷² Fig 1.1 shows Butler's modified version of the TALC from 2006. The exploration stage is characterised by small numbers of tourists, with few visitor facilities. Facilities will begin to be provided at the involvement stage. The development stage is a period with a well-defined tourist market area shaped by advertising. As the consolidation stage is entered, although the total number of visitors continues to increase, the growth rate will slow. When a resort enters the stagnation stage, the number of visitors will have peaked. Butler argues that imported artificial attractions will have superseded natural and genuine cultural attractions at this point. In the decline stage, the area will no longer be able to compete with newer destinations. The rate of decline will vary both in time and scale depending on local factors. Alternatively, a resort may achieve rejuvenation, although Butler argues that this stage will not be founded on nostalgia and the past of a resort but a complete change of the attractions on which tourism is based.

⁷¹ Richard W. Butler, 'The Concept of a Tourist Area Cycle of Evolution: Implications for Management of Resources' in *The Tourism Area Life Cycle. Vol. 1: Applications and Modifications*, ed. by Richard W. Butler, Aspects of Tourism, 28 (Clevedon: Channel View, 2006), p. 10.

⁷² Richard M. Lagiewski, 'The Application of the TALC Model: A Literature Survey in *The Tourism Area Life Cycle Vol.1: Applications and Modifications*, ed by Richard W, Aspects of Tourism (Clevedon: Channel View, 2006), Butler, pp. 29–38.

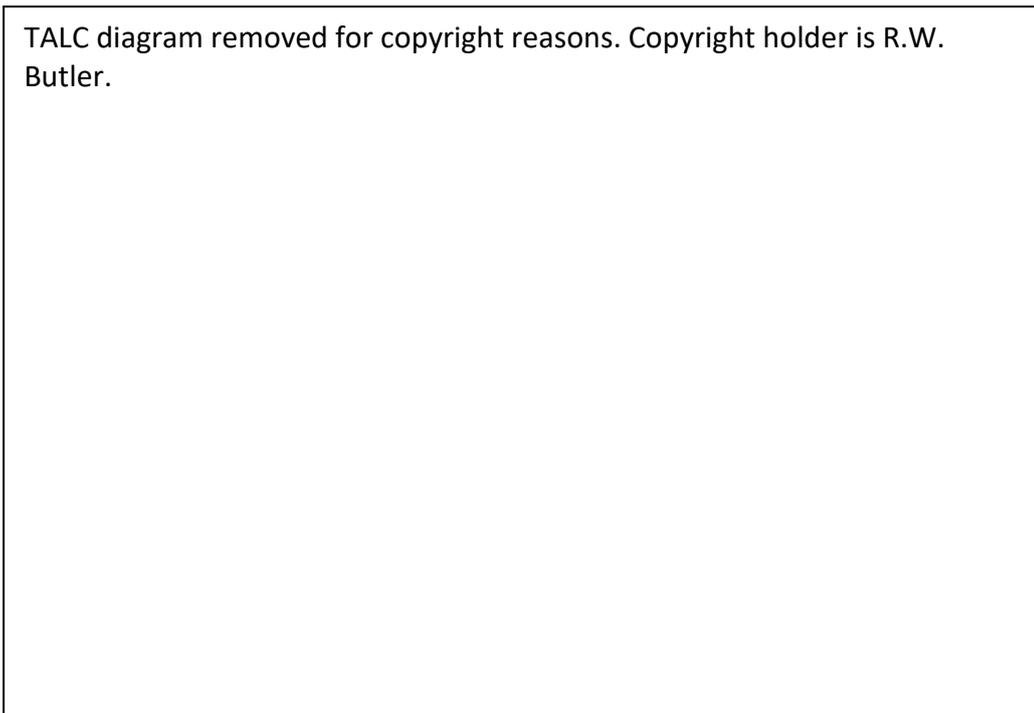


Fig 1.1 – R.W. Butler’s hypothetical evolution of a tourist area.⁷³

It is important to note that Butler did not argue that all destinations go through all these stages. Destinations may experience decline and then reinvent themselves to attract new tourists. The TALC can be a valuable tool for understanding the evolution of tourist destinations, but it should not be seen as a universal model that applies to every destination. In relation to Butler’s model, Lancashire’s seaside resorts had entered the stagnation phase by the post-war period as the peak number of visitors was reached. The decline stage could be seen from the 1970s as these resorts could not compete with newer attractions and faced a spatially and numerically declining market.⁷⁴ However, this could also be the most uncertain period, as Butler conceded that a range of factors could influence the rate of decline or even reverse it entirely. Curve A represents a resort, which with minor modifications, continues to enjoy renewed growth. At the other extreme, Curve E would mean the intervention of war, disease or other catastrophic events. (Butler gives the example of Northern Ireland after 1969.)⁷⁵ Although Butler’s model offers flexibility, it is also highly adaptable – which can be a

⁷³ Butler, p. 5.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 7.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 10.

weakness as much as a strength. Using the TALC framework, Richard Voase argues that across the life cycle of the British seaside resort, two factors, in particular, stand out: the role of private capital in providing access in the form of railway connections and the role of local governments, which either directly created the critical infrastructure of the destinations, or facilitated their creation by third parties.⁷⁶ For this reason, a close examination of local government decision-making is required.

Since it was proposed in 1980, the TALC has been criticised for being overly deterministic, with Walton leading the challenge to Butler's model. Instead, Walton emphasises the resilience of British seaside resorts, with Blackpool a primary example.⁷⁷ The TALC, he claimed, is unduly schematic and mechanistic, even in more sophisticated later versions. Walton argues that historians should try to explain the British seaside's survival instead of looking at the decline.⁷⁸ His work has challenged the assumption of inevitable decline, which raised interesting questions about why some resorts have continued to appeal to tourists. More recently, Martin Farr has been critical of deterministic approaches to seaside resorts, saying that even at its most refined, it is merely structured pessimism. He argues that representations and impressions of the seaside contributed to a narrative of decline because, like declinism, 'it was a self-replicating projection, a cognitive bias, and counter-developmental.'⁷⁹ Unlike Morecambe and Heysham, it appears that Blackpool and, to a lesser extent, Lytham St Annes continued to maintain a high degree of popularity beyond the traditional 'golden age' period. The growth of overseas holidays before the 1980s can be easily overstated as overseas travel throughout the immediate post-Second World War era did not significantly impact English seaside resorts.⁸⁰ John Hassan has also supported the case for Blackpool's resilience. He contrasts the ambition of the resort and its local authority with that of Morecambe.⁸¹ Until recently, with the proposed Eden Project North (renamed Eden Project Morecambe), Lancaster City Council's regeneration projects have been much more modest in scale than those of Blackpool Council.

⁷⁶ Voase, p. 39.

⁷⁷ Walton, *The British Seaside*, p. 198.:

⁷⁸ Walton, 'Histories of Tourism,' p. 119.

⁷⁹ Martin Farr, 'Decline Beside the Seaside: British Seaside Resorts and Declinism', in *Mass Tourism in a Small World*, ed. by David Harrison and Richard Sharpley (Croydon: CPI Group UK (Ltd), 2017), p. 106.

⁸⁰ Demeritadi, p. 72.

⁸¹ Hassan, p. 257.

Although the TALC has been referenced in most significant studies of seaside resorts, other scholars have taken various approaches in explaining the growth and apparent decline of the English seaside resort. Julian Demetriadi's survey of the period before 1974 supports the idea that a 'golden age' existed in these resorts in the immediate post-war period. However, he argues that this apparent success also gave some local authorities an excuse for inactivity towards their holiday trades.⁸² John Walton has also highlighted the significant level of resilience these resorts showed as they adapted to change during the twentieth century.⁸³ Although acknowledging the declining autonomy of local authorities, he argues that their inability to cope with the rapidly evolving tastes of youth culture is more significant. Hassan's work has analysed the impact of the coastal environment on resorts in England and Wales, where he explains that resorts once famed for their health-giving properties became associated with bathing waters contaminated with sewage. He also argues that the national press's tendency to continually revisit seaside towns like Morecambe and their problems has caused further reputational damage to the resort.⁸⁴ Fred Gray's central argument is that distinctive architecture helps define the seaside resort as an arena for leisure.⁸⁵ Ferry has also written about the development of seaside buildings and the elements that made them popular with a mass tourist market.⁸⁶ With a lack of investment in this seaside infrastructure in the late twentieth century, Lancashire's resorts came to seem very dated. The neglect of heritage by local authorities has been a significant factor in the decline of seaside tourism in Lancashire since the 1970s.

Sociologists have also explained the decline of English seaside resorts by focusing on the development of tourist cultures, with the work of John Urry being the most significant. According to Urry, tourists' experiences are conditioned by the desire to gaze upon different and unusual objects, landscapes, and other sights (the 'tourist gaze').⁸⁷ Urry argues that the decline of English seaside resorts is as much a cultural phenomenon

⁸² Julian Demetriadi, 'The Golden Years, 1950-1974', in *The Rise and Fall of British Coastal Resorts: Cultural and Economic Perspectives* (Tourism, Leisure and Recreation Series), ed. by Gareth Shaw and Allan Williams (London: Pinter, 1997), pp. 51-2.

⁸³ Walton, *The British Seaside*, p. 198.

⁸⁴ Hassan, p.257.

⁸⁵ Fred Gray, *Designing the Seaside, Architecture, Society and Nature* (London: Reaktion Books, 2006). P.7.

⁸⁶ Ferry, pp.101-11.

⁸⁷ Urry and Larsen, p.4.

as one of infrastructure. He accepted that by the 1990s, traditional seaside resorts in Britain appeared unattractive and needed better infrastructure. However, the most crucial reason for the decline of resorts was that they were no longer fashionable and did not signify good taste. In particular, the middle classes of Britain had rejected these 'tasteless' resorts and adopted a separate set of values and practices.⁸⁸ Building on the work of Urry, Jarratt further developed our understanding of the tourist's sense of place, with his focus being present-day Morecambe. He argues that the enduring cross-generational appeal of the twenty-first-century resort is based on the specific qualities of the English seaside, with its beach and shoreline.⁸⁹ However, as noted by Howard Hughes, despite still being enjoyed by millions of visitors, popular seaside entertainment and leisure culture have been under-researched areas.⁹⁰ In the three resorts under consideration, the challenge for local authorities was to adapt to these cultural shifts and adequately support the provision of their entertainment offer. However, an approach to regeneration that saw resorts as simply entertainment centres that happened to be by the sea would likely fail.

Other scholars who have explained the decline of English resorts from a social and economic perspective include Chris Cooper, Christina Beatty, and Stephen Fothergill. As with other scholars, the most cited reason for the initial decline in tourism at English seaside resorts is the development of competition from overseas. The fall in visitor numbers is also attributed to a general deterioration of the quality of the domestic product. Cooper argues that in the late twentieth century, a fall in demand for seaside tourism was due to a long-term lack of investment exacerbated by increased unemployment and changes in transport usage.⁹¹ Over the last fifteen years, Christina Beatty and Stephen Fothergill have charted the economic fortunes of seaside resorts showing the variety and complexity across English resorts.⁹² Sheela Agarwal has looked

⁸⁸ John Urry, 'Cultural Change and the Seaside Resort', in *The Rise and Fall of British Coastal Resorts: Cultural and Economic Perspectives* (Tourism, Leisure, and Recreation Series), ed. by Gareth Shaw and Allan Williams (London: Pinter, 1997), pp. 102-13.

⁸⁹ David Jarratt and Sean Gammon, "'We Had the Most Wonderful Times': Seaside Nostalgia at a British Resort" *Tourism Recreation Research* 41.2 (2016), 123-33, (p. 129).

⁹⁰ Howard L. Hughes and Danielle Allen, 'Entertainment and Its Significance in the Holiday Experience at UK Seaside Resorts', *Tourism Recreation Research*, 33.2 (2008), 131-41 (p. 131).

⁹¹ Cooper, pp. 79-101.

⁹² Christina Beatty and Stephen Fothergill, 'Economic Change and the Labour Market in Britain's Seaside Towns' *Regional Studies* 38.5 (2004), 459-78 (pp. 476-78).

at both global and local factors conducive to coastal resort change in her studies of Torbay and recognised that it was not helpful to look at national and international forces of social and economic change alone. Instead, thorough investigations focusing on small-scale, sub-national localities were also necessary to evaluate specific ground changes.⁹³ Accordingly, Agarwal's conclusions support the case-study approach taken in this thesis to understand local factors and geographical specificity within a wider context. By illuminating the intersection between the history of Lancashire's resorts and developments in local government from the 1970s onwards, I will offer insights into the problems resorts face in adapting to cultural changes and resort regeneration. A local focus situates the study in specific social and geographical contexts. In this thesis, I will argue that due to the significance of local decision-making, understanding place-specific outcomes requires understanding local-level changes. As a result, this thesis offers a significant contribution to knowledge by blending historical analysis with policy evaluation and by providing an analysis of the role of local governance in the development of tourism. This approach not only adds to the academic literature but can also serve as a resource for policymakers and local authorities involved in the planning and regeneration of seaside resorts and similar localities.

1.3 Research Methodology

As well as adapting Agarwal and Leonard's case-study-based approach, I have used a range of methods in this thesis. Previous studies have not adequately examined the relationship between Lancashire's resorts and local government. By re-examining the archival records of local and regional authorities with new research questions, it is possible to draw new conclusions about Lancashire's seaside resorts. Also, the long-term impact of decisions taken in the 1970s and 1980s can be connected to the success or failure of more recent regeneration plans. This project draws on and combines under-utilised archival material from across Lancashire to support these conclusions. My research primarily includes records from the Lancashire Archives, the Blackpool History Centre, and the local studies collections at Morecambe and St Annes Libraries.

⁹³ Sheela Agarwal, 'Restructuring Seaside Tourism', *Annals of Tourism Research*, 29.1 (2002), 25–55, (p. 40).

Morecambe Library holds an extensive local collection from the 1970s to the early 2000s, and the library at St Annes has a smaller local collection related to architecture, planning, history, and culture. By examining a range of archival evidence, new insights can be offered as to why some resort authorities have enjoyed greater success than others. Key archival materials I have utilised in this thesis include the tourism and regeneration strategy documents and visitor survey evidence created since the 1970s, as these increasingly informed decision-making at a local level. Unfortunately, during the second year of my PhD, while I was undertaking this archival research, the COVID-19 pandemic struck. The pandemic had a significant impact on English seaside resorts, the long-term implications of which are too early to tell. On a personal level, my primary archival research was also severely affected. Lancashire Archives closed in March 2020, reopening on a restricted basis for a few weeks from 21 September 2020, then closing again on 16 October 2020, as Lancashire was part of the Tier 3 restrictions. It then reopened on a restricted basis from 1 April 2021. Full access only became available in March 2022. This meant that archive was closed for almost one year and operating on a restricted access basis for another year. The Blackpool History Centre roof has yet to be repaired, and most archival materials are in deep storage. Limited access to the archive became available again in January 2022 at an alternative location. As a result, I adapted my research to include as many digital resources as were available. Many documents were not available due to lockdowns in 2020 and 2021, and only a limited amount of relevant material was digitally available. I have also had to use the material I collected before the pandemic and fill in gaps as the archives reopened.

The problems created by the pandemic reinforced the more general difficulties in locating primary sources related to aspects of resort history. There is a surprisingly limited information that exists regarding some aspects of resort history, for example, accurate data on visitor volume. This is partly due to the lack of visitor surveys and systematic data collection before the 1970s. As Demetriadi commented on holiday accommodation figures, 'Before 1972 such information was shrouded in mist'.⁹⁴ John Walton and P.R. McGloin have also highlighted the challenge historians face due to the scarcity and complexity of sources documenting the visitors, who were crucial to the

⁹⁴ Demetriadi, p.53.

resorts' economies. In particular there are significant challenges in using those sources which are available, and the reliability of the information provided.⁹⁵ More recently Jarratt has noted the lack of accurate data relating to visitor numbers and accommodation in resorts such as Morecambe.⁹⁶ So that although the collection of data has increased in recent decades, changing methodologies and access to some resources make measuring change over time still problematic.

Despite these issues, I have been able to utilise a substantial range of materials, especially local newspaper archives and those national papers available digitally. These have given valuable insights into how the town's attractions, such as its beaches, promenades, and entertainment venues, were marketed to potential visitors as well as local audiences. However, the reportage of newspapers has shifted over time from generally positive to negative. This change in tone is related to shifts in ownership, towards a more London-centric media. The reporting of events in these resorts has been strongly influenced by this trend, so that the appearance of decline has often been exaggerated. As noted by Eva Mazierska, this antipathy was reinforced by the increasingly southern-based media that shaped negative representations of the North.⁹⁷ In the face of this hostile media, the role of local authority tourism and publicity departments in Lancashire's seaside towns grew in importance. By providing visitors with various activities and attractions, these departments helped to establish the seaside as a desirable holiday destination and its place in the popular imagination. By the end of the twentieth century they offered a stark contrast, to the bleak image of the English seaside resort promoted in much of the UK media. Their publicity materials, developed by local authorities, promoted their town as a holiday destination through various means, such as brochures, posters, and advertisements in newspapers and magazines. By definition, these promotional materials presented a positive version of a resort, but they are fundamental to understanding the self-representation of these resorts.

⁹⁵ John K. Walton and P. McGloin, 'Holiday Resorts and their Visitors: Some Sources for the Local Historian', *Local Historian*, 13.6 (1979), 323-31.

⁹⁶ Jarratt and Gammon, p. 124.

⁹⁷ Ewa Mazierska, 'Introduction: The Changing Fortunes of Blackpool', in *Blackpool in Film and Popular Music*, ed. by Ewa Mazierska (Cham: Springer International Publishing AG, 2020), pp.1-25 (p. 20).

Lancashire Archives has an extensive collection of documents relating to Blackpool, Morecambe, and Lytham St Annes up to the end of the twentieth century. A wide range of council minutes and correspondence from before and after the 1974 reorganisation has shed light on the discussions and decision-making process of Lancashire's local authorities. These local authorities played an essential role in developing and maintaining the infrastructure and amenities necessary to support the tourism industry. Therefore, I have examined local government records to understand the decision-making process, as they had responsibility for planning and approving new developments, such as hotels, guesthouses, and entertainment venues. These authorities also provided and maintained transport links to the resorts, primarily through municipal bus companies from the 1920s. The importance of their relationship with railway companies is also evident in the documentary record. Although researching local government records in a physical archive was relatively straightforward, the digitised documents from the last fifteen years have been more challenging to access due to regular internal reorganisations and poorly maintained websites. Despite these problems, I have charted the development of local authority intervention. As well as administrative records, I have also analysed various documents relating to the history of local political parties. These records have helped to explain the political context in which local authorities made these decisions.

Due to its closure in February 2020, access to the Blackpool History Centre was more limited. However, various documents were examined, including Blackpool Council minutes and tourism strategies, visitor surveys, accommodation studies and official holiday journals. Digitised materials from the [showtownblackpool.co.uk](https://www.showtownblackpool.co.uk) collection have supplemented these records.⁹⁸ Access to the archive has been limited, so I have used a large sample of local newspapers to provide a context for local authority records. This has involved both those available digitally and those Blackpool newspapers available through microfiche, primarily the *Blackpool Gazette* and its predecessors. However, just like any other media outlet, local newspapers have biases and agendas. They may be influenced by the interests of their owners, advertisers, or local political affiliations. As a result, as Stephen Vella argues, newspapers both reflect and often seek to shape public

⁹⁸ Showtown Blackpool, *Collections* (2023), <<https://www.showtownblackpool.co.uk/collections>> [accessed 21 March 2023].

opinion, acting as a mirror and mould of society.⁹⁹ It has therefore, been essential to evaluate the source and context of news, including the political affiliations of newspapers and the influence of advertisers. This was especially true in the promotion of seaside resorts, where traditional advertisements were supplemented by the use of the 'advertorials' to encourage visitors from around the United Kingdom to come to the Lancashire Coast. This could come from both private sources, such as Blackpool Pleasure Beach and directly from local authorities themselves, especially following the Health Resorts and Watering Places Act of 1936 which significantly expanded the scope of municipal advertising.¹⁰⁰ In addition, it should be noted, that the production and consumption of both news and advertising has changed markedly over time, especially in the digital era.

Despite these qualifications, these local newspapers have still been valuable sources of information, especially for understanding the local tourism industry. However, it is also essential to complement their coverage with information from a variety of other sources. For example, the Northwest Film Archive has also provided valuable resources for my thesis. These films reflect contemporary attitudes towards seaside towns and leisure, also illustrating how these destinations were marketed and perceived by the public. I have also examined other local history records, including the Elizabeth Roberts' Working Class Oral History Archive (Barrow, Lancaster, and Preston). This archive is an important source for the history of working-class life in northwest England.¹⁰¹ In addition, I have also consulted other online archives, such as the Recording Morecambe Bay project.¹⁰² These oral history narratives have supplemented my research and allowed a link between individual narratives and the wider cultural and historical context.

I have assessed these local records within the broader context of societal changes by examining other digital resources, especially during the restrictions imposed

⁹⁹ Stephen Vella, 'Newspapers', in *Reading Primary Sources: The Interpretation of Texts from Nineteenth and Twentieth Century History*, ed. by Miriam Dobson and Benjamin Ziemann (London: Routledge, 2009), pp.192-208 (p.205).

¹⁰⁰ *Health Resorts and Watering Places Act, 1936* (26 Geo 5 & 1 Edw 8, c 48) (London: HMSO) pp. 1-2.

¹⁰¹ Lancaster University Regional Heritage Centre, *Elizabeth Roberts' Working Class Oral History Archive* (2018), <<https://www.regional-heritage-centre.org/>> [accessed 1 August 2018]

¹⁰² Recording Morecambe Bay, *Recording Morecambe Bay* (2020), <<https://www.recordingmorecambebay.org.uk>> [accessed 7 May 2020].

during the COVID-19 pandemic. The representation of Lancashire's resorts in the wider media has also informed this research. I adapted my investigation to include as many digital resources as were available and restructured my research questions following this disruption. I have also used digital collections such as the British Newspaper Archive to shed light on shifting cultural patterns in these resorts. These demonstrate how the media have presented Lancashire's resorts to a national audience. *The Stage* digital archive has proved especially valuable in examining changes in entertainment culture and how local authorities responded to them. Founded in 1880 and published weekly, *The Stage* covered all areas of the entertainment industry but focused primarily on theatre. It contains news, reviews, opinion, features and other items of interest, mainly to those who work within the industry. Despite this prominence, no significant study of *The Stage* and its relationship with seaside theatre has thus far been produced. In addition, in academic surveys of British theatre in the post-war period, such as John Elsom's *Post-War British Theatre*, Blackpool is notable for its absence.¹⁰³

1.4 Structure of the Thesis

I have structured this thesis to provide a chronological and comparative approach to studying Blackpool, Morecambe, and Lytham St Annes. To understand the impact of local government on resort development, I explain the role of Lancashire's seaside authorities before and after 1974. Then to understand the dynamics and development of these resorts, I analyse several of the key features in the growth of each resort. Finally, I demonstrate the critical role of local government in providing tourist amenities and entertainment from the late nineteenth century before and after 1974. My approach engages with the social-political and cultural context and local governance practices that shape policy implementation.

Following this introduction, in chapter two, I examine the local government framework established in Lancashire's seaside resorts in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. I explain and analyse how local authorities supported the growth and development of tourism in these resorts before 1974. The increasing involvement of local government was demonstrated through the provision of infrastructure, planning

¹⁰³ John Elsom, *Post-War British Theatre* (Boston: Routledge & K. Paul, 1976).

and resort development. In addition to providing essential infrastructure and maintaining the environment, local authorities became their resorts' primary promoters and marketers. I also explore the role of the first Lancashire County Council between 1888 and 1974. Although playing a more limited role in the three resorts than its successor, it helped to shape and was shaped by the seaside resorts under its jurisdiction. In addition, as attempts to reorganise local government in the 1960s gathered pace, pressure from the County Council helped shape the post-1974 settlement. I then compare the development of local government and its impact on the tourist industries of Blackpool, Morecambe, and Lytham St Annes. I then investigate the nature and effect of municipal capitalism as, until 1974, local government boundaries and responsibilities allowed, with a degree of variation, seaside resort authorities to exercise a considerable degree of autonomy.

In chapter three, I develop the themes of the second chapter by examining the impact of local government reorganisation from 1974 and its effect on the tourism policy of Lancashire's resorts. The abolition of municipal and county boroughs meant that second-tier district councils with an enhanced role for the new Lancashire County Council now represented Blackpool, Morecambe, and Lytham St Annes. In this chapter, I argue that increasing centralisation made it much more difficult for local, place-based policymaking in Lancashire's resorts. An examination of Lancashire County Council since 1974 shows that the new authority has played a key role in tourism strategy in contrast to the old County Council. I also analyse how the County Council developed a pivotal role in coordinating policy between districts, the central government and the various agencies established to promote regional tourism. However, despite this activity, I argue that this more centralised approach has been less effective in promoting and developing tourism in Lancashire's seaside resorts. I also consider the role of the three new district authorities within this system. Despite a reduction in powers following the reorganisation of Blackpool, the resort maintained its own authority. The local authority also regained some lost autonomy by gaining unitary status in 1998. As a result, Blackpool's council has developed a policy based on partnership with the private sector but underpinned by local government investment. In Morecambe and Heysham, Lancaster City Council has been much less successful, with divisions within the local

authority impeding effective decision-making. In Lytham St Annes, large-scale local authority intervention has not been as evident.

In chapters four and five, I examine five broad categories of amenities to assess social and cultural trends across the three Lancashire resorts. Each of these played a critical and interrelated role in developing each location as a centre of mass tourism. Swimming, piers, pleasure palaces, theatres and amusement parks were established from the late nineteenth century to provide a range of activities for visiting tourists, with a wide variety of holiday accommodation providing somewhere for these visitors to stay. In chapter four, I analyse the relationship between private investors and the local government in delivering tourist amenities and entertainment from the late nineteenth century until the watershed reorganisation of 1974. Before 1974 Blackpool, Morecambe and Lytham St Annes had interventionist local authorities. This approach was primarily because of the strong links between these elected bodies and tourism-related enterprises. The range of entertainment in Lancashire's seaside resorts was linked to the nature of each resort's development. Local authority investment was crucial as it provided vital infrastructure and promoted the resort to the outside world. Even when the private sector instigated the development, this was an economic partnership between local entrepreneurs and their representatives at the municipal level. In this chapter, I demonstrate that this relationship was strongest in the mid-twentieth century, after which it began to erode.

Chapter five builds upon the approach of the previous chapter to analyse attempts to maintain and regenerate the tourism industry in Lancashire after local government reorganisation in 1974. Again, to understand how successful this has been, I examine five broad categories of attractions and tourist infrastructure to assess the three Lancashire resorts. Despite facing common problems, the scale and nature of resort decline varied tremendously due to the response of local authorities. All three authorities struggled to adapt their tourism infrastructure and attractions to changing consumer tastes during the later twentieth century. Despite common problems, responses have varied dramatically across the three resorts, as the effort to counter these negative trends came primarily from local authorities. Lancaster City Council, especially from the 1970s to the 1990s, has been the least successful of the three local authorities in managing its seaside tourist infrastructure. The authority made a series of

questionable decisions concerning Morecambe's attractions throughout this period, culminating in the Blobbygate disaster in the mid-1990s. Although Lytham St Annes, under the stewardship of Fylde Borough Council, also saw the loss of key attractions between the 1970s and 1990s, these did not bring into question its future as a tourist destination. A mixture of smaller-scale entertainment options, supported by local government investment and higher-quality hotels, has provided an effective platform for expansion in the last two decades. In Blackpool, which lost more than half its visitors between the 1980s and early 2000s, a proactive unitary local authority has taken most of the main tourist attractions under its control. As a result, key attractions were saved, and long-term partnerships with the private sector were formed. With this public sector support and private marketing, increased visitor numbers have been achieved. Finally, the potential for successful regeneration in each resort is examined.

Chapter six provides the conclusion to the thesis, in which I demonstrate the critical importance of localised factors, especially the role of local government in resort regeneration against societal shifts affecting the demand for English seaside tourism. While Blackpool and Lytham St Annes benefitted from broadly effective local government since 1974, Morecambe has suffered from an inconsistent approach from its local authority. As a result, although the three resorts are geographically close and have had the same external pressures, the impact on the tourism industry in each town has been markedly different. Finally, these research findings are significant in understanding these resorts' character and contribute to a broader understanding of English resort development. Thus, the results presented in this thesis are of academic and policy relevance.

Chapter 2 ‘Municipal Pleasures’: The Role of Local Government in Lancashire Seaside Resorts Before 1974

2.1 Introduction – Local Government and Tourism in Lancashire Before 1974

This chapter examines the structure of local government established in Blackpool, Morecambe, and Lytham St Annes in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century that led to the development of these resorts as mass tourist destinations. This framework, which survived until 1974, was critical to the success of these resorts during this period. In contrast to the post-74 period, the organisation and appointment of local government placed greater emphasis on the role of local authorities over that of the central government. The election of policymakers who had intimate knowledge of their local area and the needs of the local population helped to deploy public services effectively.¹ By the end of the nineteenth century, every part of England and Wales was administered at a local level by an elected council, and the pattern of organisation completed by the Local Government Act of 1894 remained essentially unchanged until it was restructured by the London Government Act 1963 and the Local Government Act 1972.² Before this period, legislation relating to local government (such as the 1933 and 1958 Local Government Acts) did not significantly change the structure established in 1894. This stability helped local authorities to build up effective professional service departments and deliver a growing range of local services. It was against this background that seaside authorities developed municipal enterprises to increase their resorts’ attractiveness to visiting tourists.

In this chapter, I will argue that the influence of local government on the fortunes of these resorts during the period before 1974 was not coincidental but a critical factor in understanding their growth and development. In the early decades of the twentieth century, the additional powers granted to local authorities enabled an interventionist place-based approach that the central government did not seriously challenge until the 1970s. Although far from perfect, by following this approach there was a sense of ownership and empowerment among local residents and stakeholders, leading to more

¹ Steve Leach and Howard Davis, *Enabling or Disabling Local Government: Choices for the Future*, Public Policy, and Management (Buckingham [England]; Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1996), p. 72.

² P. W. Jackson, *Local Government*, 3rd ed (London: Butterworth, 1976), p. 58.

effective and responsive local government planning and development for tourism. Lancashire's local authorities were instrumental in building new infrastructure to attract visitors, such as promenades and public gardens. In addition, these authorities then took primary responsibility for promoting tourism and marketing their towns as holiday destinations. Alongside other social and economic factors, these authorities played a crucial role in creating a sense of place and identity for Lancashire's resorts. Unlike the post-1974 period, policies and interventions were generally tailored to address the specific needs and opportunities of the place in question.

The development of local government in England during the nineteenth century was a gradual process marked by several important pieces of legislation and reforms. However, the 1888 Local Government Act proved to be a critical reform and laid the basis for the dual system of local government, which would last for almost ninety years. It created elected county councils, including Lancashire County Council, based on the existing ceremonial counties. Initially, the responsibilities of county councils were limited, but these were increased by central government substantially over the next forty years.³ In addition, autonomous county boroughs were created in towns with populations over fifty thousand. The 1894 Local Government Act then created elected urban and rural district councils.⁴ Local government autonomy was most significant in Blackpool after the resort qualified to become a county borough in 1904, administratively separate from Lancashire County Council.⁵ Due to their smaller populations Morecambe and Lytham St Annes shared administration with the County Council in a dual system before 1974, which meant they could not qualify for county borough status. However, their independence increased with the granting of municipal charters in 1902 to Morecambe and in 1922 to Lytham St Annes (following the merger), as these provided significant additional financial freedom, which smaller urban and rural districts in Lancashire did not have. Although still part of the administrative county, these municipal boroughs expanded their organisational functions and exercised

³ Tony Byrne, *Local Government in Britain: Everyone's Guide to How It All Works*, Penguin Law/Government, Politics, 7., (London: Penguin, 2000), p. 18.

⁴ Jackson, pp. 12–13.

⁵ Blackpool's population grew rapidly between 1901 and 1911, from 24,549 to 62,302. By 1921 Lytham St Annes had a population of 25,877 and Morecambe and Heysham 24,205. See, *Vision of Britain, Blackpool UA, Population Statistics, Total Population (2021)*, <https://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10091731/cube/TOT_POP> [accessed 9 August 2021].

considerable autonomy to establish and run a wide range of tourism-related public services. The level of independence found in these resorts and the duration of this order (see Table 2.1) is striking compared to the frequent reorganisations after 1974.⁶

Table 2.1 - Local government in Lancashire resorts since the 1870s. The table below shows its changing organisation over time.

Decade	Lancashire	Blackpool	Morecambe	Lytham St Annes
1870s		Blackpool Municipal Borough (1876)		
1880s	Lancashire County Council (I) (1888)			
1890s			Morecambe Urban District Council (1894)	Lytham Urban District Council (1894) St Annes Urban District Council (1894)
1900s		Blackpool County Borough (1904)	Morecambe Municipal Borough (1902)	
1910s				
1920s			Morecambe and Heysham Municipal Borough (1928)	Lytham St Annes Municipal Borough (1922)
1930s				
1940s				
1950s				
1960s				
1970s	Lancashire County Council (II) (1974)	Blackpool Borough Council (1974)	Lancaster City Council (1974)	Fylde Borough Council (1974)
1980s				
1990s		Blackpool Council Unitary (1998)		

⁶ David Wilson and Chris Game, *Local Government in the United Kingdom*, 5th. ed (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. 58.

2000s				
2010s				

Although the early growth of seaside tourism relied on investment from private landed interests, the new county, and municipal boroughs, increasingly took the lead. Following the Acts of 1888 and 1894, local authorities played a crucial role in developing the character of Lancashire’s seaside resorts. In partnership with the private sector, significant intervention from the local state meant that these coastal authorities conducted policy within a framework that Walton and others have termed ‘municipal capitalism’ or ‘municipal conservatism.’⁷ This framework resulted in considerable business influence on resort authorities, involving direct pressure or shared values. Those elected to these councils assumed they knew what was in the best interests of the areas they represented. As Walton argues, unlike the ‘municipal socialism’ promoted by organisations like the Fabian Society, these local authorities aimed to represent ratepayers as the shareholders and organise resources to promote their resort and civic life rather than redistribute power and wealth. For example, at the annual business meeting in 1907, the Chairman of Lytham Urban District Council stated that ‘their business capacity and intimate knowledge of the town and its requirements would be brought to bear, and no doubt they would decide what they honestly believed to be the best for the interests of the town and its inhabitants.’⁸ This comment is typical of the paternalistic attitude and confidence that prevailed in Lancashire’s resorts during the early twentieth century. In partnership with business interests, local government actively intervened in Lancashire’s resorts to increase visitor numbers. However, although there were many similarities in the approach of local authorities in Blackpool, Morecambe, and Lytham St Annes, there were also crucial differences due to the distinct origin of each resort.

The intervention of local authorities ensured that the benefits of a flourishing tourism industry could be reinvested into further expansion and development of the resort. It was also critical for the long-term sustainability of tourism, developing the

⁷ John K. Walton, *The British Seaside: Holidays and Resorts in the Twentieth Century*, Studies in Popular Culture, (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 2006), p. 170.

⁸ ‘Lytham Urban Council,’ *Preston Herald*, 20 April 1907, p. 3.

physical infrastructure necessary to attract and entertain visitors. This, in turn, connected to the wider infrastructure, not least the railways, which had developed across the United Kingdom, enabling millions of tourists to journey to the coast. During this period, local government in England was based on a model of civic duty with a widespread belief in the importance of investing in local infrastructure and public services. This investment helped each authority establish a distinct identity, not least through the liveries of their municipal transport companies.

In addition to providing infrastructure and maintaining the environment, these local authorities became prominent tourism promoters and marketers.⁹ This primary marketing mechanism was the annual holiday guide produced by each council's publicity department. A typical example is shown in Fig 2.1, from Blackpool in 1927. The ambition of the local authority is demonstrated with the slogan of 'Britain's Playground'. As well as sea and sand, the cover illustration also promotes the North Pier, Blackpool Tower, Palace Theatre, and the Giant Wheel. This emphasises the range of attractions Blackpool provided in the 1920s for its visitors. In addition, these annual guides advertised holiday accommodation, and they were the principal way visitors could choose where to stay. As local authorities decided which establishments could appear, they could also regulate this market, with the ultimate sanction being the removal from the guide. Less directly but equally important was the local media's role in these resorts. Overall, the local press played a vital role in informing and engaging the public, acting as a bridge between local authorities and their communities. While the dynamics between the press and local authorities varied from resort to resort, their interactions were important to local governance and civic life. In addition, newspapers like the *Morecambe Visitor* during the 1919 local elections took strong editorial stances and could influence, or at least reinforce, public opinion.¹⁰ As local papers aligned with specific political parties or interest groups, their reporting and editorials reflected these biases.

⁹ Clive Charlton and Stephen Essex, 'The Involvement of District Council in Tourism in England and Wales', *Geoforum*, 27.2, (1996), 175-192 (p. 175).

¹⁰ 'A Clarion Call to Sterner Action', *Morecambe Visitor*, 15 Oct 1919.

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Fig. 2.1 - Blackpool Publicity Department, Blackpool Holiday Guide Front Cover, 1927.¹¹

The increasing involvement of local authorities can be seen through the provision of local tourism infrastructure, planning and development and proactive policies to promote and market their resorts. Local government intervention was particularly evident in Blackpool, where an absence of dominant landed interests (as in Lytham) enabled the local authority to take the lead from the 1870s.¹² In Morecambe, the impact of local government increased dramatically in the 1920s following the election of 1919 and the merger with Heysham in 1928. Even in Lytham St Annes, initially developed under the Clifton family's influence, local authority control increased, especially after the town was granted a municipal charter in 1922. This ushered in a period of large-scale public spending in these resorts, which significantly enhanced the

¹¹ Showtown Blackpool, *Publicity Department, Blackpool Holiday Guide 1927* (2023), <<https://www.showtownblackpool.co.uk/collections/galleries/publicity-department>> [accessed 23 May 2023].

¹² John K. Walton, *Blackpool* (Keele: Keele Univ. Press, 1998), pp. 84–7.

appeal of each resort to the visiting public. Although there was competition between these resorts, as Harold Perkin notes, each resort's 'tone' varied markedly, allowing locations to appeal to different sectors of the growing tourist market.¹³ This could mean directing public resources towards business interests rather than poorer residents. Therefore, despite significant investments in tourist amenities, local authorities in Lancashire also faced criticism for their management of the seaside towns. Criticism came from Liberal and Labour politicians, for as Walton notes, the emphasis on tourism development often was at the cost of providing housing and other social amenities.¹⁴ In addition, local groups concerned about 'value for money' repeatedly criticised specific proposals before construction. However, once this public investment helped to attract increased visitor numbers, the local authority usually overcame such opposition.

By the 1950s, English seaside holidays had become a well-established and popular tradition. Demand increased further following the Holiday with Pay Act of 1938. The Act required employers to provide their workers with one week of paid leave each year, and it was a significant step forward in improving the welfare of workers in the UK. Before its introduction, most workers had no right to paid leave and those who did often received only a minimal amount of time off. The Act stimulated the growth of the tourism industry, as more working-class people could take holidays. This positively impacted local economies and increased the viability of municipal enterprises, particularly in areas that relied heavily on tourism, such as seaside towns. As a result, despite growing foreign competition between 1951 and 1974, the number of domestic holidays taken in the UK (four days or more) increased from twenty-five million to over forty million.¹⁵ This was still the era when seaside resorts dominated the market, and Blackpool alone accounted for almost ten per cent of these staying holidays in the early 1970s.¹⁶ With millions of visitors arriving each summer, one of the key challenges facing local authorities in Lancashire during the 1950s was managing the rapid growth of tourism in their towns. Blackpool and Morecambe experienced a surge in visitor

¹³ H.J. Perkin, 'The 'Social Tone' of Victorian Seaside Resorts in the North West,' *Northern History*, XI (1976), 180–94 (p. 188).

¹⁴ John K. Walton, *The British Seaside*, p. 186.

¹⁵ Julian Demetriadi, 'The Golden Years: English Seaside Resorts 1950-1974', in *The Rise and Fall of British Coastal Resorts*, ed. by Gareth Shaw and Allan Williams (Guildford: Biddles Ltd, 1997), p. 53.

¹⁶ Blackpool, Blackpool History Centre, LM891, Research Unit, English Tourist Board, Blackpool Visitors and Tourism Survey 1972, 1973, p. 3.

numbers in the years following Second World War, significantly straining local resources and infrastructure. However, these local authorities addressed these challenges through various measures, including developing new attractions and expanding public transport services. Overall, local authorities in Lancashire played a critical role in developing and managing their respective seaside towns before 1974. While they faced increasing challenges by the time of reorganisation, their efforts helped shape these towns' character and identity.

2.2 Lancashire local government and tourism before 1974

2.2.1 Lancashire County Council

The activities of the first Lancashire County Council were far more limited than those of its post-1974 incarnation. Before 1974, the County Council did not influence tourism development in seaside resorts in the way it would in subsequent decades. The only comprehensive history of its work has been John Marshall's, *History of Lancashire County Council*, published in 1977. In this study, Marshall argues that the authority was relatively efficient and had more achievements than failures. He also maintains that relations with other local authorities in Lancashire were primarily harmonious. I will argue that this is an oversimplification, as tensions arose over taxation and policy and later over the shape of local government reorganisation. The independence of county boroughs and the autonomy of municipal boroughs were vigorously defended by local councillors, leading to conflict with the County Council. As a county borough, Blackpool did not send elected representatives to County Hall between 1904 and 1974. Morecambe and Lytham St Annes, as municipal boroughs, did have representation, but most local services related to tourism (with the significant exception of highways) were the borough's responsibility. With such a large and diverse county as Lancashire, this division of responsibilities allowed for more effective local decision-making and allocation of resources than could have been achieved by the larger authority.

When created in 1889, Lancashire's activities were confined to the matters formerly controlled by the magistrates at Quarter Sessions. These included highways, licensing, county asylums, the control of cattle movement, and authority shared with the magistrates over the police. Until 1974, Lancashire County Council covered the

historic County of Lancashire from Barrow to Liverpool – a total area of over 1,700 square miles.¹⁷ In his history of the Council, Marshall argued that Lancashire’s tactical and delegatory skill had served the County well, and he claims there were few disputes between Lancashire County Council and the municipal boroughs of Lytham St Annes and Morecambe and Heysham.¹⁸ However, Stephen Leach argued that Marshall’s picture of the Council’s effectiveness might have been painted too optimistic. He also claimed, with some justification, that because Lancashire County Council financed the research, this put pressure on the authors and undermined academic detachment.¹⁹ Whatever the strengths or weakness of Lancashire County Council in the period before 1974, it is clear from the records that the authority was usually content to leave issues relating to the tourist industry to their borough counterparts.

As noted, Lancashire County Council’s responsibilities included managing and developing the county’s road network. This would include the construction of major arterial routes, bypasses, and bridges to enhance connectivity and ease traffic congestion. As car ownership grew and the road network became more critical, this area of county planning directly affected tourism in all of Lancashire’s resorts. The development of highways became a key area of public policy as the County Council prioritised securing good roads to transport tourists to Lancashire’s seaside resorts of Blackpool, Fleetwood, Morecambe, and Southport.²⁰ By the 1930s, Lancashire County Council was responsible for approximately 2,900 miles of road, with increasing numbers using them to reach their holiday destinations. For example, the average daily number of vehicles using the Preston to Blackpool road had risen from 653 in 1911 to 6,657 in 1935.²¹ In 1939, the County Councils Association noted that in Lancashire, ‘the development of roads and bridges under any county council in modern times is largely the story of growth, and to this in Lancashire is added, the rapid growth of such seaside

¹⁷ Lancashire Evening Post, *Going behind the Scenes of Lancashire County Council’s 130-Year History* (2021), <<https://www.lep.co.uk/news/politics/going-behind-scenes-lancashire-county-councils-130-year-history-651138>> [accessed 30 April 2021].

¹⁸ J.D. Marshall, *The History of Lancashire County Council, 1889 to 1974* (London: Martin Robertson, 1977), pp. 363-87.

¹⁹ Stephen N. Leach, ‘Book Review: The History of Lancashire County Council 1889-1974: Edited by J. D. Marshall’, *Urban Studies*, 15.3 (2016) p. 456.

²⁰ A.F. Davie, ‘Administration and Finance’, in *The History of Lancashire County Council 1889-1974*, ed. by J.D. Marshall (London: Martin Robertson, 1977), p. 95.

²¹ Preston, Lancashire Archives, Library Collection, The County Councils Association, *The Jubilee of County Councils 1889-1939*, (London: Evans Brothers Ltd), pp. 86-7.

resorts as Southport, St Annes, Morecambe and Blackpool.²² The growing need for effective road links to these holiday destinations cannot be underestimated. Transport policy also required more municipal coordination than other aspects of tourism infrastructure.

Although relations between the County Council and the county boroughs and districts of Lancashire were generally good, transport policy was one area where conflict occasionally arose. For example, in July 1918, Morecambe Corporation obtained Parliamentary consent to run motor buses in the borough. Lancashire County Council objected to this due to the buses' potential impact and cost on roads maintained by the County Council.²³ Cooperation was, however, more usual, with Council members recognising the need for joint planning for transport. This cooperation was demonstrated in 1926 when councils across the Fylde coast (including Blackpool and Lytham St, Annes) agreed to form a joint committee with Lancashire County Council to resolve transport problems.²⁴ After the Second World War, the County Council unsuccessfully supported the case for motorway links to seaside resorts, for example, a proposed connection to Morecambe. Without this link, traffic was channelled into Lancaster before crossing the river Lune, causing congestion and deterring motorists from visiting the resort.

While a shift from rail to road was already evident before the 1960s, this trend accelerated following the 1963 Beeching Report and the loss of over one-third of the British rail network during the 1960s.²⁵ As a result, conflict emerged between Lancashire's local authorities over the closure of Blackpool's busiest station, Blackpool Central. Martin Bairstow argues that Blackpool Corporation had long coveted the land occupied by Central Station for future development and argued for its closure instead of Blackpool North (as recommended by Beeching). This proposal was accepted by British Railways, and Blackpool Council acquired the Station site for development.²⁶ In response, Lancashire County Council supported the objections of Lytham St Annes Council by raising concerns about the impact of rail services on the South Fylde line.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 84.

²³ 'Seaside Motor Bus Tours,' *Fleetwood Chronicle*, 22 February 1918, p. 3.

²⁴ 'Regional Town Planning, Joint Committee Suggested,' *Fleetwood Chronicle*, 23 July 1926, p. 3.

²⁵ David Henshaw, *The Great Railway Conspiracy* (Hawes: Leading Edge, 1991) p. 193.

²⁶ Martin Bairstow, *Railways of Blackpool, and the Fylde* (Leeds: Amadeus Press Ltd, 2001) p. 84.

Although these concerns were brushed aside by British Railways at the time, Lancashire County Council's County planning officer wrote to the transport minister explaining that this could lead to the closure of the line and that 'holiday visitors ... would be likely to go to other resorts served by trains (and) the project has considerable potential danger to the economy of the South Fylde.'²⁷ In retrospect, the concerns of the County Council officer concerning the future of rail transport in the Fylde would prove to be well-founded.

Another area of conflict was county finance, with seaside authorities often in opposition to increases in county taxation. In the early 1900s, removing county taxation was the main argument for merging St Annes Urban District Council with Blackpool County Borough. The Chair of St Annes finance committee argued in 1916 that 'Blackpool possesses entertainment, which adds materially to its rateable value, and is receiving increased profits from its municipal undertakings, both tending to keep the rate down, while Imperial demands are made upon the County to send the rate up.'²⁸ As will be discussed later, this merger did not occur, although Blackpool gained boundary extensions at the expense of the administrative County in 1934 and 1955.²⁹ Later, in 1935, Lytham St Annes council argued strongly against a rise in county rates and that any increase in spending should instead come from reserves.³⁰ *The Lancashire Evening Post* reported the Mayor, Alderman W. Hope, saying, 'It seems to me they have no idea about the development of areas under their control. The lower our rate, the quicker we shall develop, and the more we develop, the more money there is going to the Council.'³¹ Not surprisingly, councillors in Morecambe and Lytham St Annes believed that their borough councils, rather than Lancashire County Council, were best placed to make decisions and spend public money. Despite this opposition, by 1953-54, total spending by the Lancashire County Council had grown to £28.7 million compared to just

²⁷ LA, CC/NV/199, Blackpool South-Blackpool Central [P95/4]

²⁸ LA, CC/NV/6, Proposed amalgamation of St Annes and Blackpool, June 1916.

²⁹ *The History of Lancashire County Council, 1889 to 1974*, ed. by J. D. Marshall (London: Robertson, 1977), p. 119.

³⁰ Until the reforms of the 1980s and 1990s, local government funding came from two main sources, grants from the central government and local rates. Other sources of income were from local authorities' property and from the services which authorities provided. The rate was a tax which the local authority could collect based on the assessed rateable value of a property. The pre-1974 system is more fully explained by Derek Bickerstaffe in *At Your Service, Local Government in the Regions* (London: Wayland, 1974), pp. 84-8.

³¹ 'Antiquated Policy' of County Finance,' *Lancashire Evening Post*, 26 March 1935, p. 5.

under £600,000 in 1911-12. Adjusted for inflation, this represented an approximately ten-fold increase in public expenditure by the County Council.³² The relationship with Lancashire County Council was, in effect, a marriage of convenience for these councils, which covered populations too small to achieve complete independence.

As a result, the county councillors elected in Morecambe and Lytham St Annes manifested a hostile attitude to County taxation. Marshall describes the councillors from these seaside resorts as having strongly 'marked characteristics'. They were 'meticulous, contentious, economy-minded' and 'shopkeeper-minded'. This reflected, he argued, their representation of areas dominated by retired people, commuters and the owners of small businesses.³³ This small 'c' conservatism is illustrated by the election notice for Cllr Tom Atkinson (Independent - Morecambe Division No. 1) published in the *Morecambe Guardian* in March 1946, promising a continuation of the 'efficient administration and sound finance' that he had delivered during the previous nine years in office.³⁴ A fiscal conservative, Atkinson (with a background in accountancy) played a prominent role in the finance committee during the 1940s and 1950s, arguing for lower rates and the careful spending of public money. This approach continued until the 1950s as Lancashire County Council was dominated by both small and large 'c' conservatives. Democratic engagement with Lancashire County Council was problematic, and between 1952 and 1970, turnout declined in Lancashire County Council elections from 46.5 per cent to 32.2 per cent, undermining the legitimacy of the Council.³⁵ It should also be noted that county councillors were frequently returned unopposed in many polls. When Tom Atkinson originally ran for office (unsuccessfully) due to a by-election in 1931, it was the first contested election in the Morecambe No.1 Division since 1910.³⁶ The lack of competitive elections indicates a lack of political engagement from the public towards the County Council. It also supports William Robson's contention that in the mid-1950s, the spirit of democracy had not penetrated county government and that the 'county

³² 'The County's Expenditure,' *Burnley Express*, 24 July 1954, p. 1. Inflation comparison calculated here, and elsewhere in the thesis using the Bank of England inflation calculator. Bank of England, *Inflation Calculator* (2023), <<https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/monetary-policy/inflation/inflation-calculator>> [accessed 26 May 2022]

³³ Marshall, p. 118.

³⁴ 'Lancashire County Council Election,' *Morecambe Guardian*, 2 March 1946, p. 1.

³⁵ D.T. Denver and H.T.G. Hands, 'Politics 1929-74' in *The History of Lancashire County Council 1889-1974*, ed. by J.D. Marshall (London: Martin Robertson, 1977), p. 213.

³⁶ 'County Council Bye -Election,' *Morecambe Guardian*, 2 April 1931, p. 7.

councils remain largely the playground of the leisured classes.³⁷ Even as county council elections became more contested, it is notable that most councillors came from either a business or professional background and often served for extended periods.

After 1945, although turnouts declined, contested elections were more likely to occur. However, despite Labour candidates standing in seaside resorts, none were elected in Morecambe and Lytham St Annes before the reform of Lancashire County Council in 1974. In 1955, for example, despite opposition from Labour in both Morecambe divisions, Annie Clayton and Bernard Drake, representing the Conservative Party, were comfortably elected. Clayton was a hotelier at Sandylands Promenade in Morecambe, showing the continuing importance of the links between seaside politics and the tourist industry.³⁸ The other Morecambe division returned another Conservative, R.C. Quick, a local journalist. Despite his background as a county councillor when Quick produced a short history of Morecambe and Heysham in the early 1960s, he did not refer to his council experience or directly to any role that the County Council might have played in the development of the resort.³⁹ Elections by this time had become competitive and party political across Lancashire as the County Council's remit grew. This, in turn, caused increasing tensions with municipal boroughs such as Morecambe and Heysham.

The growing reach of the County Council became evident during the 1960s as tourism promotion became part of a broader regional strategy. Notably, before this decade, there had been almost no direct involvement from the authority in this area. Interventions such as the County Council's mid-1950s anti-litter campaign tended to be small-scale, with a police officer deployed to Lytham Green to ensure visitors 'use the receptacles provided'.⁴⁰ During the 1960s, however, this role began to change. Lancashire County Council responded positively in the latter part of the decade to the proposal from the Wilson government to establish regional tourist boards. After several years of consultation, the 1969 Development of Tourism Act would eventually create

³⁷ William A. Robson, *The Development of Local Government*, 3rd edn (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1954), p. 156.

³⁸ 'Four Candidates at Morecambe,' *Bradford Observer*, 19 March 1955, p. 5.

³⁹ R.C. Quick, *The History of Morecambe and Heysham* (Morecambe: Morecambe Times, 1962).

⁴⁰ 'Hint to Visitors,' *Lancashire Evening Post*, 6 July 1956, p. 1.

these boards.⁴¹ At a regional conference held in July 1966, Lancashire County Council supported a resolution recognising the importance of regional planning for the tourist and holiday industry for the North West and agreed in principle to the establishment of a North West Tourist Association. Therefore, by the 1960s, the relationships between the County Council and the other authorities in the region were becoming more complex as they navigated their roles in tourism development.

In addition, the County Council also committed to winning support from other authorities within Lancashire for this proposal.⁴² The NWTAA and the other boards created that year had a remit for domestic tourism marketing and a general concern for resorts.⁴³ As deindustrialisation accelerated during the 1960s, the Labour Government realised that tourism could positively counter economic decline. Labour produced a white paper outlining proposals to establish statutory tourist boards as part of a more active central government policy in tourism. After consulting on the white paper, the English Tourist Board was established in 1969 by the Development of Tourism Act.⁴⁴ Below this level, regional boards, including the North West Tourist Board, would promote tourism in Lancashire. With this increased focus on coordinating tourism policy across regions, Lancashire County Council became more involved in developing tourist strategy in the latter part of the twentieth century.

As local government reorganisation loomed, tensions between seaside municipal boroughs and Lancashire County Council became further exposed. At a conference arranged by the County Council in March 1961, the Town Clerk of Morecambe and Heysham said that just because County Districts were not making many complaints about the County administration did not necessarily mean they had no complaints. In addition, he stated that there were cases in detail where County Districts disagreed with the Council. On the other hand, the Mayor of Lytham St Annes indicated that although there was room for improvement, the Borough Council supported the two-tier system.⁴⁵ Morecambe and Heysham Borough Council abstained in a motion

⁴¹ Sheela Agarwal, 'The Public Sector: Planning for Renewal?', in *The Rise and Fall of British Coastal Resorts*, ed. by Gareth Shaw and Allan Williams (London: Pinter, 1997), pp. 137-58 (p. 141).

⁴² 'Tourist Association Mooted,' *Heywood Advertiser*, 8 July 1966, p. 8.

⁴³ Chris Cooper, 'Indicators of Decline', in *The Rise and Fall of British Coastal Resorts*, ed. by Gareth Shaw and Allan Williams (London: Pinter, 1997), pp. 79-101 (p. 93).

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 95.

⁴⁵ LA, CC/NV/123, North and Central Lancs conference [P47/4/6], Nov 1960 – Jul 1961.

supporting the maintenance of the status quo. This was due to a proposal from Lancaster City Council regarding the creation of a new County Borough with Morecambe. The proposal did not advance due to Morecambe and Heysham Council's scepticism and Lancashire County Council's vehement opposition. The County Council saw the creation of any new county boroughs negatively, as it would disrupt the divisional administration for education, health, and welfare services aside from the potential loss of territory. In a show of solidarity with Morecambe and Heysham, Lytham St Anne's Town Clerk said that although the Council supported the two-tier system, they did not want it to be inferred that they would be opposed to new county boroughs elsewhere.⁴⁶ Although supportive of autonomy elsewhere in the County, Lytham St Annes' support for the dual system prevented a 'takeover' by the adjacent Blackpool County Borough.

By the end of the 1960s, Lancashire County Council faced abolition due to the Redcliffe-Maud report (1969), which would have created a series of unitary authorities in place of the two-tier system. Unsurprisingly, on 31 July 1969, the County Council responded by declaring that they were 'totally opposed to the setting up of unitary authorities in Lancashire'.⁴⁷ Opposition to the changes transcended party divisions, with the leader of the Labour group, Sir Fred Longworth, claiming that 'the unitary was a mockery of local government' and that 'Lancashire was second to none as a local authority'.⁴⁸ However, the election of Edward Heath's Conservative government in 1970 meant that the two-tier system would continue, albeit in a radically different form. The Conservative Party were anxious to avoid unitary authorities. Tony Byrne suggests that this was driven by Conservative MPs, who feared the changes to their parliamentary constituencies that might have occurred had county parameters been abolished.⁴⁹ The Association of Municipal Corporations also opposed the new system, as it represented a significant loss of autonomy for these authorities.⁵⁰ This reorganisation emphasised achieving economies of scale and standardisation, with the number of authorities

⁴⁶ LA, P13/9/9F, Lancashire County Council Working Party, 6 December 1960.

⁴⁷ Marshall, p. 377.

⁴⁸ 'Fierce Fight Ahead', *Nantwich Chronicle*, 14 August 1969, p. 8.

⁴⁹ Byrne, p. 46.

⁵⁰ Bruce Wood, 'The Process of Local Government Reform, 1966-74', *Urban and Regional Studies*, 14, 1976.

reduced from around 1500 to 500.⁵¹ With the removal of Greater Manchester and Merseyside to the south and northern districts joining the new Cumbria County Council, Lancashire County Council was significantly reduced in size. These revised boundaries favoured the Conservative Party, which comfortably won the 1973 and 1977 elections.⁵² Conservative dominance of the new County Council would not be challenged until Blackpool and Morecambe returned significant numbers of Labour candidates from the 1980s.

As a result of the reorganisation, in 1974, Blackpool was placed under the administrative control of Lancashire County Council for the first time in seventy years. Despite local resentment at the loss of county borough status in Blackpool, there was also a sense of relief as councillors felt that the process had reached a resolution. As John Stewart points out, despite concerns about the changes, many in local government hoped that the new framework had removed the reorganisation issue from political agendas.⁵³⁵⁴ However, this was to prove wishful thinking, as in the following decades, local government structures would be the subject of almost constant review by both Conservative and Labour governments.

The role of Lancashire County Council in tourism development before 1974 was limited, but it grew significantly even before the reorganisation. Transport infrastructure, especially with the growth of car ownership and the decline of railways, meant that the County Council had a crucial role in ensuring that tourists could arrive at their intended destination. By the 1960s, the County Council was championing the new tourist boards seeing an economic opportunity for Lancashire against a declining industrial base. (This would foreshadow the much more extensive interventions that would take place by the 1980s.) Lancashire County Council worked well with municipal boroughs and other districts on transport and strategic planning issues. There was, however, an underlying tension that existed with autonomous county boroughs such as Blackpool. Marshall painted too optimistic a picture of the relationships between the

⁵¹ Leach and Davis, p. 81.

⁵² Elections Centre, *English Shire Counties* (2015), <https://www.electionscentre.co.uk/?page_id=2398> [accessed 10 November 2021]

⁵³ John Stewart, 'An Era of Continuing Change: Reflections on Local Government in England 1974–2014', *Local Government Studies*, 40.6 (2014), 835–50 (p. 838).

County Council and the other authorities in Lancashire, especially those representing seaside towns. Blackpool had sought county borough status from the turn of the century, and tensions persisted throughout the County Council's history, with critical voices also heard from Morecambe and Lytham St Annes. As municipal boroughs, they guarded their delegated powers and remained the principal authorities concerning tourism. Although far from perfect, the fact that the pre-1974 system allowed them to do this proved to be a considerable strength. Rather than the increasingly centralised system of policymaking that emerged in the late twentieth century, Lancashire's resorts before 1974 had the freedom to develop place-based approaches which were, overall, more effective than those which followed. Critically, place-based decision-making in local government better utilised local knowledge and expertise to develop strategies tailored to the needs of Lancashire's resorts.

2.2.2 Blackpool

The impact of local government on Lancashire's seaside resorts is most evident in Blackpool. As a county borough between 1904 and 1974, Blackpool Council and its Corporation enjoyed the autonomy and freedom of action that its successor authorities lacked. Although the private sector owned and developed most of Blackpool's major attractions during this period, what is striking is the extent to which the local authority supported and promoted their endeavours through investment in infrastructure and marketing the resort to potential visitors. Blackpool Corporation re-defined the parameters of the intervention in the tourism market and established a template that other resorts could emulate. In 1896, John Hyde, in a review of the resort for the *Windsor Magazine*, described Blackpool in the following fashion:

Everywhere there is evidence of the investment of huge capital, but so judiciously and with such foresight is this gone about, that so far from involving the town in burdens, every fresh undertaking goes only to advance the wealth and well-being of the community. The Corporation is thoroughly alive to the importance of advance, and the construction of the new promenade is evidence of their wise enterprise.⁵⁵

The increasing reach of the local authority was not without controversy, as the lines between public and private spending were questioned within Blackpool even at

⁵⁵ LA, E02/BLA/HYD, Blackpool of Today, John Hyde, *The Windsor Magazine*, 1896, p. 396.

the time. Between the 1870s and 1960s, following an approach based upon municipal conservatism, Blackpool Council was able to create the most popular seaside resort in the United Kingdom, or in the words of George R. Sims in a later review of 1902, ‘a wonderland by the waves.’⁵⁶ This approach would be challenged in the 1960s, as most of Blackpool’s largest attractions were sold to national companies. In addition, by the early 1970s, with local government reorganisation looming and dramatic changes in the tourism market, there were strong indications that new approaches would be necessary for Blackpool Council to continue this earlier success.

The role of local government in Blackpool grew during the late nineteenth century following the establishment of the Blackpool Local Board of Health in 1868. After a successful campaign organised by significant local figures, such as entrepreneur William Cocker, Blackpool was incorporated as a Borough in January 1876.⁵⁷ This was against a background of rapid population growth of thirty to fifty per cent per decade at the end of the nineteenth century.⁵⁸ By establishing a Borough Corporation, additional powers were granted with its Charter. Initially, as Walton notes, these were applied by the authority with a light touch. Still, the role of the local authority grew as a provider of amenities and services and a regulator of standards and public behaviour.⁵⁹ The resort’s promotion and marketing were also integral for the Blackpool Corporation from the 1870s onwards as, uniquely, the Corporation obtained (in 1879) parliamentary authority to collect a special local tax advertising the town’s attractions.⁶⁰ This was acceptable to local ratepayers, as the Conservative administration was able to keep the overall tax burden low during this period. However, there is no way of effectively quantifying how far municipal advertising stimulated the resort’s growth in a period long before effective market research. As Walton notes, Blackpool became the only British resort to ‘plan and develop an advertising campaign knowing that the available revenue would expand with the town’s rateable value’.⁶¹ For example, by 1921/22, the

⁵⁶ Ibid., George R. Sims, 1902.

⁵⁷ Brian Turner and Steve Palmer, *The Blackpool Story* (Blackpool: S. Palmer, 1994), p. 32.

⁵⁸ Allan Brodie and Matthew Whitfield, *Blackpool’s Seaside Heritage* (Swindon: English Heritage, 2014), p. 2.

⁵⁹ John K Walton, Historical Association (Great Britain), and Lancaster Branch, *Wonderlands by the Waves: A History of the Seaside Resorts of Lancashire* (Preston: Lancashire County Books, 1992), p. 6.

⁶⁰ Walton, Historical Association (Great Britain), and Lancaster Branch, p. 7.

⁶¹ Walton, *Blackpool*, p. 82.

Corporation could spend over six thousand pounds on advertising the town while embarking upon a significant infrastructure expansion in the resort.⁶² Despite the low rates, local authority spending in this period was not universally popular. At the beginning of the twentieth century, a 'Municipal Reform Union' was formed in the resort to campaign against 'Town Council Extravagance.' It was claimed by this group that 'rates are gone up (sic), and it is harder to get a living, largely in consequence of the wasteful and extravagant spending of public money by members of the Town Council'.⁶³ Although this did not lead to the changes demanded by the group, claims of council waste and corruption would reoccur in subsequent decades.

Although the construction of Blackpool's key attractions, such as the Tower and Winter Gardens, was funded by the private sector, Blackpool Council's investment in the town's infrastructure grew in the years before it became a county borough. In addition to promenade development, the most significant municipal innovation in this period was introducing electrical power to the resort.⁶⁴ Even Blackpool Borough Council's coat of arms, adopted in 1899, demonstrated the town's pride in its early adoption of electricity. As seen in Fig 2.2, a thunderbolt is in the centre. It refers to the enterprise of Blackpool as a pioneer in adopting electricity for lighting and traction purposes. It is also notable that the resort's motto was 'Progress'.

⁶² 'Blackpool's Rates - What We Get in Return', *Blackpool Gazette & Herald*, 17 February 1923, p. 11.

⁶³ LA, P51/SMI, The Blackpool Municipal Reform Union, *Blackpool Town Council Extravagance Exposed*, 1902.

⁶⁴ Brodie and Whitfield, p. 59.

Illustration of Blackpool Coat of Arms removed for copyright reasons. Copyright holder is Blackpool Council.

Fig 2.2 - Blackpool Borough Council, Coat of Arms, granted 10 June 1899.⁶⁵

Investment in innovative technologies also led to Britain's first municipally owned electric tramway. Although by the Tramways Act of 1870, local authorities were not allowed to run their own trams, they could build the lines and then lease them to private companies. The tramway was run privately for the first seven years of operation (1885-1892) until the original lease expired.⁶⁶ Blackpool Council were then able to successfully lobby the central government to pass an Improvement Act in 1893 (overriding the Tramways Act), which allowed the Corporation to provide services directly. Not only did the Council buy out the shareholders of this tramway, but it also later bought out the shares of the Blackpool to Fleetwood Tramway. Blackpool Corporation also supplied the electricity which powered the rival Lytham and St Annes Tramway.⁶⁷ The success of the tram network was demonstrated as passenger numbers

⁶⁵ Blackpool Council, *Blackpool Coat of Arms, Blackpool Town Hall History* (2022), <<https://www.blackpool.gov.uk/Your-Council/The-Mayor/Town-Hall-history.aspx>> [accessed 23 June 2022]

⁶⁶ Turner and Palmer, p. 35.

⁶⁷ Terry Regan and Andrew Hazlehurst, *From Lamp to Laser: The Story of Blackpool Illuminations* (St. Albans: Skelter, 2004), p. 25.

grew from 355,512 in 1893 to 12,452,820 by 1913.⁶⁸ Having been the first authority to establish this model, a publicly owned tram service has continued to the present day, even when all other local authorities removed them. As a result, the trams became a significant tourist attraction, especially during the Illuminations period.

Despite high expenditure on sea defences, the promenade, and a unique level of municipal spending on advertising the resort, Blackpool's local taxation levels were amongst the lowest in England. Expenditures in the resort were tightly focussed on supporting and promoting the tourist industry on which the town relied. This was the main reason that as early as October 1900, there was a campaign in St Annes to amalgamate with Blackpool. In support of a merger, the St Annes Council Finance Committee produced figures illustrating the rateable value and rates of the two places in 1900. These can be seen in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1 Amalgamation of St Annes with Blackpool, The Scheme Explained, 1916, Statement by the Chairman of the Finance Committee⁶⁹

	Population (1901)	Rateable Value £	District Rate	Borough Rate	Poor Rate	Total
Blackpool	47,376	395,150	3/8	7d	5d	4/8
St Annes	6,807	49,330	4/-	n/a	9d	4/9

Adding St Annes would have created a local authority with a population of over fifty thousand, thus expediting county borough status for Blackpool. According to the Chair of St Annes Finance Committee, 'It was supported by the responsible citizens in both places and opposed in St Annes by the land interest and a majority of ratepayers – by the latter mainly on sentimental grounds.'⁷⁰ With even more rapid population growth in the first decade of the twentieth century, Blackpool became a county borough without St Annes just four years later. Further north in the resort, the Princes Parade

⁶⁸ LA, Library Collection, Allen Clarke, *The Story of Blackpool* (S.R.Publishers Ltd, 1969), pp. 258-9.

⁶⁹ LA, CC/NC (6), Statement by the Chairman of the Finance Committee, Amalgamation of St Annes with Blackpool, The Scheme Explained, 1916, p. 2.

⁷⁰ Ibid. p. 2.

was completed in 1912 alongside new municipal gardens.⁷¹ The development of Blackpool Illuminations was a significant innovation in this pre-war period that would have longer-term consequences. Inspired by the Borough Tramways and Electrical Engineer Charles Furness, the first display took place in 1912. Although there would be significant periods when the Illuminations did not occur between 1913 and 1949, this was primarily due to the impact of war. The Blackpool Illuminations grew in popularity during the 1930s. By 1938 476,000 came by train and increasing numbers by car and coach. These additional visitors were vital as they also spent money on Blackpool's other attractions and accommodation. Due to the economic benefits for the resort, Blackpool has held the display continuously since 1949, extending the holiday season beyond the summer season.⁷² Although the local authority primarily funded this extension of the holiday season, it was also supported by the private sector. Local businesses helped to pay for the Illuminations through voluntary contributions to the Illuminations subscription fund, coordinated by the Businessmen's Liaison Committee.⁷³ The relationship between Blackpool Council and local businesses in relation to the Blackpool Illuminations since the 1940s has been characterised by cooperative efforts in production, innovation, and financial support, contributing to the Illuminations' continuing appeal and significance for the resort.

After the First World War, there was another push by Blackpool Council for expansion and innovation in the provision of town infrastructure. Blackpool Council meetings were reported in depth in local newspapers, such as the *Blackpool Gazette & Herald*, which recognised its instrumental role. In a 1923 speech by the Mayor to the Blackpool and District Share Exchange annual dinner, it was stated that 'Blackpool's present position as the lowest rated borough and the important schemes which had been carried through would have been impossible without the excellent service of the Corporation officials.'⁷⁴ A key example of this contribution came from John Charles Robinson, the Borough Architect, who moved between 1920 and 1944 from a classical to a more modernist approach to the resort's infrastructure projects. Key developments of this period included the opening of Stanley Park (1926) and the Cabin Lift (1930) on

⁷¹ Brodie and Whitfield, p. 89.

⁷² Regan and Hazlehurst, pp. 133-4.

⁷³ BHC, LP51, Blackpool Borough Council Minutes, 1974/75, Minute 3, p. 83.

⁷⁴ 'Corporation Officials Defended', *Blackpool Gazette and Herald*, 23 January 1923, p. 2.

North Shore.⁷⁵ In addition, during the 1930s, Blackpool's tram system was the subject of significant further investment. Commissioned in 1933, a new fleet of trams was brought to the network by its controller, Walter Luff. This acquisition laid a basis for the longer-term survival of Blackpool's tram network.⁷⁶ Local authority investment in infrastructure and support from the local businesses meant that the resort continued to expand its tourist industry.

If the interwar period saw the continued growth of municipal intervention, the private sector still provided the core of the entertainment provision. There was still a strong relationship between the two, as evidenced at a council meeting in 1938 where one councillor declared: 'If there is a councillor who has no Tower shares, he is either unlucky or unwise.' That year, the Council included four hotel owners and seven company directors (five from hotels).⁷⁷ Gary Cross has pointed out the irony of the importance of the municipality in a town dedicated to free-market principles. He also notes a characteristic tone of self-congratulation, which fused the Corporation with 'the town'.⁷⁸ Although this may be true, it also expresses a confidence and sense of civic pride that would be increasingly absent in later decades.

The relationship between the local authority and business interests was not always harmonious despite these connections between the Blackpool Council and private enterprises. An example of conflict occurred in 1936 when Blackpool Pleasure Beach objected to a programme of entertainment in Stanley Park with a scheme to encourage early-season holidays. Despite a previously good relationship between Blackpool Council and the Pleasure Beach, Leonard Thompson, the managing director of Blackpool Pleasure Beach between 1929 and 1976, closed the amusement park in protest. Thompson argued that early season opening was barely profitable without the Corporation sponsoring its own attractions. Thompson felt he was effectively subsidising a rival because the Pleasure Beach was one of Blackpool's most significant business ratepayers.⁷⁹ The Council was also criticised for wasteful spending, such as in 1935 when

⁷⁵ Brodie and Whitfield, pp. 99-100.

⁷⁶ IMDb, 'Perpetual Motion' *The Blackpool Tram* (TV Episode 1992) (2021) <<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt2231559/>> [accessed 20 October 2021].

⁷⁷ Gary S. Cross, ed, *Worktowners at Blackpool: Mass-Observation and Popular Leisure in the 1930s* (London; New York: Routledge, 1990), pp. 206-7.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 235.

⁷⁹ Turner and Palmer, p. 105.

it commissioned the building of the Derby Baths indoor swimming pool. The *Lancashire Evening Post* ran with the headline, 'Blackpool Council to Buy Baths Site – Cries of "Another White Elephant" During the Debate'.⁸⁰ This indicates that support for municipal intervention was by no means unanimous in the resort, at least at the proposal stage.

Further conflicts concerning local authority spending emerged after the Second World War. As Walton notes, after the Second World War, the high representation of development-related professionals among the councillors fostered a climate of suspicion and factionalism in the Council.⁸¹ A threat to the established order of municipal conservatism emerged during the mid-1950s when the minority Liberal group accused Conservative councillors of bribery and corruption. The Conservatives strongly contested the claims and argued that it was merely a political stunt by the Liberals to gain votes. Alderman Alfred Salisbury, quoted in the *Halifax Evening Courier* in June 1956, stated, 'I am the person, I believe, who has been hurt the most. People of the town are convinced that I sold land to the Corporation to the value of £30,000. I want it to be clearly understood that I have not and that I would resign if a case could be proved against me'.⁸² Although claims of individual corruption were not substantiated in February 1958, an all-party committee of the Corporation reported that more than a quarter of a million pounds' worth of business had been transacted between individual councillors and the Corporation.⁸³ The Conservative Party agent also highlighted the close relationship between the ruling Conservatives and Blackpool's business community in his 1954 annual report. In this report, he asked for the authority to write to the Directors of the Tower and Winter Gardens for the free use of the Tower and to approach other local businesses for donations to the local Conservative Party.⁸⁴ These connections between the tourist industry and the resort's dominant political group underline that municipal conservatism continued influencing local decision-making in the post-Second World War era. In the final local elections before the 1974

⁸⁰ 'Blackpool Council to Buy Baths Site', *Lancashire Evening Post*, 6 March 1935, p. 7.

⁸¹ Walton, *Blackpool*, p. 156.

⁸² 'Blackpool Council Votes for an Inquiry', *Halifax Evening Courier*, 7 June 1956, p. 2.

⁸³ Walton, *Blackpool*, p. 156.

⁸⁴ LA, PLC/5/3/1, Blackpool Conservative Association, Executive Committee Minutes Book, 21 Feb 1947-24 Oct 1963.

reorganisation in May 1969, the Conservatives gained an additional three seats taking their total to fifty-eight councillors out of a possible sixty-eight.⁸⁵ The Conservatives remained popular in the resort, and the ruling party's dominance would not be seriously challenged for another twenty years. This electoral success indicates that most voters in Blackpool were content with the approach that the local authority took to resort management.

Although the population growth rate in Blackpool had slowed, the Council sought to 'modernise' aspects of the town's infrastructure.⁸⁶ In 1961 the town's population peaked at 153,185, and in 1962 the Council proposed an ambitious town-centre redevelopment scheme with tiered promenades and high-rise buildings. Except for a few buildings, such as Blackpool Tower, it would have meant the removal of the town centre's Victorian and Edwardian infrastructure. As this redevelopment began, however, the original plan was abandoned by Blackpool Council in favour of a piecemeal approach.⁸⁷ During this decade, there was also a long-running debate about what to do with the old airport site near Stanley Park.⁸⁸ In the early 1960s, the Conservative government planned a new university for the North-West of England, and Blackpool Council were keen for it to be built in the town. The old airport site was visited on 27 April 1961, and it was stated afterwards that the University Council, led by the chair of Lancashire County Council, were 'suitably impressed.' Despite the offer of £50,000 from the Council, Lancaster was chosen instead.⁸⁹ Other potential schemes, such as a permanent circus site and a hoverport, fell through. Finally, Blackpool Council opened a municipal zoo at the location of the proposed university in 1972.⁹⁰ Before 1974 this would prove Blackpool Council's most significant post-war development. Although Blackpool Zoo has survived to the present day, albeit now in private ownership, a new University in the town would have had a dramatic effect. With the growth and impact of Lancaster University, this seems to have been a lost opportunity for the resort and

⁸⁵ 'Election Results-How the Boroughs Voted', *Daily Mirror*, 9 May 1969, p. 2.

⁸⁶ Mayor of Blackpool, Alderman Ernest Machin, 'Glad you're back!', *West Lancashire Evening Gazette*, 6 August 1959, p. 13.

⁸⁷ Brodie and Whitfield, p. 20.

⁸⁸ Walton, *Blackpool*, p. 154.

⁸⁹ 'University Council Tours Four Sites', *Halifax Evening Courier*, 27 April 1961, p. 9.

⁹⁰ Walton, *Blackpool*, p. 154.

may have been influenced by the fact that Blackpool had de-facto independence from Lancashire County Council, whereas Lancaster City Council did not.

The debate over local government reform, which developed during the 1960s, undermined the authority's ability to undertake long-term planning. Blackpool's hostility to the changes proposed in 1971 was based on the transfer of services traditionally provided by the County Borough, such as education, to the new Lancashire County Council. The authority had been more favourably inclined towards the changes proposed by the previous Labour Government as this would have given Blackpool a dominant position in a Fylde Unitary Area. Blackpool's councillors voted to reject the 1971 proposals and urged the Conservative Members of Parliament for Blackpool North and Blackpool South to take every step to oppose them.⁹¹ Blackpool Council committed fifty thousand pounds following this decision to campaign against these changes. Their fight against the proposals was critically undermined, however, as neighbouring authorities such as Lytham St Annes did not support Blackpool's approach.⁹² Blackpool Council, therefore, became subordinate to Lancashire County Council in 1974 for the first time in seventy years. The senior *West Lancashire Evening Gazette* reporter Eric Littler criticised the loss of autonomy and wrote, 'I see it as a sad occasion for Blackpool. A demoting of a proud county borough to inferior status – for what? I wish I knew.'⁹³ However, the reduced status of the local authority was mitigated initially by the fact that the new leader of Lancashire County Council, Leonard Broughton, was from Blackpool. Also, unlike in Lytham St Annes and especially Morecambe and Heysham, local government boundaries were not changed, and primary responsibility for tourism remained under its control. As will be shown in subsequent chapters, this was a significant reason Blackpool exhibited greater resilience to a declining domestic market in the 1970s and 1980s than other resorts.

⁹¹ BHC, LP51, Blackpool Borough Council Minutes 1971, 25 February 1971, Minute No.19, p. 136.

⁹² BHC, LP51, Blackpool Borough Council Minutes 1971, 29 April 1971, Minute No.5, p. 323.

⁹³ Eric Littler, 'D-day today for Blackpool town council...and what of tomorrow?', *West Lancashire Evening Gazette*, 27 March 1974, p. 10.

2.2.3 Morecambe and Heysham

Morecambe emerged as a tourist destination in the mid-nineteenth century when the railway was extended to the town, making it more accessible to visitors. However, Morecambe grew more slowly than Blackpool until the 1920s, when the local government became more active. Morecambe developed from the fishing villages of Poulton, Bare and Torrisholme, with legislation to change the name passed in 1881.⁹⁴ Between 1852 and 1894, before Morecambe Urban District Council was established, local government was controlled by a local board of health. In 1902 Morecambe was granted a charter and became a borough. From this point onwards, an increasing range of public services was provided by local government, including gas and electricity.⁹⁵ Unlike Blackpool, Morecambe Borough Council had a much smaller population and, consequently, more limited financial and administrative resources. According to the 1911 Census, the population of Morecambe's local government district was only 12,131 compared to Blackpool's 58,371.⁹⁶ This limited the amount of revenue that Morecambe Council could raise through local taxation and restricted the level of municipal enterprise before the First World War. As a result, the local authority focussed on making the promenade the town's focal point. This included new shelters and bandstands costing twenty thousand pounds and funded through local taxation.⁹⁷ Like Blackpool, in 1908, Morecambe's local authority also took over the private tramway which ran along the seafront (this had been in operation since 1887). With a more limited financial base than Blackpool, these tramways were not electrified and would be phased out by the local authority in favour of buses by 1924.⁹⁸

In the inter-war period, as the resort's population grew rapidly, the Morecambe and Heysham Council embarked upon an unprecedented investment in the town's infrastructure. Between 1911 and 1961, Morecambe's population grew by 223 per cent

⁹⁴ Great Britain, Ordnance Survey, and Lynn Wilman, *Morecambe, 1911* (Dunston, Gateshead: Alan Godfrey Maps, 1992).

⁹⁵ Terry Potter, *The Growth of Morecambe* (Morecambe: Morecambe Visitor, 1976), p. 8.

⁹⁶ Vision of Britain, *Morecambe UD/MB Through Time, Total Population* (2023), <https://visionofbritain.org.uk/unit10062068/cube/TOT_POP> [accessed 2 June 2023] and *Blackpool MB/CB Through Time, Total Population*, (2023) <https://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/100186766/cube/TOT_POP> [accessed 2 June 2023].

⁹⁷ Great Britain, Ordnance Survey, and Wilman.

⁹⁸ Thomas W.W Knowles, *Morecambe Bay's Municipal Buses, 1908-1983* (Lancaster: Sharpe, 1983), p. 7.

to 40,228.⁹⁹ Jarratt notes that a significant proportion of this population growth was due to retirees moving to the resort, creating potential conflict with tourists.¹⁰⁰ However, this was not necessarily a negative development, as the revenue from local rates grew and spending increased on municipal services, such as buses. This increased revenue, in turn, allowed Morecambe and Heysham Council to improve its spending and borrowing power. This growth in population during the early twentieth century enabled the local authority to develop Morecambe and Heysham as a tourist resort. In Bingham's *Lost Resort*, he titles the period between 1919 and 1939 as 'the golden gate of enterprise'.¹⁰¹ He describes Morecambe's councils of the 1920s and 1930s as 'hard-headed, obstreperous, frequently philistine, (and) dominantly Tory.'¹⁰² However, Bingham does acknowledge that their business background encouraged an enterprise culture that shaped the resort. In contrast to his judgement on Morecambe's fortunes in the later twentieth century, he also emphasises the importance of local decision-making.

Morecambe also increased its administrative capacity in the years following World War One with the appointment of its first full-time Town Clerk (Joseph Entwistle) in 1920. Over the following sixteen years, he was responsible for guiding the administration of the rapidly growing resort. The Morecambe Corporation Act of 1924 further empowered the Corporation and, in the words of R.C. Quick, 'literally opened the door to the vast programme of municipal enterprise'.¹⁰³ Having been suggested by a local resident, the corporate motto, 'Beauty surrounds, health abounds', was adopted in 1925.¹⁰⁴ Applied, first to Morecambe and then to Morecambe and Heysham (following the amalgamation of the two resorts in 1928), it was used in marketing campaigns and promotional materials until 1974. The slogan resonated, as shown in the following evocative report/advertorial printed in the *Belfast Witness* newspaper in 1929:

⁹⁹ Potter, p. 9.

¹⁰⁰ David Jarratt, 'The Development and Decline of Morecambe in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries: A Resort Caught in the Tide,' *Journal of Tourism History*, 11.3 (2019), 263-83 (p. 269).

¹⁰¹ Roger Bingham, *Lost Resort? The Flow and Ebb of Morecambe* (Milnthorpe: Cicerone Press, 1990), p. 164.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 169.

¹⁰³ R.C. Quick, p. 33.

¹⁰⁴ 'Morecambe Schemes,' *Lancashire Evening Post*, 28 April 1925, p. 6.

‘Beauty surrounds, health abounds’ is Morecambe’s heraldic motto and in these four words, is epitomised its chief claims to distinction as a holiday centre. Who, having seen Morecambe Bay placid and clear, with the amazing panorama of hills and mountains stretching as far as eye reach, can deny the splendour? The view is ever changing, gay in many hued variations, sombre and grey or resplendent in crimson and purple as the declining sun sets—but always entrancingly beautiful. Then of the land behind—rich in natural loveliness. The Vale of Lune has few rivals, its grandeur and the majestic foliage fully warranting the eulogies of Ruskin, who was born and spent many of his days in the Lakeland district. It is claimed that few resorts can surpass Morecambe for the genuine true properties and health-giving quality of its climate. The high salubrity—the ozone content—is at once soothing and bracing and a delightful sense of exhilaration is felt immediately.¹⁰⁵

Morecambe appointed its first Advertising and Entertainment manager to compete with other resorts in 1928.¹⁰⁶ The Health Resorts and Watering Places Act of 1936 expanded the scope of municipal advertising, stating that ‘councils of municipal boroughs were empowered to advertise the amenities of their towns as a health resort or watering place in any manner they think fit’. For this purpose, they could incur expenditure not exceeding the product of a rate of 3d in the £.¹⁰⁷ With additional funding, the effort to promote the resort to potential visitors was given further impetus from the Publicity and Entertainment Department of Morecambe and Heysham Borough Council in target areas such as Glasgow and Bradford.¹⁰⁸ Council advertising and positive media coverage in this period raised the profile of Morecambe and Heysham across the United Kingdom. In turn, the new visitors it attracted increased the municipal income for further spending.

Despite these developments, the overall success of the local authority in this period was disputed by contemporary commentators. Jarratt has pointed out that these observers were often critical of Morecambe Corporation’s performance, particularly in the 1920s. Criticisms included heavy local taxation and ill-judged spending. He argues

¹⁰⁵ ‘A Fine Holiday Centre, Seas, Mountains, Charms of Go-A-Head Morecambe,’ *The Witness (Belfast)*, 5 July 1929, p. 5. However, the positive report was published as a result of an LMS Press promotion and not independently.

¹⁰⁶ R.C. Quick, p. 34.

¹⁰⁷ *Health Resorts and Watering Places Act, 1936* (26 Geo 5 & 1 Edw 8, c 48) (London: HMSO) pp. 1-2.

¹⁰⁸ Recording Morecambe Bay, *Oral history interview with John Owen, Publicity and Entertainment Department in Morecambe Town Hall* (2018), <https://www.recordingmorecambabay.org.uk/content/catalogue_item/oral-history-interview-john-owen> [accessed 18 August 2018].

that this changed in the 1930s with an improving national economic situation.¹⁰⁹ However, as noted in the case of Blackpool, vocal opposition often existed concerning local authority spending and taxation. Letters to the local press did not necessarily reflect broader public opinion in the resort, and this negative view of the authority was not reflected in local election results after 1919. In contrast, Sonya Dryden makes the alternative case that the 1919 election proved to be a turning point for the authority and the resort. This election saw the emergence of a 'progressive' coalition, who won council seats in the so-called 'new blood' Election, with these new councillors making the most of their resources and forging links with private enterprises to enact a civic vision for the town.¹¹⁰ This election contrasts strongly with others held in later decades, as each ward was contested, and only one of six retiring councillors was re-elected. It ushered in an extended period of political stability, as there would be no similar turnover of councillors until the 1970s.

The success of the local authority is underlined by the fact that Morecambe and Heysham grew more rapidly in the 1920s than any other Lancashire resort. The local authority purchased the central section of the foreshore from the Duchy of Lancaster in 1921 and built Sandylands Promenade. In addition, against a background of national economic depression, the council constructed a new coastal road from central Morecambe northwards.¹¹¹ Census evidence shows that the population within the combined Morecambe and Heysham authority area grew by 8.9 per cent between 1921 and 1931, compared to 1.9 per cent in Blackpool. In addition, the growth of municipal transport in Morecambe during the 1920s saw the numbers working in this sector increase by 13.1 per cent.¹¹² According to the Borough Surveyor, the numbers arriving by motor transport also increased from 17,246 in August 1923 to 50,004 in August 1928.¹¹³ There was also a significant expansion of municipal parks, with Regents Park (1925) and Happy Mount Park (1927) opening in this decade.¹¹⁴ Other local authority-

¹⁰⁹ Jarratt, p. 270.

¹¹⁰ Sonya Dryden, 'The New Blood Election of 1919 and Morecambe between the Wars' (unpublished master's dissertation, Lancaster University, 2016), p. 5.

¹¹¹ Potter, p. 21.

¹¹² 'A Vision of Britain through Time | Your National On-Line Library for Local History | Maps, Statistics, Travel Writing and More' <<https://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/>> [accessed 6 May 2020].

¹¹³ LA, MBMO-HE, Morecambe and Heysham Borough Council Minutes 1928/29, Minute 2695, p. 555.

¹¹⁴ Bingham, p. 173.

funded schemes in the 1920s included improving the beaches by importing additional sand and a joint advertising campaign with the LMS railway.¹¹⁵ Therefore, the rapid development of Morecambe in the 1920s was strongly influenced by the local authority's actions. A council-produced pamphlet celebrated these achievements dramatically when the coastal road was officially opened in 1933. The following extract sums up the guiding principles and philosophy of the Council during this period of expansion:

The opening up of dormant areas and the expansion of the borough means more roads, more houses, more rates! Many residents are out for a Greater Morecambe, with more home attractions so that our visitors will not say that Morecambe is a nice place for apartments and a convenient place for excursions in the district. Let us cater to keep visitors in the town during the greater part of the holiday so that we may have more prosperity and our visitors more rest and enjoyment. The extension of the boundary east, to Hest Bank, southwards to the Lune and west to Sunderland Point must be our determined aim!¹¹⁶

This determination to expand the resort and compete with neighbours such as Blackpool led to the local authority purchasing the old harbour site from LMS and constructing the Super Swimming Stadium later in the 1930s.¹¹⁷ The impact of this investment was reflected in the growth of the municipal bus company during the 1930s. The number of passengers on Morecambe's buses grew from 5.4 million in 1931 to 8.4 million by 1939. This was even more remarkable as Morecambe and Heysham Bus services did not run into neighbouring Lancaster!¹¹⁸ The growth in the popularity of Morecambe is also demonstrated by the significant additional number of visitors arriving by rail. According to figures from the London Midland and Scottish Railway (LMS), the number of tickets collected at Morecambe had risen from 645,793 in 1933 to 995,483 by 1937.¹¹⁹ These figures support the argument that municipal investment during the 1920s and 1930s significantly boosted Morecambe's tourist industry.

¹¹⁵ LA, MBMO-HE, Morecambe and Heysham Borough Council Minutes 1928/29, Minutes 1055. p. 225, and 2144, p. 446.

¹¹⁶ Lancaster, Lancaster Central Library, *A.W. Gorton, Myr-Cwm - Morecambe* (Morecambe and Heysham Council, 1933), EO2/MOR.

¹¹⁷ Barry Guise and Pam Brook, *Morecambe's White Hope* (Lancaster: Palatine Books, 2008), p. 15.

¹¹⁸ Knowles, p. 37.

¹¹⁹ LA, MBMO-HE/ACC6430/34/1, Railway statistics, of tickets collected at Morecambe, 1933-1939.

The Second World War blocked further significant municipal developments until the 1960s, as did a highly costly sewerage scheme.¹²⁰ Despite the financial constraints on Morecambe and Heysham Council, a series of record summers occurred during the 1950s. By 1956, 12.9 million passengers travelled on municipal buses, before a steady decline to 6.3 million by 1974.¹²¹ The rise in car ownership and the reduction of rail services undoubtedly impacted the numbers travelling by bus, especially those arriving for a day visit.¹²² Following the example of Blackpool, Morecambe organised annual Illuminations, attracting hundreds of thousands on special excursion trains during the 1950s.¹²³ Although the Illuminations continued until the 1990s, the decline of rail services to Morecambe became a significant factor in the resort's ability to compete with rivals. Morecambe had depended on railway visitors since the 1880s, but by the 1960s, its rail services were under threat. A clear signal of emerging problems was highlighted in a letter from the travel manager of the Eastern Region of British Rail to Morecambe and Heysham Council in August 1962:

You will appreciate that at holiday times, we have great difficulty in meeting our rolling stock commitments and several excursions had to be cancelled, including those to Morecambe. I feel I must say that the problem of stock is one which will inevitably grow more acute each year.¹²⁴

Morecambe had been served by two railway stations: Morecambe Euston Road and Morecambe Promenade.¹²⁵ However, with increasing traffic on British roads, rail passengers fell rapidly in the 1960s and 1970s.¹²⁶ Regional lines were cut by British Rail, and investment focussed on inter-city travel. Although Euston Road station was closed in 1962, the track removal and demolition were not completed until 1971. This left an unsightly area in the centre of the resort.¹²⁷ Although the Council protested these

¹²⁰ R.C. Quick, p. 44. The improvement scheme began in 1939. It took twenty-six years to complete, costing over £2.5 million.

¹²¹ Knowles, p. 11.

¹²² Stuart Riley, 'Morecambe Study, 1971; Pilot Survey of Staying Visitors' (Lancaster: University of Lancaster, 1971). Figures from the 1971 survey show fifty-six per cent of visitors surveyed for day trips arrived by car compared to twenty-nine per cent by bus and fourteen per cent by train.

¹²³ Jarratt, p. 271.

¹²⁴ LA, MBMO-HE/ACC6430/28/4, Letter from British Rail Eastern Region to Morecambe and Heysham Council, August 1962.

¹²⁵ Guise and Brook, p. 11.

¹²⁶ Brian Haresnape, *British Rail, 1948-1978* (Shepperton: Ian Allan, 1979), pp.167-68.

¹²⁷ 'Rail Track to Go', *Morecambe Visitor*, 18 April 1971.

cutbacks, they had negligible impact on the decision-making of British Rail during this period, indicating the declining influence of local government.

With increasing signs of declining visitor numbers in the mid-1960s, Lancaster University's Marketing Department proposed conducting a visitor survey. However, despite correspondence and a meeting at the end of 1967, no further progress was made on the proposal for three years.¹²⁸ The issue of cost was the primary motivating factor for the delay. This research would have proved pioneering if it had proceeded, as it was not until 1969 that the country's leading holiday region was subject to a visitor survey. Had this work been undertaken by Lancaster University in 1967/68, a tourism strategy based on its findings could have led to a more informed, forward-thinking approach and pre-empted the decline in visitor numbers of the 1970s. Instead, major decisions facing Morecambe and Heysham Council between 1968 and 1972 were either delayed or founded on limited knowledge of the resort's tourist base.

In the final years of Morecambe and Heysham Council, a partnership with Lancaster University did emerge. Between 1972 and 1973, the Tourism Research Unit of Lancaster University conducted ten different surveys covering day visitors, summer visitors, non-holiday makers, accommodation, and occupancy levels.¹²⁹ Lancaster University set aside some funds earmarked for research projects in the university to benefit local authorities. With this funding, Stuart Riley, from the Marketing Department, established a tourism research unit.¹³⁰ The *Manchester Evening News* ran a full-page article based on Riley's research headed 'Coasting Downhill'. Much of the coverage portrayed the resort negatively, with Morecambe described in the newspaper as 'not very pleasant'. However, Riley pointed out that tourism could be revived in the resort with enhanced support from the local authority.¹³¹ This indicates that despite the problems identified in the survey, Riley did not consider the decline of tourism inevitable.

¹²⁸ LA, MBMO-HE, Morecambe and Heysham Borough Council Minutes 1970-71, Minute 765, 23 November 1970.

¹²⁹ UK Data Service, *Morecambe Study* (2019)

<<https://beta.ukdataservice.ac.uk/datacatalogue/studies/#!?Search=morecambe%20study&Page=1&Rows=10&Sort=1&DateFrom=1753&DateTo=2019>> [accessed 11 February 2019].

¹³⁰ Marion E. McClintock, *Shaping the Future: A History of The University of Lancaster 1961-2011* (Lancaster: University of Lancaster, 2011), p. 308.

¹³¹ Pat Roberts, 'Coasting Downhill', *Manchester Evening News*, 12 January 1973, p. 10.

Despite falling visitor numbers, Morecambe continued to offer a wide range of municipally supported attractions. The Swimming Stadium, Harbour Band Arena and Illuminations were long-standing commitments dating back to the middle of the century. However, these were added to as Morecambe and Heysham Council took ownership of an 'Oceanarium' called Marineland and a leisure park called New Heysham Head during the late 1960s. In the *Liverpool Echo* on 21 July 1973, a report by a local journalist, Arthur Johnson, spoke in glowing terms about both of these local authority-supported attractions saying, 'There are two massive attractions that took me completely by surprise: the magnificent oceanarium and the massive entertainment centre – New Heysham Head.'¹³² However, Riley concluded that if tourism were to die, the effect on the town would be the same as the closure of the Clydeside shipyards in Glasgow.¹³³ At this pivotal moment, however, when a clear focus on the future of tourism in Morecambe and Heysham was required, local government reorganisation significantly weakened the ability of local politicians to respond.

Before 1974, the local authority primarily responsible for promoting tourism to the resort was Morecambe and Heysham Council, a municipal borough. In 1970/71, it spent £795,230 on all its services, with £191,876 (twenty-four per cent) on tourism spending.¹³⁴ From 1974, promoting tourism in Morecambe would no longer be a central focus for the local authority. Councillors representing wards in the resort needed to win support from Lancaster to determine policy. Plans to regenerate Lancaster as a service centre with an appeal to tourists from the 1980s involved a shift of investment at the expense of Morecambe. Although located next to each other, Morecambe, Heysham, and Lancaster had surprisingly few interactions before 1974, with almost no joint planning for providing services. This lack of local authority coordination would cause significant problems in the post-merger era. As local government underwent reorganisation, the focus shifted away from Morecambe to Lancaster, diluting efforts to support the tourism industry in Morecambe.

¹³² Arthur Johnson, 'Holiday Town '73 - Seaside Town has new life', *Liverpool Echo*, 21 July 1973, p. 8.

¹³³ Bingham, p. 292.

¹³⁴ LA, MBMO-HE/ACC 6430, Minutes of Morecambe and Heysham Borough Council 1970-71, Minute 359, 20 July 1970, p. 87.

2.2.4 Lytham St Annes

Local government had only a limited role in the early development of Lytham and St Annes as seaside resorts. Lytham, the older of the two, has a history dating back to the twelfth century and was initially a fishing and farming community. On the other hand, St Annes-on-Sea developed in the late nineteenth century as a purpose-built resort town.¹³⁵ The early growth of these locations as tourist destinations was due to the actions of private landowners and companies. Lytham was the first significant seaside resort in Lancashire, attracting visitors from the late 1700s.¹³⁶ As the destination which developed earliest, and in the absence of local government, the entrepreneurial skills of the Clifton family were most significant in setting the tone of the resort.¹³⁷ Perkin argues that this tone was underpinned by the social character of the resident community, which came into existence there and the elite which dominated it. This leads back to the resort's origins, the land's original distribution, and the terms and conditions under which it was sold or leased.¹³⁸ With its historic buildings and cultural heritage, Lytham St Annes developed a social tone that was defended by locals and appreciated by visitors.

A local government system emerged from the mid-nineteenth century onwards as a growing residential population demanded better infrastructure and services.¹³⁹ In 1847 the Lytham Improvement Act established a board of commissioners who played an essential role in the development of Lytham in the late 1800s, developing a sewerage system, paving and roads.¹⁴⁰ Except for Lowther Gardens (1878) and the pier pavilion (1892), there were no significant additions to the resort's attractions, and instead, the new Lytham Urban District Council, which was established in 1894, deliberately limited their range to deter the 'wrong' type of visitor, with all amusements (from 1904) limited to the Pier. As Kath Brown argues, from this point onwards, Lytham focussed its tourism

¹³⁵ Kath Brown, *Lytham St Anne's: The Reluctant Resorts* (Preston: Lancashire County Books, 1992), pp. 1-2.

¹³⁶ R. A Haley, *Lytham St Anne's: A Pictorial History* (Chichester: Phillimore, 1995), p. 11.

¹³⁷ Brown, p. 33.

¹³⁸ Perkin, p. 185.

¹³⁹ According to census returns Lytham's resident population grew from 230 in 1811 to 1,024 by 1841. Vision of Britain, *Lytham SubD through Time, Population Statistics, Population Change* (2021), <https://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10544981/cube/POP_CHANGE> [accessed 18 November 2021].

¹⁴⁰ Haley, p. 13.

policy on the town's walkways, with elegant seating and shelters built to attract 'visitors of quality'.¹⁴¹ With the emergence of St Annes a few miles along the coast and the dominance of Blackpool, Lytham UDC developed policies designed to please the residential population and appeal to longer-staying visitors who preferred peace and quiet rather than working-class day-trippers.

St Annes developed as a more typical late Victorian seaside resort than Lytham. In 1874, wealthy east Lancashire landowner Elijah Hargreaves leased six hundred acres of land from the Clifton family. He formed the St Annes on the Sea Land and Building Company to plan and build a model resort to attract wealthy visitors.¹⁴² The lease was for 1,100 years to create a new resort, including a hotel, a railway station, a pier, and a promenade.¹⁴³ The Land and Building Company enforced strict covenants to ensure that all development was of the highest standard. However, this venture launched by a private enterprise was not as successful as hoped. By 1892 it had become apparent that St Annes could not compete with neighbouring Lytham or Blackpool, either in the number of attractions it could offer or the amount of capital available to provide pleasure facilities.¹⁴⁴ As a result, the emerging local government of the town increasingly began to take the lead in the development of the resort. In its earliest years, St Annes came under the jurisdiction of the Lytham Commissioners, but from 1878 the town elected its board of health. As the town grew, the board's part in the town's affairs grew, and the influence of Thomas Bradley, appointed Clerk in March 1887, was a critical factor in the increasingly interventionist local government of the district. Bradley continued in position when the local Board of Health became St Annes Urban District Council in 1894, and he became the first Town Clerk when the Charter of Incorporation was obtained in 1922.¹⁴⁵ A cautious approach was taken to borrowing, unlike the Land and Building Company, which was dramatically in debt. Bradley believed in the proverb 'He that goes a-borrowing goes a-sorrowing', and the chief concern of the members was

¹⁴¹ Brown, p. 33.

¹⁴² Ibid., p. 2.

¹⁴³ Fylde Council, *Neighbourhood Profile Report* (2019), <<https://new.fylde.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Neighbourhood-Profile-Report-Part-2.pdf>> [Accessed 17 November 2021].

¹⁴⁴ Paul Stanton Peers, 'The Development of St Annes-on-the-Sea as a Residential Town and Watering Place 1874-1914' (unpublished master's dissertation, Lancaster University, 1979), p. 49.

¹⁴⁵ Gabriel Harrison, *Rage of Sand: The Story of the Men Who Built Their Own Seaside Town*. (London: Benn, 1971), p. 131.

to keep down the rates.¹⁴⁶ Despite the expansion of local government in the first half of the twentieth century, this fiscal conservatism would continue to be a significant feature of local politics in the resort.

As well as actual and perceived financial constraints, the Land and Building Company also played a significant role in restricting and influencing the development of St Annes. The Company Chairman Gabriel Harrison documented this role in his history of St Annes, *Rage of Sand – the Story of the Men Who Built their Own Seaside Town*, published in 1971. In this book, he was keen to highlight the determination and energy of the Land and Building Company directors. The role of St Annes UDC was expanded through the provision of public services, and it acquired the promenade and the foreshore and even provided an ice cream stall on the beach. The assignment of the Promenade and Foreshore by the Land and Building Company to the Council in 1896, however, expressed the following restrictions:

Upon the use of the seashore fronting the Promenade for public entertainments, concert or band or other performance of any kind, etcetera, the erection of permanent or temporary stalls for the sale of any article or commodity of any description, public meetings, etcetera, and the hawking or vending of oysters or any other fish.¹⁴⁷

These restrictions remained in place throughout the life of the Lytham St Annes council, with the ice cream stall on the beach being an exception. Thus, as Harrison explained, ‘the promenade at St Annes, for a distance of over one mile was perhaps unique in the country since visitors are unable to purchase any article or refreshment ‘other than an ice cream’. He noted that the early Directors of the Land and Building Company had the ‘foresight’ to retain almost a complete monopoly for the Pier in providing public entertainments.¹⁴⁸ This meant that the promenade at St Annes would be quite different from that of Blackpool, a few miles along the coast, with the lack of public houses serving alcoholic drinks and other amusements being a significant (and deliberate) deterrent to working-class visitors.

Elections occurred for the first St Annes Urban District Council in December 1894. According to Shakeshaft, party politics did not appear to have played any significant

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 132.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 134.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 134.

role.¹⁴⁹ This would be true in the resort until the 1920s when, as in Blackpool and Morecambe, the Conservative Party established a dominant position.¹⁵⁰ These new councillors had little connection to the old parish of Lytham or the Clifton family.¹⁵¹ Instead, these early councillors largely came from the business community elsewhere in Lancashire. They desired to give a fresh impetus to the resort, which had struggled to grow in line with the Land and Building Company's plans in its early years.¹⁵² An early clash with the Company came over the future of public gardens in the resort. St George's Gardens (Ashton Gardens) remained the only recreational area for the town until 1898. In 1900 the only other place, apart from the Esplanade, laid out by the Council were the planned slopes near the railway station, which became known as 'the Plantation'.¹⁵³ To give fresh impetus to the development of the town and to overcome some of the restrictions on the Council, the St Annes on the Sea Improvement Act of 1914 advocated favourable policies towards tourism, and unlike Lytham, St Annes wanted to develop some entertainment in the town, although not on the same scale, as Blackpool.¹⁵⁴ As Blackpool grew to the north, encouraging an increasingly working-class visitor base, developers in St Annes sought to maintain the more refined social tone envisioned by its founders.

A key motivation for the Improvement Act of 1914 had been the battle over the future of St Georges (later Ashton) gardens. The Land and Building Company had established these in the 1870s, but they proved to be loss-making, and in 1896 they were leased to the leading local building company, who stopped maintaining them and built over a portion. St Annes UDC sought to buy the gardens, but because the Company would not agree on terms, they sought a Parliamentary Bill to give them the power to acquire the land free of restrictions.¹⁵⁵ Controversy over the scheme's cost was overcome through the intervention of Lancaster's Lord Ashton, who purchased the

¹⁴⁹ Peter Shakeshaft, *St Anne's on the Sea: A History* (Lancaster: Carnegie, 2008), pp. 198–99.

¹⁵⁰ 'Municipal Election Breeze. Political Aspect Introduced at Lytham St Annes. A Councillor's Spirited Reply' *Lancashire Evening Post*, 29 October 1925, p. 7.

¹⁵¹ Shakeshaft, p. 199.

¹⁵² Vision of Britain, *St Annes on the Sea UD through Time, Population Statistics, Population Change* (2021), <https://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10135199/cube/POP_CHANGE> [accessed 21 November 2021].

¹⁵³ Shakeshaft, p. 208.

¹⁵⁴ Brown, p. 40.

¹⁵⁵ Ashton Gardens, *History of Ashton Gardens* (2021) <<http://www.ashtongardens.org.uk/histgdn.htm>> [accessed 16 November 2021].

gardens for the resort.¹⁵⁶ This allowed for an expansion of council spending in other areas, including £140,000 on the purchase of the tramways from the Blackpool, St Anne's and Lytham Tramways Company; £93,000 on electricity works; and £80,000 on the purchase of the gas works from the St Anne's on Sea Gas Company. One of the last significant commitments of the Council was to spend over £12,000 on the open-air seawater baths in 1916.¹⁵⁷ The final meeting of the St Anne's on the Sea Urban District Council took place on 6 November 1922. In his speech, Cllr Critchley thanked the members present for their past work and expressed the opinion that 'the reputation which the town now enjoyed had been made during the last eight years.'¹⁵⁸ The impact of these changes can be seen in the growing population of the resort in this period. During the First World War, and despite losing one hundred and seventy men from St Annes due to the conflict, the number of residents had risen by seventy-four per cent between 1911 and 1921.¹⁵⁹ Overall, a combination of improved transport links, planned development, and significant municipal investment in new amenities and attractions stimulated the growth of St Annes on Sea as a seaside resort.

Despite this success, pressure grew for St Annes UDC to merge with one of its neighbouring authorities to provide a larger financial base for development. Although there was some resistance from Lytham residents, with 1,300 registered voters of Lytham opposed, the Clifton Estate and most of Lytham UDC supported the amalgamation.¹⁶⁰ Based on the 1921 census, the combined population was over twenty-six thousand, strengthening the case for a charter of incorporation and granting the new authority considerable additional powers.¹⁶¹ With the support of both district councils, the authorities merged, and the application for a charter was granted in 1922.¹⁶² The new council met for the first time on 9 November 1922, with eighteen male councillors

¹⁵⁶ 'Obituary - Lord Ashton, A Wealthy Recluse', *The Times*, 28 May 1930, p. 18.

¹⁵⁷ Shakeshaft, p. 209.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 210.

¹⁵⁹ Imperial War Museum, *St Annes on Sea* (2022), <<https://www.iwm.org.uk/memorials/item/memorial/2214#>> [accessed 23 January 2022]. In addition to those who were away fighting, 171 men are listed as killed on the St Annes War Memorial.

¹⁶⁰ 'Petition Against Fusion', *Lancashire Evening Post*, 1 April 1921, p. 4.

¹⁶¹ Vision of Britain, *St Annes on the Sea UD Through Time, Populations Statistics, Population Change* (2021), <https://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10135199/cube/POP_CHANGE> [accessed November 2021].

¹⁶² Shakeshaft, p. 216.

drawn predominantly from a business background.¹⁶³ Between 1922 and 1939, the new Lytham St Annes Council expanded its role, becoming responsible for diverse services, including electricity, gas, roads, sewers, refuse collection, parks, swimming baths and transport. Notably, for the prosperity of the resort, tourism promotion was overseen by the local authority.¹⁶⁴ In 1924, for example, growing interest in Lytham St Annes meant that the number of published guides doubled from 3,000 to 6,000.¹⁶⁵ As in Blackpool and Morecambe, these holiday guides, produced to show the range of attractions and accommodation in Lytham St Annes, played a crucial role in attracting and informing visitors.

In addition to the towns of Lytham and St Annes, the new authority also assumed responsibility for the village of Ansdell and the district of Fairhaven, both located between the two towns. The latter was created in the 1890s by Fairhaven Estates Company, between Lytham and St Annes on the coastal side of the railway and centred around a large marine lake.¹⁶⁶ In 1923 the new borough of Lytham St Annes was able to buy the lake, and the land surrounding it, with money again donated by Lord Ashton. The local authority then invested £16,500 of public funds for an extension to the Lake. This was used to construct a bathing pool, tennis courts and putting greens. The council also renamed the area Ashton Marine Park in honour of their benefactor.¹⁶⁷ After continuing confusion with Ashton Gardens in St Annes, the name reverted to Fairhaven in 1974. The Marine Park development was another indication of Lytham St Annes Corporation's aim of creating a more sophisticated environment for visitors than Blackpool's.

There would be a proposal from some councillors to merge Lytham St Annes with Blackpool in 1931 due to the financial pressures created by the Great Depression.¹⁶⁸ However, despite the promise of lower rates and increased efficiency, strong opposition

¹⁶³ LA, MBLs/acc.5401, Lytham St Annes Corporation Minutes, 1922/23, 9 November 1922, Minute 2, p. 2.

¹⁶⁴ LA, MBLs/acc.5401, Lytham St Annes Corporation Minutes, 1922/23 30 July 1923, Minute 954, p. 547.

¹⁶⁵ LA, MBLs/acc.5401, Lytham St Annes Corporation Minutes, 1923/24, 20 October 1924, Minute 993, p. 861.

¹⁶⁶ Lancashire County Council, Red Rose Collection, *Fairhaven Lake, Fairhaven, Lytham St Annes* (2022), <<https://redrosecollections.lancashire.gov.uk/view-item?i=232126>> [accessed 10 June 2022].

¹⁶⁷ LA, MBLs/acc5401, Lytham St Annes Corporation Minutes, 1924-25, 17 November 1924, Minute 117, p. 70.

¹⁶⁸ 'Greater Blackpool. The Proposed Welding of Fylde Seaboard Towns', *Lancashire Evening Post*, 30 June 1931, p. 6.

from residents and Lancashire County Council meant that Lytham St Annes Council would administer the resort until 1974. Brown notes, however, that once the local authority no longer wished the town to be linked to Blackpool, the end of the tramways in Lytham and St Annes was inevitable. By 1936, the local authority ended the tram service, emphasising the separateness of the towns.¹⁶⁹ Blackpool Corporation had offered to run the system up to St Anne's with buses to Lytham. The proposal from Blackpool was the subject of protracted discussions before being narrowly defeated by Lytham St Annes Council, which decided to abandon the whole tramway and retained control of its own motor bus department.¹⁷⁰ In this period, the local authority and the Building Company exercised public and private control as both sought to protect the resort from exploitation and maintain its peace and charm. Harrison noted that in this period, the local authority and Company's energy ensured that no longer was Lytham St Annes 'a town whose only industry is golf'.¹⁷¹ Critically, they wanted the resort to continue to appeal to wealthier visitors and did not want working-class holidaymakers pouring into Lytham St Annes.

Relations between the local authority and the Land and Building Company were not always as harmonious. Harrison noted that when Cecil Fortune, managing director of the Pier, took over in the 1960s, he was handed a carefully prepared memorandum about the office's details and the matters he must deal with. It contained this wording - 'watch the Corporation for any insidious attempts to ignore or override the Company's rights on the foreshore – the Company's solicitors must always be consulted about any move by the Corporation.'¹⁷² The Company possessed powers that could override the Corporation's planning decisions on properties within the central square mile of the resort. Harrison noted, however, that by 1971 the local authority and the Company were 'wedded to improving the town for the sake of its people.' The lack of significant post-Second World War developments probably helped this better relationship. The Borough of Lytham St Annes was responsible for all the parks, two swimming baths, recreation grounds, Lowther Pavilion, Ashton Pavilion, Fairhaven Lake, and other popular amenities but avoided new and costly developments. Harrison claimed that the Company and its

¹⁶⁹ Brown, p. 33.

¹⁷⁰ Harry Postlethwaite, *Lytham St Annes Transport*. (Glossop: Venture Pub., 2009), p. 21.

¹⁷¹ Harrison, p. 137.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 168.

staff were good friends with the council members and councillors of the Corporation and its senior officials, particularly Mr R.A. Cork, the Town Clerk, and Mr J.S. Mason, the Borough Surveyor.¹⁷³ Large and small 'c' conservatism dominated the resort in this period. When the final elections were held in 1969, the Conservative Party held twenty-seven of the thirty-two council seats available.¹⁷⁴ During this period, the authority tended to defend the status quo rather than look forward. For example, in contrast to an earlier progressive spirit, Lytham St Annes Councillors voted to uphold a ban on married women working for the Corporation in 1957, with one councillor, quoted in the *Lancashire Evening Post*, saying, 'a girl gets married to form a home I hope, and she can't form a home if working.'¹⁷⁵ This illustrates the social conservatism of councillors and their determination to maintain the status quo, which could also make them hostile to innovation and change in other areas.

Despite a lack of significant post-war innovations, the resort was broadly successful in this period due to its appeal to a more fashionable and wealthier clientele. In 1972, Lytham St Annes Council confidently celebrated the fiftieth anniversary of the merger of the two towns with a special Golden Jubilee newspaper. This publication advertised the significant number of attractions available, including a prominent advert for St Annes Pier, which still hosted a wide range of entertainment.¹⁷⁶ In the same year, the holiday brochure for the resorts proclaimed that Lytham displayed an air of 'confident permanency and charm' and that St Annes was 'stylish' compared to 'the haste and gaudiness of other neighbouring holiday resorts.'¹⁷⁷ This statement is not only a reference to Blackpool but also to Morecambe and Heysham. It shows that there was little desire in Lytham St Annes to emulate their near neighbours. Blackpool's holiday brochures of the same period emphasise that the resort has the widest possible variety of entertainment and attractions.¹⁷⁸ Blackpool had aimed for (and achieved) dominance amongst the Lancashire seaside resorts by attracting millions of working-class visitors.

¹⁷³ Haley, p. xvii.

¹⁷⁴ 'Election Results – How the Boroughs Voted', *Daily Mirror*, 9 May 1969, p. 2.

¹⁷⁵ 'Lytham Women Librarians Will Be Dismissed on Marriage', *Lancashire Evening Post*, 30 July 1957, p. 7.

¹⁷⁶ Lytham St Annes, St Annes Library, *Lytham St Annes Golden Jubilee 1922-1972*, Lytham St Annes Corporation, 1972.

¹⁷⁷ StAL, *Lytham St Annes Holiday Guide*, Lytham St Annes Corporation, 1972. p. 5.

¹⁷⁸ BHC, LE02, Blackpool Corporation, *Blackpool Official Holiday Journals 1970-74*.

Lytham St Annes had carved a niche as a quieter middle-class destination. As a result, when faced with growing competition from the 1970s, the resort faced these challenges from a different starting point.

In contrast to Blackpool and Morecambe councillors, local representatives in Lytham St Annes backed the 1974 local government reorganisation. This support was because the resort would be dominant in the new Fylde Borough Council due to the rural nature of the rest of the authority. The motion to support the new Council was passed overwhelmingly at a special meeting of the Council on 1 May 1972, saying it would be an effective and viable local government unit.¹⁷⁹ It is clear from council minutes in the final eighteen months of Lytham St Annes Council that there was a strong belief that the new authority would continue with the same approach and policies, not the least because there was a great deal of continuity with elected councillors and administration. Unlike Blackpool, which saw its powers reduced, or Morecambe, which became a junior partner to Lancaster, the population of Lytham St Annes meant that its elected representatives significantly outnumbered those of rural Fylde, with twenty-eight councillors to eighteen.¹⁸⁰ As a result, it was believed by Lytham St Annes councillors that business as usual could continue in the resort.

2.3 Conclusions – Local Government before 1974

Alongside the private sector, and reacting to a growing domestic tourism market, local government helped to create unique spaces for visitors to Blackpool, Morecambe Heysham, and Lytham St Annes before 1974. These resorts did not just passively evolve in response to wider market forces but were actively shaped by their local authority's political and economic decisions. As a result, although the Lancashire holiday resorts under examination developed close to each other, they developed distinctive tourist identities. Formed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, by 1974, these identities were very well-established. Although other factors were in play, this was due, to a significant degree, to the choices made by local authorities who could exploit the relative freedom granted to county and municipal boroughs. The effectiveness of

¹⁷⁹ LA, MBL/acc5538, Lytham St Annes Municipal Council, 'Lytham St Annes Municipal Council Minutes 1972-1973' (Lytham St Annes Municipal Council, 1972), Lancashire Archives.

¹⁸⁰ 'English Shire Districts | Elections Centre' <https://www.electionscentre.co.uk/?page_id=2397> [accessed 20 November 2021].

Lancashire County Council is debatable, and it had only a limited influence on the development of Lancashire's resorts before 1974. This was particularly true in Blackpool, which had county borough status from 1904 onwards. In Blackpool, local authority influence was most pronounced as, from the 1870s, the Council played a significant role in shaping the resort. Blackpool Council created a cycle of success, whereby increasing visitor numbers and a growing population until the 1960s generated revenues that both allowed investment in key infrastructure and, at the same time, kept local taxes low. Although the dominance of the Conservative Party and its strong links with local business interests led to accusations of corruption in the 1950s, those links meant that the authority prioritised policies that would promote further tourism growth. Although Blackpool became a second-tier authority in 1974, as I will argue in the next chapter, in tourism policy, there would be a great deal of continuity and continued success until the 1990s.

The development of Morecambe and Heysham as a major tourist resort was much slower than Blackpool's, and the most significant period of local authority involvement began in the 1920s. Following the so-called 'new blood' election of 1919 and the merger in 1928, Morecambe could, to some extent, compete with Blackpool until the early 1960s. In contrast to Blackpool, however, Morecambe was already facing significant challenges by 1974, with declining visitor numbers and increased financial support needed for key tourism attractions. There is evidence that Morecambe and Heysham Borough Council had recognised this by enlisting the help of Lancaster University's Tourism Research Unit. After reorganisation, Lancaster City Council took responsibility for the publicity and promotion of Morecambe and Heysham and subsidised most of the resort's key attractions. Whereas the old Borough Council could focus its resources on these areas, Lancaster City Council would have to balance these considerations against others in the wider district. Critically, this reorganisation made Morecambe's interests and tourism a lower priority than they had previously been. If Morecambe had been incorporated within the proposed unitary Furness and North Lancashire Authority of the Redcliffe-Maud Report (1969), it would have joined other established tourism centres in South Lakeland and have allowed much greater financial autonomy. It would be wrong to say that continued decline was inevitable by 1974, as other forms of local government had been proposed.

Lytham St Annes also lost some of its local autonomy in 1974 by creating the Fylde Borough Council. However, with its original development shaped by the Clifton family and then the St Annes Land and Building Company, the influence of local government was more limited than in Blackpool and Morecambe. In addition, Lytham St Annes Council policy was to support development that made the resort distinctive from Blackpool rather than to compete. As a result, Lytham St Annes Council was less exposed to large-scale commitments than many other seaside authorities in 1974.

Until 1974, local government units in Lancashire had broadly, if imperfectly, reflected the towns and communities they represented. This was particularly beneficial to those communities which relied on millions of holidaymakers visiting the Lancashire coast. Local government spending on publicity and transport had produced a multiplier effect, promoting private investment in these resorts. In Blackpool, Morecambe and Heysham and, to a lesser extent Lytham St Annes, the needs of the tourist industry had taken a very high priority regarding local government spending. All of this occurred during a period of rising domestic tourism numbers and decentralised policymaking. Following an approach aligned with municipal conservatism, the resorts' identity and the local authority had been almost synonymous with Corporation branding on local services for fifty years. As I will explain in the next chapter, the significant shifts after 1974 affected this alignment between local governance and resort identity, which had been carefully built up until that point.

Chapter 3 ‘Weathering the Storm?’: The Role of Local Government in Lancashire Seaside Resorts After 1974

3.1 Introduction – Local Government and Tourism After 1974

In this chapter, I analyse the changes in local government influence over tourism in Blackpool, Morecambe and Lytham St Annes since 1974. I also examine the different approaches and levels of success their local authorities have had in revitalising or maintaining the tourist industry in their area. Since the early 1970s, changes in national policy have dramatically affected how Lancashire seaside resorts have been governed. In contrast to the following political upheaval, the period before 1974 appears to have been one of relative tranquillity. This was underpinned by the comparative commercial prosperity seaside resorts then enjoyed. In this chapter, I will argue that the extensive reorganisation of 1974 posed challenges that impaired the ability of resorts to survive and thrive and, in hindsight, can be viewed as a decisive negative turning point in the history of Lancashire’s resorts. The virtual independence of county boroughs was removed, and district councils would have a secondary role within the two-tier system. Although considered large enough to be entitled to its own district authority, Blackpool lost control of key areas such as education. While tourism remained a major priority for the resort, it became more difficult for the authority to undertake significant capital spending projects. Lytham St Annes, and especially Morecambe and Heysham, were now administered by authorities, which also had to consider the needs and demands of other urban and rural areas. Finally, although not a primary function of a county council, it is notable that since 1974, Lancashire County Council has taken a much more active role in promoting tourism. Especially from the 1980s, tourism was considered a significant job provider (it was estimated in 1995 that nine per cent of jobs in Lancashire relied on tourism) and a potential vehicle for social and environmental improvements.¹ With ongoing deindustrialisation in Lancashire, development agencies were also established to promote tourism-led regeneration. While this could lead to a more coordinated approach to tourism and regeneration across Lancashire, it also eroded local decision-making within the resorts.

¹ Lancaster, Lancaster University Library, TYLEqd, Lancashire County Council, A Tourism Strategy for Lancashire, March 1995, p. 3.

The Local Government Act of 1972 reduced over a thousand borough councils into 333 district councils when implemented in 1974.² Within the new administrative boundaries of Lancashire, sixteen district councils replaced the previous mosaic of county borough, municipal borough, and urban and rural district councils.³ Unlike the previous system, the public poorly understood the roles of these new authorities, and this did not improve over time. Unhappy with the performance of local authorities, the Thatcher and Major Conservative governments introduced over one hundred and fifty pieces of legislation affecting local government between 1979 and 1994, and in the words of Tony Byrne, 'change became endemic.'⁴ In 1997, Colin Rallings and Michael Thrasher pointed out that twenty years after creating this dual system, evidence from opinion surveys confirmed that the public was mostly ignorant of the functions carried out by local authorities and puzzled about the allocation of responsibilities between the various tiers of local government.⁵ Since then, further reorganisations and policy initiatives have made this picture even more complex. Blackpool, for example, was granted unitary status in 1998, whereas the two-tier system continued in Lancaster and Fylde.⁶ Uncertainty about the future of this arrangement has grown in recent years, with a protracted debate amongst local authorities and the Conservative government about a Lancashire devolution settlement.⁷ With a lack of consensus about the future of local government, Lancashire's leaders have not been able thus far to access additional powers and resources made available in other regions.

The pressure for change has increased due to reductions in local government funding and the apparent success of city regions.⁸ Significant uncertainty about the future of local government has had important implications for long-term planning, as

² Tony Byrne, *Local Government in Britain: Everyone's Guide to How It All Works*, Penguin Law/Government, Politics, 7., rev.updated ed (London: Penguin, 2000), p. 21.

³ J.D.Marshall, 'The County Council in Retrospect', in *The History of Lancashire County Council 1889-1974*, ed. by J.D.Marshall (London: Martin Robertson & Co. Ltd, 1977), p. 378.

⁴ Byrne, p. 23.

⁵ Colin Rallings and Michael Thrasher, *Local Elections in Britain* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 2.

⁶ Great Britain and others, *Final Recommendations on the Future Local Government of Lancashire: A Report to the Secretary of State for the Environment* (London: H.M.S.O., 1994).

⁷ Lancashire Telegraph, *New Authority Proposal Threatens Devolution Consensus* (2023), <<https://www.lancashiretelegraph.co.uk/news/23564062.new-authority-proposal-threatens-lancashire-devolution-consensus/>> [accessed 4 June 2023]

⁸ Lancslive, *West LanCS Could Be Abolished and Dissolved into Merseyside or Other Lancashire Areas* (2022), <<https://www.lanCS.live/news/lancashire-news/west-lanCS-could-abolished-dissolved-23024493>> [accessed 16 February 2022].

Martin et al. found in their recent report that there has been a ‘disruptive churn of institutions and policies’ and ‘inadequate development of local policymaking capacity’.⁹ Instead, as Colin Copus has convincingly shown, the two ‘unhealthy obsessions’ that policymakers attach to local government in England emphasise continued reorganisations and preference for larger authorities, considered more efficient, effective, and cheaper.¹⁰ This focus on larger, more centralised authorities post-1974 may have created economies of scale, but at the expense of the bespoke, place-based policymaking that individual resorts needed. The impact of the structural changes ushered in by the 1972 reorganisation varied across Lancashire’s remaining resorts. Lancashire County Council became much more directly involved in coordinating tourism policy. In Blackpool, especially following the creation of a unitary authority in 1998, there has been a dramatic increase in local authority intervention. Without that place-based approach, as shown in this chapter, the resort would have shown far less resilience as a tourist destination. Therefore, although increasing limitations were put on local authorities, especially from the 1980s, Blackpool still had significant resources and policy discretion. Lancaster City Council, in contrast, has had to balance the demands of Morecambe and Heysham with those of Lancaster and the rural area, which now comprised the larger part of the authority. Within Fylde Borough Council, Lytham St Annes councillors maintained a dominant position with the new administration. The remaining local discretion allowed by the central government was also applied differently in the three resorts. From the 1990s, Blackpool has adopted a new form of municipal entrepreneurship, with council-owned businesses working in partnership with the private sector. At the same time, Lancaster City Council and Fylde Borough became less directly involved in providing tourist attractions and their associated services.

In this chapter, I explore each Lancashire authority’s ability to adapt and respond to the challenges facing English seaside resorts. The differences across these authorities

⁹ Ron Martin Gardiner, Ben and others, *Levelling up Left Behind Places: The Scale and Nature of the Economic and Policy Challenge* (2021), <<https://www.vlebooks.com/vleweb/product/openreader?id=none&isbn=9781000592900>> [accessed 7 February 2022], p. 8.

¹⁰ Colin Copus, ‘The Current State of English Local Government: Will Structure Solve All Problems?’, *Political Insight*, 9.2 (2018), 29–31.

show that the declinist model does not fit each resort.¹¹ In particular, some assumptions underpinning Richard Butler's TALC model are unhelpful, especially regarding resort rejuvenation. Rather than the complete change of attractions suggested by Butler, major regeneration projects in each of the three resorts now recognise the importance of new developments complementing the unique seaside heritage of each town.¹² Therefore, rather than providing a general explanation of decline and rejuvenation, the variety of experiences across Lancashire resorts demonstrates the need to understand the impact of place-specific factors in each location. I argue that no one-size-fits-all model exists for understanding their decline or rejuvenation and a continued need for a nuanced approach as these resorts navigate future challenges.

3.2 Lancashire local government and tourism after 1974

3.2.1 Lancashire County Council

Although the size of Lancashire County Council was dramatically reduced following the 1972 Local Government Act, its powers within its new boundaries were enhanced. In contrast to the old County Council, the new authority played an increasingly significant role in promoting tourism, especially in the 1980s. Although coastal tourism was the most important part of Lancashire's offer, the County Council also sought to develop tourism in former industrial towns as part of broader regeneration efforts. The involvement of Lancashire County Council in tourism policy caused some resentment, especially in the former county borough of Blackpool.¹³ Despite these concerns, Lancashire County Council developed important strategic and oversight functions incorporating tourism strategy during the 1980s and 1990s. With increasingly fragmented structures in the twenty-first century, Lancashire County Council has developed a pivotal role in coordinating policy with the central government and the various agencies established to promote tourism in the region. Since 1974, Lancashire

¹¹ Peter John in Kevin Ward, et al. *"Whatever Happened to Local Government? A Review Symposium."* *Regional Studies, Regional Science*, 2.1 (2015), 435–57.

¹² R.W. Butler, 'The Concept of a Tourist Area Cycle of Evolution: Implications for Management of Resources', in *The Tourism Area Life Cycle Vol.1 Applications and Modifications*, ed. by R.W. Butler (Clevedon: Channel View Publications, 2006), p. 8.

¹³ J. A Chandler, *Local Government Today* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2009), p. 22., pp. 36-9.

County Council has navigated a complex landscape of changing political control, financial constraints, and evolving responsibilities to play an increasingly strategic role in regional tourism and development. However, this has not been without controversy and challenges, particularly concerning resource allocation and long-term planning capabilities. These developments have occurred against the backdrop of local government reforms, which reduced the ability of councils to run services directly during the 1980s, and of significant cuts in local government spending since 2010.¹⁴ With serious questions relating to the future organisation and funding of local authorities like Lancashire County Council, the ability to develop longer-term plans for tourism has been impeded in recent years.

Initially, Lancashire County Council continued to play a minor role in promoting tourism in the region, with a significant shift only occurring during the 1980s. This was partly due to the changing political complexion of the authority between 1977 and 1981. In the first election in 1973, the Conservative Party had won fifty-two out of the ninety-six council seats available, and in 1977 they achieved a landslide result winning all but twelve seats. The Labour Party won control of Lancashire in May 1981 due to the initial unpopularity of the Thatcher government.¹⁵ This began a longer-term trend where the Conservative Party struggled at a local level in deindustrialising towns and cities in the North West of England and including seaside towns such as Morecambe and Blackpool. Labour then maintained its power as the largest party on the County Council until 2009, when there was evidence that this 'red wall' was beginning to crumble in smaller towns.

Lancashire's changing political complexion was aided by the increasing ability of the Labour Party to win council seats in Blackpool and Morecambe.¹⁶ The Conservative Party still dominated at the county level in Lytham St Annes, although they occasionally lost seats to independents and Liberal Democrats. For example, in St Annes, Conservative John Goldbourn lost his seat in 1981 (which he had won comfortably in

¹⁴ Institute for Government, *Local Government Funding in England* (2021), <<https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/explainers/local-government-funding-england>> [accessed 25 November 2021].

¹⁵ UK Polling Report, *Voting Intention 1979-1983* (2022), <<http://ukpollingreport.co.uk/voting-intention-1979-1983>> [accessed 23 January 2022]. An *NOP* poll conducted on the day of the May 1981 local elections gave the Labour Party a 39.3 per cent share of the vote nationally, compared to 30.9 for the Conservatives and 26.6 for the Liberals.

¹⁶ Elections Centre, *English Shire Counties* (2021), <https://www.electionscentre.co.uk/?page_id=2398> [accessed 25 November 2021].

1973 and 1977) to an independent despite appealing (in a dated manner) in his election literature to 'the married woman' to 'use your vote wisely and preserve home and workplace'. Goldbourn warned that 'a combination of socialists and independents would bring disaster to Lancashire, and if repeated in other parts of the country, lead to a collapse of orderly local government.'¹⁷ His loss illustrated that this brand of social conservatism was becoming less attractive by the 1980s. While sharing a fear of socialism with Goldbourn, more affluent voters in Lytham St Annes would also use local elections to protest vote before returning to the Conservatives in national elections to prevent a Labour government. Ironically, with the powers of local authorities increasingly constrained by the Thatcher government, many voters felt that local elections could be approached this way. With long-term voting trends in Lancashire favouring the Labour, the Party would win and maintain control of Lancashire County Council between 1981 and 2009, with a further period of power between 2013 and 2017. The range of policies available to Lancashire County Council during this period diminished as Conservative governments pursued a strategy of privatisation and deregulation of local services between 1979 and 1997. Although Lancashire's Labour councils believed in active local government to deliver policy aspirations, this reduction in local autonomy, which was not significantly reversed under the Blair and Brown governments of 1997-2010, hampered the ability of Labour-led councils to pursue their aims.

Although not as radical as others in the country, the new Labour authority sought to develop County policy in a more expansionist and interventionist direction than the Conservatives before 1981. In addition, with rising unemployment Labour saw the expansion of tourism as a vital element in providing new jobs in Lancashire. A full audit of Lancashire tourism conducted in 1981 in consultation with district authorities and the North West Tourist Board showed an early indication of interest in tourism development.¹⁸ From this time onwards, Lancashire County Council sought to develop a strategic overview for tourism, which was further developed over the next two decades. Until 1997, however, Labour councillors had to work within a local government system

¹⁷ Lytham St Annes, StAL, John Gouldbourn, *Conservative Election Leaflet*, Lytham St Annes Conservative Party, 1981.

¹⁸ Nelson, Nelson Library, J. Rowbotham, County Planning Officer, *Lancashire Tourism Inventory*, 1982, p. 2.

shaped by a Conservative government at a national level. This meant local authorities became enablers and regulators of services rather than direct providers. Although some (especially Labour) councils initially fought these trends, by the end of the 1980s, most had adapted to this new reality. For example, Lancashire County Council was very much against the Transport Act of 1985, which required local authorities to divest themselves of their transport undertakings. As a result, they published a series of leaflets in January 1985 covering various areas under the general heading 'your bus service is under attack'.¹⁹ Ironically, the Transport Act led to an increased role for the County Council at the expense of districts. This was because any bus services felt socially necessary by the local authority but not registered commercially had to be tendered by the County Council, which would support the service financially. Although this did mean a commitment for local taxpayers, the lowest price was to be chosen unless very good reasons could be advocated that this should not be done.²⁰ In addition, when Lancashire County Council came under financial pressure, this support for public transport could be withdrawn, such as in 2011.²¹ On a more positive note, with fewer direct services to manage, local authorities could instead think more strategically about development in their areas, and it is against this background that Lancashire County Council began to develop its tourism strategy.

The importance of tourism in Lancashire was emphasised in the Lancashire Structure Plan (Forward to 1996) published in 1986. It proposed encouraging the development of tourist facilities and accommodation in the seaside resorts by upgrading existing facilities, accommodation, and infrastructure. It also called for the provision of large-scale new tourist attractions. Before 1974, tourism policy had been the responsibility of the county and municipal boroughs. This intervention represented a significant expansion of the role of the Lancashire County Council, at least at a strategic level.²² The new approach to tourism was reported in the *Liverpool Echo* in June 1987, with Lancashire County Council calling for a closer liaison with the private sector and

¹⁹ Harry Postlethwaite, *Lytham St Annes Transport*. (Glossop: Venture Pub., 2009), p. 41.

²⁰ Philip Bell, *Deregulation and Transport: Market Forces in the Modern World* (London: Fulton, 1990), p. 43.

²¹ BBC News, *Lancashire County Council Outlines £179m Cuts Plan* (2022), <<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-lancashire-12134370>> [accessed 23 January 2022].

²² LA, Library Room, Lancashire Planning Department, *The Lancashire Structure Plan, Forward to 1996*, Lancashire County Council, 1986.

initiatives, such as a major television advertising campaign, to keep Lancashire's resorts at the forefront of British holiday venues.²³ The plan was, however, perceived by Blackpool Council also as an intrusion upon the role traditionally taken by the resort authorities. While welcoming the general thrust of the policies contained in the strategy, Blackpool Councillors expressed concern that resources might be transferred from Blackpool and towards 'non-traditional' tourist areas, such as Lancashire's deindustrialising towns.²⁴ Although these could be promoted as part of an overall tourism offer within Lancashire, it also encouraged competition for scarce local authority resources. Although it was noted that the coastal strip was still the dominant feature of both the County's and the Region's holiday tourism, the County Council also wished to promote tourism to Lancashire's countryside, and the City of Lancaster.²⁵ The use of revenues raised in the resort by Lancashire County Council for non-Blackpool tourism projects became a significant reason for Blackpool Council to bid for unitary status in the 1990s.

Lancashire County Council's first full tourism strategy was then published in 1988. This report recognised the importance of coastal tourism for Lancashire, with ninety per cent of the serviced accommodation in seaside resorts. The challenges facing Blackpool and Morecambe were addressed. It was noted that although still remarkably successful, Blackpool needed to develop new markets to boost the resort's appeal. There was less optimism for Morecambe, where the report pointed out that there needed to be more investment in accommodation stock or attractions. The strategy document was more optimistic about Lytham St Annes, noting it was still a tranquil and upmarket resort with good facilities and quality hotels.²⁶ Although this strategy document clearly outlined the issues facing Lancashire coastal resorts, the policies to address them were vague and lacked specific funding commitments. At the same time, Lancashire County Council requested that the Conservative Government designate Blackpool, Fleetwood, Morecambe, Lancaster and the coastal strip as assisted areas

²³ 'County Tourism Drive', *Liverpool Echo*, 11 June 1987, p. 24.

²⁴ BHC, Blackpool Borough Council Minutes 1987, 26 August 1987, Minute 5, p. 670.

²⁵ Lancaster, Lancaster University Library, Lancashire County Council, A Tourism Strategy for Lancashire, 1995, p. 3.

²⁶ Lancaster, Lancaster Central Library, Local History Collection, Lancashire County Council, A Strategy for Tourism in Lancashire, 1988.

because of continuing decline and worse unemployment levels than average. Louise Ellman, the Labour leader of Lancashire County Council, believed that the government had assumed that Lancashire's seaside towns only had a seasonal unemployment problem.²⁷ Despite this lobbying, it would be several decades before the central government recognised the specific, long-term issues facing Lancashire's seaside resorts and their regeneration.

In the 1980s and 1990s, priority was given by Thatcher and Major governments to inner-city regeneration programmes and tourism development elsewhere. This approach was then maintained by the incoming Blair government from 1997. As late as 2006, Richard Girling of the *Sunday Times* noted that when he asked the Department for Culture, Media and Sport about its vision for the future of tourism in the UK that he was offered a list of six 'Beacon Councils' that demonstrated 'best practice' in sustainable tourism and promotion. However, the total number of traditional seaside resorts represented between them was zero.²⁸ This was a legacy of the 1980s and 1990s when regenerating seaside resorts had not been a prime concern for the UK Government. Instead, priority was given to developing new tourist attractions in declining industrial cities to revitalise areas hit hard by economic recession and social problems.

Lancashire County Council's 1988 tourism strategy was revisited and revised during the 1990s, recognising that the role of local authorities had changed. The Thatcher and Major Conservative governments emphasised local authorities as enablers of public services rather than direct providers, working in partnership with voluntary and private organisations.²⁹ As a result, the 1991 Structure Plan identified that any tourism development in Lancashire by local authorities must be conducted in collaboration with the private sector. This was increasingly important to gain central government grant assistance and European funding.³⁰ The County Council recognised in its 1995 document that it needed more resources to implement the strategy.³¹ Direct

²⁷ Ian Hamilton Fazey, 'Lancashire Seeks Brussels Aid for Coastal Towns', *Financial Times*, 27 January 1988, p.10.

²⁸ Richard Girling, 'No, we don't like to be beside the seaside', *Sunday Times Magazine*, 23 April 2006, p.14.

²⁹ LUL, Lancashire County Council, A Tourism Strategy for Lancashire, 1995, p. 1.

³⁰ LUL, Lancashire County Planning Department, Lancashire Structure Plan 1991-2006: Greening the Red Rose County Explanatory Memorandum, 1997, p. 192.

³¹ LUL, Lancashire County Council, A Tourism Strategy for Lancashire, 1995, p. 35.

financial support for the promotion of tourism was limited. In 1994/95, for example, this funding amounted to just £218,000.³² A further development was that by the mid-1990s, these policy documents were based on better market research data than previously available. Both Blackpool Council (1989) and Lancaster City Council (1987) had undertaken studies of their tourist markets. Blackpool's visitor numbers were sixteen times those of Morecambe, with the latter resort only achieving ten per cent of Blackpool's visitor expenditure.³³ Combined with research undertaken by the North West Tourist Board, these surveys gave local authorities a far better picture of tourism in Lancashire. Unfortunately, although an accurate diagnosis of the challenges facing the County's resorts was available, evidence of effective interventions in this period is much less apparent. Specific projects that Lancashire County Council did become involved with during this period were primarily linked to transport infrastructure. These included the refurbishment of the Blackpool to Fleetwood tramway and the M55 road link to the Blackpool Promenade.³⁴ The growing complexities of local government funding and the range of organisations involved in promoting tourism would make the stated aim of working in partnership increasingly challenging during the twenty-first century. In addition, following the review of local authority structures in the early 1990s by the Banham Commission, Blackpool was awarded unitary status in 1998.³⁵ This meant that Lancashire became administratively more fragmented, although it also opened opportunities to Blackpool Council that would not be available to Lancaster City or Fylde councils.

Between 1997 and 2010, as part of its wider devolution agenda, the Labour government promoted a 'new regionalism' policy. As noted in chapter one, this led to the creation of regional development agencies (RDAs), and the absorption of tourist boards. In turn, the Conservative-led government then abolished the RDAs in 2012. In place of RDAs, Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) were established to boost growth to drive sustainable private-sector-led growth and job creation, including that in the tourist industry. LEPs were responsible for setting local priorities for economic development and determining the relative importance of the tourism sector and the roles it should

³² *Ibid.*, p. 36.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 55. This figure refers to the amount spent by each visitor.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

³⁵ Chandler, p. 22.

play in this respect.³⁶ In addition to the Lancashire LEP (which also covers Blackpool), Marketing Lancashire, a destination marketing organisation (DMO), has promoted the County nationally and internationally. This is a not-for-profit organisation ‘working in the interest of a prosperous Lancashire.’ As well as members from the private sector, the board of Marketing Lancashire includes three members of Lancashire County Council and the leader of Blackpool Council.³⁷

Marketing Lancashire has subsequently been at the forefront of developing a County-wide tourism strategy. The group appointed specialist consultants to create a new Visitor Economy Strategy (VES) and Destination Management Plan (DMP) for Lancashire. In 2014, Ruth Connor (Chief Executive of Marketing Lancashire) argued that ‘with the establishment of Marketing Lancashire in 2012, the county is now in a position to make a real step-change towards achieving the wider ambitions of Lancashire, as the destination of choice for business, investment, educational studies as well as for short breaks and day visits.’³⁸ The complexity of promoting tourism in Lancashire was emphasised in the Lancashire Visitor Economy Strategy 2015-2020 created by Marketing Lancashire. The report noted that over seventy frameworks, plans and strategies were already referenced in the County’s visitor economy strategy. Increased bureaucratic complexity had created further barriers to local action, diluted accountability and hampered cohesive strategy development. Unfortunately, this was at a time when the tourism market was itself changing rapidly. Therefore, it undoubtedly made a challenging situation even more difficult. For, as Agarwal argues, the modern English seaside economy is highly already complex due to ‘the idiosyncratic nature of tourism consumption and production.’³⁹ Despite a positive intention to boost economic growth through promoting tourism, local government policy churn has added to this complexity. It has also compromised the effectiveness of Lancashire County Council’s policies in achieving their intended goals.

³⁶ Tim Coles, Claire Dinan, and Fiona Catherine Hutchison, ‘Tourism and the Public Sector in England since 2010: A Disorderly Transition?’, *Current Issues in Tourism*, 17.3 (2014), 247–79 (p. 251).

³⁷ Marketing Lancashire, *What We Do, About Marketing Lancashire* (2021), <<https://www.marketinglancashire.com/about-us/what-we-do/>> [accessed 29 November 2021].

³⁸ ‘Vision to Boost Lancashire Tourism’, *Lancashire Evening Post*, 12 June 2014.

³⁹ Sheela Agarwal, ‘Resort Economy and Direct Economic Linkages’, *Annals of Tourism Research*, 39.3 (2012), 1470–94, (p. 1471).

Although Lancashire County Council continues to have a vital role in strategic planning, dozens of other agencies are now involved in developing tourism across Lancashire. Ensuring that these can work effectively together is essential in delivering regeneration projects. Ambitious plans require substantial funding, exposing local authorities to considerable risk. Lancashire County Council, for example, withdrew in the summer of 2021 from a bid to make the County a UK City of Culture in 2025 due to the £22m cost.⁴⁰ The lack of a devolution deal for Lancashire has disadvantaged its local authorities compared to city regions such as Manchester. Significantly, despite all these strategies, in February 2020, a report for Marketing Lancashire noted that ‘Lancashire has not got a well-understood offer. Aside from Blackpool, it has no flagship attractions. Accommodation is patchy, and some areas have limited things for visitors to see and do. Seasonality can be pronounced, and the County is over-reliant on a local and loyal market.’⁴¹ Although this summary may well have been correct, it could equally have been written at any point in the previous forty years and underlines the failure of prior strategies to promote Lancashire tourism as a whole. As such, it also questions the earlier effectiveness of the two-tier structure and the overly complex system for promoting and developing tourism in Lancashire’s resorts. Given the ongoing challenges and opportunities, future strategies will need to streamline the bureaucratic processes, align with market needs effectively, secure consistent and substantial funding, and, most importantly, create a cohesive tourism vision that different stakeholders can rally behind.

3.2.2 Blackpool Borough Council (Unitary from 1998)

There was little immediate change in key aspects of tourism policy following the 1974 reorganisation of Blackpool Council. The boundaries of the Blackpool Borough remained the same, and only ten new councillors were elected (out of fifty-six).⁴² In addition, as I will demonstrate, Blackpool’s new second-tier authority continued to commit significant

⁴⁰ BBC News, *UK City of Culture 2025: Lancashire Axed Bid ‘Should Be Revived’* (2021) <<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-lancashire-57694128>> [accessed 22 November 2021].

⁴¹ Team for Marketing Lancashire, *A Smart Growth Tourism Strategy for Lancashire.* (Marketing Lancashire (2020), <www.marketinglancashire.com/app/uploads/2020/03/Strategy-Report-Final-Draft-28-Feb.pdf> [accessed 29 November 2021], p. 3.

⁴² ‘Council closes for lunch - and for good’, *West Lancashire Evening Gazette*, 27 March 1974, p. 11.

sums of money to promote tourism during the 1970s, although most of its attractions remained in the private sector.⁴³ This was to change radically as the local authority became increasingly responsible for the ownership of running attractions from the 1990s, with its ability to do so aided by unitary status from 1998. Blackpool also saw a significant political transformation as the local authority shifted from Conservative to Labour control between 1991 and 2007. This intervention, linked to radical regeneration plans, would prove vital to the resort's survival as a major tourist destination due to the scale of the economic and social challenges the resort has faced. As a result, there is considerable evidence to support Walton's argument that Blackpool showed remarkable resilience in this period. John Hassan has also made this case and contrasted the ambition of the local authority with that of Lancaster City Council and Morecambe.⁴⁴ Although there was a steady expansion in local government spending on tourism during the immediate post-1974 period, once Blackpool Council was granted a unitary status, the authority's role became the lynchpin of the resort's future.

Despite the advantages gained from unitary status, however, the new administration could not reverse a decline in visitor numbers during the first decade of its existence (1998-2008), and large-scale regeneration plans in this period were not fully realised.⁴⁵ Unitary status has allowed continued large-scale investment in Blackpool's tourist industry. Comparing council tourism spending across England is a complex task, as different councils have different approaches to tourism. Investment in transport, accommodation, and other aspects of tourism infrastructure has eclipsed that of other coastal resorts in Lancashire and elsewhere in England. For example, in 2018/19, Blackpool Council allocated £17.8 million to tourism-related spending, while Brighton and Hove City Council allocated £14.8 million.⁴⁶ In comparison, as a second-tier

⁴³ BHC, LP51, Blackpool County Borough Minutes, 23 November 1972, p. 830.

⁴⁴ John Hassan, *Seaside, Health and the Environment in England and Wales Since 1800*. (Aldershot: Routledge, 2016), p. 257.

⁴⁵ There were about 9.8 million visits to the resort in 2007, compared to about 20 million a year in the 1980s. BBC News, *Blackpool Sees Rise in Visitor Numbers* (2021), <<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-lancashire-11061823>> [accessed 6 December 2021].

⁴⁶ Blackpool Council, *Municipal Budget for the Year Ending 31st March 2019* (Blackpool: Blackpool Council, 2019) and Brighton & Hove City Council, *Budget Book 2018-19* (Brighton: Brighton & Hove City Council, 2019).

authority, Lancaster City Council's total revenue budget for 2018/19 was £15.5 million.⁴⁷ In addition, as well as enjoying a larger budget, Blackpool Council has greater autonomy and control over local government functions. This has allowed the local authority to tailor policies and services more specifically to the perceived needs of the resort. This differs from other local councils in the region, which do not have the same scope or focus on tourism. The Blackpool model that emerged in the early twenty-first century is based on a range of partnerships with the private sector underpinned by public investment. In recent years this has enabled a range of impressive large-scale regeneration schemes to progress, such as the Talbot Gateway project.⁴⁸ Although not purely 'municipal' in the pre-1974 sense, this local government-led strategy has seen visitor numbers grow again, partially reversing a fall in the 1990s and early 2000s.

One of the aims of the Talbot Gateway project was to deal with some of Blackpool's transport problems. With piecemeal development since the Victorian era and increasing numbers of visitors arriving by car, the old town centre plan was no longer considered fit for purpose. These problems increased with the steady loss of rail services to the resort from 1964 onwards. Blackpool South's service was reduced by British Rail in the 1970s to a shuttle service from Kirkham with only two trains from Preston daily. In addition, despite representations from Blackpool and Fylde Borough Councils, British Rail abandoned the remaining sidings at South Station, and the track was singled in 1983.⁴⁹ Martin Henshaw describes Blackpool's reduced railway network, which was supposed to be compact, efficient and modern, as 'inefficient and chronically short of investment capital.'⁵⁰ The Blackpool North line was finally electrified in 2018, and direct connections with London were restored. Despite the impact of rail strikes and Covid-19, there is compelling evidence that this investment has improved visitor numbers to Blackpool over recent years. Although the numbers using railways in 2021/22 were still forty per cent below that of the most in the pre-Covid year of 2019/20, Blackpool North's

⁴⁷ Lancaster City Council, *Lancaster City Council Approves Its 2018/19 Budget* (2018), <<https://www.lancaster.gov.uk/news/2018/mar/lancaster-city-council-approves-its-2018-19-budget>> [accessed 24 March 2023].

⁴⁸ Talbot Gateway, *Talbot Gateway, About* (2022), <<https://www.talbotgateway.com/about/>> [accessed 10 April 2022]

⁴⁹ Martin Bairstow, *Railways of Blackpool, and the Fylde* (Leeds: Amadeus Press Ltd, 2001), p. 85.

⁵⁰ David Henshaw, *The Great Railway Conspiracy: The Fall and Rise of Britain's Railways Since the 1950s*, 2. ed. (Hawes: Leading Edge Press and Publ, 1994), p. 198.

figures showed just a one per cent reduction. Out of 2,570 stations listed by the Office of Rail and Road, this put Blackpool North as the 158th strongest performance in the UK. In comparison, without comparable investment, St Annes on Sea passenger numbers were fourteen per cent lower, and those of Morecambe down twenty-nine per cent.⁵¹ Although most visitors still arrive by car, with the Talbot Gateway regeneration scheme providing a tram and rail interchange, the numbers arriving by rail into Blackpool will likely increase further during the 2020s. Overall, Blackpool Council has prioritised public transport as essential for the sustainable development of the resort, ensuring that visitors can enjoy their experiences, reducing traffic congestion and the impact on the environment and local communities.

A direct motorway link meant that Blackpool was more accessible than other Lancashire resorts, despite the loss of rail services. The opening of the M55 motorway to Blackpool in 1975 resulted in increased numbers of day visitors. Although traffic congestion can deter tourism, the revenue generated by parking charges has proved a significant income stream for the local authority, with £3.7 million generated in 2015/16 alone. This compares to just £347,000 collected by Fylde Council.⁵² To mitigate the impact of this increased car use, Blackpool Council supported the pedestrianisation and redevelopment of Victoria Street to create the Hounds Hill Shopping Centre in 1980. Despite this intervention, Blackpool has lost many of its key retail outlets in recent years.⁵³ This was when local authorities saw retail-led developments as a potential solution to losing other attractions. For example, in 2000, Marc Etches, the Chief Executive of Leisure Parcs, which then owned the Winter Gardens, argued that parts of the Winter Gardens could be converted into retail outlets. He was reported in *The Stage* as claiming that ‘one of the things for Blackpool to resolve is retail. Retail is one of the three legs of the economic stool: accommodation, entertainment, and retail.’⁵⁴ While the Winter Gardens would have provided a large central area for such a development, with listed status and a lack of funds, this idea made no further progress. In addition, combined with specific locational reasons, Blackpool’s retail problems have been

⁵¹ HM Government, *Estimates of Station Usage, ORR Data Portal* (2023), <<https://dataportal.orr.gov.uk/statistics/usage/estimates-of-station-usage>> [accessed 16 January 2023].

⁵² ‘Blackpool Council’s £3.7m profit from car parks’, *Blackpool Gazette*, 9 December 2016.

⁵³ Ted Lightbown, *Blackpool: A Pictorial History* (Chichester, Sussex: Phillimore, 1994), p. 50.

⁵⁴ Robin Duke, ‘Winter Gardens Future in Doubt’, *The Stage*, 26 October 2000, p. 7.

compounded by the recession of 2008-2010, a steady move to online shopping, and the Covid-19 pandemic.⁵⁵ This has resulted in further financial commitments from the local authority to support the town's retail sector. Blackpool Council bought the Hounds Hill Shopping Centre for £47 million in November 2019, claiming that the move would deliver significant financial returns and catalyse regeneration.⁵⁶ With current high-street trends, the decision to make this investment demonstrated a high level of risk-taking compared to other local authorities.

During the 1980s, the local authority increasingly turned to market research to understand the changing tourism market and improve decision-making. Although still a thriving tourist destination throughout this decade, Blackpool had an ageing infrastructure that was costly to maintain. Blackpool's tourist attractions also had to compete against increasing domestic and foreign competition. As a result, local authority spending commitments related to tourism have risen dramatically since the early 1970s. In fact, the cost of council-run tourist attractions had increased by over fifty per cent (adjusted for inflation) between 1973/74 and 1987/88.⁵⁷ Market research did not become common in UK resorts until the late 1980s, and the lack of this data suggests that significant strategic decisions were made based on preconceived views rather than evidence. In contrast, a wealth of visitor information was gathered for local authorities during the twenty-first century, allowing more effective decision-making. The early 1972 survey was instigated by the English Tourist Board (ETB), not Blackpool Council. And with Blackpool's continued popularity with its traditional tourist base, further, expensive research did not seem necessary. However, as costs soared during the 1980s, one of the primary reasons for commissioning a new survey in 1987 was to support bids for additional funding. Blackpool Council considered it essential that up-to-date information was available for inclusion in submissions to the government and other bodies when attempting to justify or obtain funds for planned future development projects and

⁵⁵ The Guardian, *Great Britain's High Streets Lost More Than 17,500 Chain Store Outlets in 2020* (2021), <<http://www.theguardian.com/business/2021/mar/14/great-britain-high-streets-lost-more-than-17500-chain-stores-in-2020-covid>> [accessed 13 December 2021].

⁵⁶ BBC News, *Blackpool Council Buys Houndshell Shopping Centre for £47m* (2021) <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-lancashire-50302003>> [accessed 19 December 2021].

⁵⁷ BHC, LP51, Blackpool County Borough Minutes 1972, 23 November 1972, Minute No.14, p.830 and 1986, 3 December 1986, Minute No.3, p. 905. Spending on attractions and amenities rose from £691,000 to £4,625,200. Adjusted for inflation, this is an increase of more than fifty per cent.

attracting potential private sector developers interested in investing in the resort. The cost of the new study was over £60,000, but grant aid meant that fifty-five per cent of the cost was met by the Regional Development Fund Business Improvement Service scheme.⁵⁸ Blackpool Council steadily increased its marketing budget during the 1980s, so research to underpin this spending was essential.

The results of the 1987 National Opinion Poll (NOP) Blackpool Visitor Survey confirmed Blackpool's position as the most visited seaside resort in the country, with around 12.5 million visitors spending approximately £300 million the estimated bed spaces totalling about 100,000 in over 3,500 holiday establishments. Although the number of unique visits had increased since the 1972 survey, there were fewer repeat visits, and most holidays had become short breaks. The importance of the local authority intervention was stressed in the conclusion to this report, which stated that 'Blackpool Council needs to continue its support for well-funded professional marketing of the resort as a whole. This involvement by the Blackpool Council is particularly vital for new initiatives in extending or broadening Blackpool's appeal. Shifts in a resort's market do not just happen: they need active promotion'.⁵⁹ When Blackpool Council took the lead in this area, such as in the 1990 joint advertising campaign with the First Leisure Corporation and Blackpool Pleasure Beach, a £200,000 public investment was matched by both partners, resulting in £600,000 of spending.⁶⁰ In contrast, just a few years later when Blackpool Council were seeking partners for a proposed 'Promenade Millennium Bid', the Director of Technical Services reported that with the exception of the Pleasure Beach no offers of partnership or financial assistance had been received. With a need for fifty per cent matched funding, the £10-£20 million proposals could not proceed.⁶¹ This indicated that, by the mid-1990s, the commitment of national companies such as First Leisure to Blackpool was beginning to weaken.

Despite attempts to promote Blackpool into new markets, the 1990s marked a turning point in the resort's fortunes as the number of day visitors declined significantly. During the 1990s, many former visitors had given up on Blackpool as a holiday destination, and the resort failed to attract significant new markets. A market research

⁵⁸ BHC, LE02, Blackpool Borough Council Minutes 1986, 3 December 1976, Minute No.8, p. 991.

⁵⁹ BHC, LM891, Blackpool Visitor Survey, 1987, p. 29.

⁶⁰ BHC, LE02, Blackpool Borough Council Minutes 1989, Minute 32, 1 November 1989, p. 604.

⁶¹ BHC, LE02, Blackpool Borough Council Minutes 1995, Minute 3, 23 November 1995, p. 786.

survey project from 1997 suggested that Blackpool had become a 'one-dimensional stereotype' that was run-down and had poor accommodation standards.⁶² An analysis of the 1999 holiday season, discussed by Blackpool Council as part of a tourism and economic development policy review, found that there had been a further decrease in the average occupancy levels in holiday accommodation from seventy-one per cent in 1997 to sixty-five per cent in 1999.⁶³ The negative perception of Blackpool was deterring staying visitors and would prove difficult to reverse over the next two decades. A 2013 survey of non-visitors found that potential tourists were not coming to Blackpool because they perceived it as an unclean and unsafe place, dominated by 'stag-do's' and 'hen-parties'.⁶⁴ The survey emphasised Blackpool's negative reputation as a down-market working-class resort, with a widespread concern that the resort was not attracting the right type of visitor. One area of success was the continued interest in the Blackpool Illuminations, which continues to attract off-season visitors.⁶⁵ Also, the Illuminations helped to promote Blackpool as a tourist destination, positively raising the town's profile and increasing its appeal as a place to stay throughout the year.

The desire of the local authority to tackle these issues was partly responsible for local government reform in the 1990s. Between July and August 1993, the national polling organisation MORI conducted a poll to help shape the *Banham Report* into local government reorganisation in Lancashire. Published in October 1994, it showed that in Blackpool, only forty-nine per cent had a sense of belonging to the county council area of Lancashire. In contrast, seventy-six per cent of respondents had a sense of belonging to the district council area of Blackpool.⁶⁶ Despite this lack of connection to Lancashire County Council, the Local Government Commission recommended no change to the two-tier structure. This was based on the argument that no groundswell of opinion existed for change across Lancashire. However, the Commission did suggest that this

⁶² BHC, LM891, John Arden, *The Blackpool Visitor, why? Why Not?* Market Research Survey Project, September 1997.

⁶³ BHC, LP51, Blackpool Borough Council Minutes 2000, Minute 2, 31 January 2000, p. 85.

⁶⁴ BHC, LM891, Blackpool Non-Visitor Survey 2013, Market Research Groups, Bournemouth University.

⁶⁵ Visit Blackpool (2021) estimated that the Illuminations attracts over 3.5 million visitors a year, spending more than £250 million during their visit. See Visit Blackpool, *Blackpool Illuminations Facts* (2022), <<https://www.visitblackpool.com/things-to-do/blackpool-illuminations-and-lightpool/25-blackpool-illuminations-facts/>> [accessed 26 January 2022].

⁶⁶ Cited in John Banham, *The Future Local Government of Lancashire: Draft Recommendations: A Report to Local Residents* (London: HMSO, 1994), pp.35-44.

could be modified in the case of Blackpool as it was an area ‘where local people and other interest groups do appear to accept the unitary authority proposed by the Commission as part of its draft recommendations.’⁶⁷ With further lobbying from Blackpool Council and others, unitary authority was granted and re-formed as an autonomous local government unit in 1998.

This separation occurred, even though, by the mid-1990s, both Blackpool and Lancashire County Councils were under Labour administrations. The Conservatives lost overall control of Blackpool Council for the first time after the 1987 elections before being beaten comprehensively in 1991 by the Labour Party.⁶⁸ ‘Conservative failures’ highlighted by the Labour Party in the election of that year included the demolition of the Derby Baths (an Olympic-standard pool), financial mismanagement and delaying a solution to the problem of the cleanliness of the beaches.⁶⁹ In contrast to the earlier period, since 1991, Blackpool Council has been Labour-run every year except from 2007 to 2011.⁷⁰ Although Blackpool did still elect Tories, the century-long domination by the Conservative Party was over. As Walton points out, this coincided from the mid-1990s with a sense of sustained crisis, which brought into doubt the resort’s future. At the same time, it has also created a range of opportunities for a new generation of local councillors.⁷¹ John Nickson has also argued that it enabled Blackpool to take a more proactive approach by establishing arms-length but municipally owned companies in areas such as entertainment and transport.⁷² It is doubtful that this would have been possible if Blackpool had continued with its previous administration or as a second-tier authority. Competing interests would challenge this approach if the resort were incorporated into a larger ‘city region’. Despite significant setbacks over the last twenty years, Blackpool Council has defended its particular interests by developing place-based approaches.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 29.

⁶⁸ John K. Walton, *The British Seaside: Holidays and Resorts in the Twentieth Century*, Studies in Popular Culture (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 2006), p. 175.

⁶⁹ BHC, Blackpool Borough Council Minutes, 1991, Minute 17, 20 March 1991, p. 193.

⁷⁰ Andrew Teale, *Local Elections Archive Project* (2020), <<https://www.andrewteale.me.uk/leap/>> [accessed 7 February 2020].

⁷¹ John K. Walton, *Blackpool, Town and City Histories* (Keele: Keele Univ. Press, 1998), p. 163.

⁷² John Nickson, *Our Common Good: If the State Provides Less, Who Will Provide More?* (London: Biteback Publishing Ltd, 2017), p. 236.

Blackpool Council's approach to public transport is vital to this strategy. Whereas all other municipal bus companies across Lancashire were gradually sold after the deregulation of 1986, Blackpool Transport Services (BTS) has remained in public ownership.⁷³ BTS was formed in 1986 and took control of Fylde BT (Blue Buses) in 1994.⁷⁴ BTS has subsequently invested heavily in its network since the 1990s. Approval was obtained to upgrade the tramway to an LRT system in January 2008 at £85.3 million, and eighteen new articulated trams were purchased, which commenced operation in April 2021. Blackpool Transport has also retained a selection of older trams to perform heritage services. From 2023, as part of the Talbot Gateway project, a tramway extension will allow visitors to transfer from the tram to the rail network quickly. The extension aimed to capitalise on the electrification and growth in rail travel to Blackpool North.⁷⁵ As a result of this investment, journeys for residents, commuters, and visitors from the railway station will be made more accessible.

For those areas not connected to the tram network, BTS has also invested in Blackpool's busses. A 'Palladium' theme was launched in 2015 with a new livery and free Wi-Fi to promote a 'modern' image for public transport.⁷⁶ This resulted in replacing old and uncomfortable vehicles, so the whole bus fleet was renewed over five years.⁷⁷ Overall, this enterprise has proved successful with the investment in new trams and buses driving up passenger figures. For example, by 2017/18, 5.2 million passengers were using Blackpool's trams, against 2.2 million in 2009/10.⁷⁸ Speaking to the *Blackpool Gazette* in 2016, Service Director Bob Mason pointed out the financial benefits this

⁷³ Mike Rhodes, *Municipal Transport in Lancashire Since 1974*, 2021, p. 4 <<https://www.vlebooks.com/vleweb/product/openreader?id=none&isbn=9781445699530>> [accessed 3 December 2021].

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

⁷⁵ Live Blackpool, *Blackpool Tramway Extension, Phase 2 of Talbot Gateway*, (2022) <<https://www.liveblackpool.info/about/town-centre/blackpool-tramway-extension/>> [accessed 10 September 2022].

⁷⁶ BTC 'We wanted a premium look and feel for this brand to show how we're developing Blackpool Transport buses. The name Palladium comes from the precious metal and is chrome/silver in colour. It's also used in catalytic converters. See Blackpool Transport, *Welcome to Palladium - Enjoyable Travel Along the Fylde Coast* (2022) <<https://www.blackpooltransport.com/palladium>> [accessed 26 January 2022].

⁷⁷ Rhodes, p. 24. In 1959 there had been twenty-seven separate municipal transport departments in the county with a combined total of 5,309 passenger vehicles.

⁷⁸ Lancashire County Council, *Bus and Tram Passenger Journeys - Lancashire County Council* (2021) <<https://www.lancashire.gov.uk/lancashire-insight/transport/local-bus-and-tram-passenger-journeys/>> [accessed 19 December 2021].

brought to the town and the strong public approval ratings of ninety-six per cent for Blackpool Transport, 'When Blackpool Transport does well, Blackpool does well.'⁷⁹ As a result of the success of BTS, Blackpool Council can take a significant financial dividend in most years, which is not available to other authorities in Lancashire and elsewhere.

Against an increasingly challenging background and based on the evidence from the surveys conducted in the 1990s and other data, Blackpool Council developed a five-year tourism strategy in 1997 to improve visitor numbers. This report noted that the town had multiple economic and social problems associated with large-scale deprivation and that this poverty was combined with severe environmental and transport issues. However, Blackpool gaining unitary authority status provided significant opportunities for the resort.⁸⁰ The 1998 reorganisation restored a considerable proportion of the autonomy that Blackpool had lost when it ceased to be a county borough in 1974.⁸¹ Although significant sums are ringfenced for education and social care, this gave the authority a budget of £142.2 million by 2020/21, which meant, for example, that £6.5 million could be spent on strategic leisure assets.⁸² Although a direct comparison of spending on tourism with Blackpool is complex due to budgeting arrangements, Lancaster City Council's total budget for the same year was just £23.3 million, used across the whole council area, not just Morecambe and Heysham.⁸³ Fylde Council allocated £2.5m in 2020/21 to the Tourism and Leisure Committee out of a total budget of £10.6m, a significant proportion, although covering the whole of the Fylde and not just Lytham St Annes.⁸⁴ Although these resorts also benefitted from Lancashire County Council spending, as previously mentioned, their budget for tourism is small and spread across the whole of the County. Blackpool also has a larger financial base against which

⁷⁹ Blackpool Gazette, *Tram Chiefs Target 5 Million Passengers* (2021) <<https://www.blackpoolgazette.co.uk/news/tram-chiefs-target-5-million-passengers-1232220>> [accessed 19 December 2021].

⁸⁰ BHC, LM891, Blackpool Council, Blackpool Tourism Strategy 1997-2002.

⁸¹ Politics.Co.Uk, *UK Local Government Structure - All You Need to Know* (2022) <<https://www.politics.co.uk/reference/local-government-structure/>> [accessed 28 January 2022].

⁸² Blackpool Council, *Annual Budgets* (2022) <<https://www.blackpool.gov.uk/Your-Council/Transparency-and-open-data/Budget,-spending-and-procurement/Annual-budgets.aspx>> [accessed 28 January 2022].

⁸³ Lancaster City Council, *Statement of Accounts* (2022), <<https://www.lancaster.gov.uk/the-council-and-democracy/budgets-and-spending/statement-of-accounts>> [accessed 28 January 2022].

⁸⁴ Fylde Council, *Revenue Budget 2020/21 – Final Draft* (2020) <<https://new.fylde.gov.uk/council/finance/revenue-budget-2020-21-final-draft/>> [accessed 28 January 2022].

to borrow money to fund future investments with unitary status. The large-scale investment in tourism promotion and infrastructure since 1998 would not have been available to a second-tier authority.

Even with this increased autonomy and spending power, Blackpool Council has struggled to achieve all its ambitious plans. Blackpool Council published a 'Masterplan' in March 2003, which promised £1 billion of investment over fifteen years and the creation of twenty thousand new jobs. However, although improvements to the promenade were completed in 2012, other projects associated with the 'Masterplan' were delayed or cancelled. The key feature of this plan was to be a new 'super-casino' on the old Central Railway Station site, and its cancellation left Blackpool Council in search of private-sector investment to push forward the redevelopment of this area. Brodie and Whitfield point out that Blackpool was not awarded the super-casino due to the criteria set before the Casino Advisory Panel (CAP). The CAP was not asked to choose the best site for a casino in terms of maximum regeneration or minimising social harm from gambling addiction. Instead, the panel was asked to ensure the selected locations provided 'the best possible test for social impact'.⁸⁵ As Brodie and Whitfield note 'Blackpool's suitability made it unrepresentative and not the experimental location the panel was asked to find.'⁸⁶ As will be explored in chapter five, due to the failure of these plans and with a lack of private investors, Blackpool Council acquired the 'key leisure' assets of the resort, such as Blackpool Tower and the Winter Gardens, bringing them under public ownership.⁸⁷ In recent years, the local authority has invested in refurbishing the Blackpool Tower and Winter Gardens to ensure that these historic buildings continue attracting visitors and remain a significant part of Blackpool's cultural heritage.

Following the failure of the casino plan, Blackpool Council finally began the regeneration of the Central Station (see Fig 3.1) site in 2022. This £300m scheme is proposed to be the largest single investment in Blackpool's history, aiming to attract 600,000 additional visitors each year to the resort. Significantly, this development will include a 'heritage quarter' and will restore the sites existing heritage buildings, as well

⁸⁵ Allan Brodie and Matthew Whitfield, *Blackpool's Seaside Heritage* (Swindon: English Heritage, 2014), p. 127.

⁸⁶ James Collard, 'Save Me Quick', *The Times*, 20 April 2007 p. 26.

⁸⁷ BHC, LM891, Blackpool Council, *Destination Blackpool 2015-2017*, 2015.

as adding new attractions and hotels.⁸⁸ This indicates a shift in attitudes towards seaside heritage and that the local authority now recognises the importance of Blackpool's seaside heritage and the buildings that reflect this.

Photo of Blackpool Central redevelopment area removed for copyright reasons.
Copyright holder is Live Blackpool.

Fig 3.1 - Aerial shot of the proposed Blackpool Central redevelopment area.⁸⁹

During the post-war period up to 1974, the stability of Blackpool's tourist market paralleled the stability of its local government. Despite emerging issues following the reorganisation, the resort maintained a strong position as Britain's most popular during the 1970s and 1980s. This was partly due to the greater level of continuity in local governance than in other seaside resorts in Lancashire. The continued success of Blackpool during this period appears to confirm the Walton thesis of resort resilience, but it was a resilience underpinned by the tourism-minded local authority. This situation changed dramatically in the 1990s with a decline in visitor numbers and a change of political control. In the early decades of the twenty-first century, Blackpool Council

⁸⁸ Blackpool Council, *Major Milestone for Blackpool Central as Work Set to Commence*, (2022), <blackpool.gov.uk/Your-Council/Creating-a-better-Blackpool/Blackpool-Central/Blackpool-Central.aspx> [accessed 20 December 2022]

⁸⁹ Live Blackpool, *Work Begins on First Phase of Blackpool Central Car Park* (2022), <<https://liveblackpool.info/about/town-centre/blackpool-central/>> [accessed January 23 2023]

developed a new model for regeneration, benefitting from its unitary authority status. With municipal ownership of public transport and other key strategic tourism and retail assets, the authority has developed policies adapted to the resort's needs and heritage. Had Blackpool Council accepted a declinist view and scaled back these interventions, the town would have suffered a terminal loss of tourist attractions and visitors. It also illustrates how local governance can make a substantial difference in adapting to and mitigating external pressures. Blackpool's local authority has shown a willingness to innovate and adapt with an openness to pivot strategies based on emerging trends and data, which is crucial for resilience in a rapidly changing tourism market.

3.2.3 Lancaster City Council (Morecambe and Heysham) Since 1974

The 1974 creation of Lancaster City Council had an enormous impact on local politics and the future of Morecambe. It brought together into an administrative area the populations of Morecambe and Heysham, a large rural area and the City of Lancaster.⁹⁰ The creation of this new authority, meant to be an efficient administrative move, had unintended consequences for Morecambe, especially regarding its tourism industry and political stability. Unlike Blackpool and Lytham St Annes, the administrative boundaries of Morecambe's new district council severely undermined the resort's autonomy and identity. While scholars such as Walton and Jarratt have noted the adverse effects of this reorganisation, its long-term impact warrants further exploration. Jarratt argues that with a council no longer focused on tourism, 'even the most generous of observers would have to agree that some of the decisions made by the council through the 1980s and into the 1990s were questionable.'⁹¹ Although some of these questionable decisions have been corrected, the results of this change have continued to be a significant barrier to regeneration to the present day.⁹² Although there is evidence to support the claim by Stephen Constantine and Alan Warde that Morecambe was already struggling by the

⁹⁰ According to the 1971 Census Morecambe and Heysham had a population of 39,730, Lancaster Rural District 16,540 and Lancaster City 43,795. Giving a total population of 100,065. See Vision of Britain, *Census Reports* (2022), <<https://visionofbritain.org.uk/census/>> [accessed 11 November 2022]

⁹¹ David Jarratt, 'The Development and Decline of Morecambe in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries: A Resort Caught in the Tide', *Journal of Tourism History*, 11.3 (2019), 263-83 (p. 278).

⁹² Walton, *The British Seaside*, p. 188.

early 1970s, they also recognise that its tourist industry was 'clamouring for support'.⁹³ However, with the dilution of focus on tourism-centric strategies that are crucial for the revitalisation of seaside resorts like Morecambe, the resort was unable to compete effectively with other coastal towns.

From its inception, Lancaster City Council was criticised for its approach to Morecambe's tourist industry. In 1977, Stuart Riley stated that 'decisions are extremely difficult because the basic decision about the value of tourism to the area has not yet been made.' Using the example of the Swimming Stadium, he also claimed that instead of demonstrating leadership in planning and executing policy, 'since the merger, there has been a lot of bad feeling between councillors from Morecambe and Lancaster of the pro and anti-tourism lobbies.'⁹⁴ Promoting tourism in Morecambe was no longer a central focus for the local authority. Councillors representing wards in the resort would need to win support from Lancaster representatives to determine policy. Many of the newly elected representatives of Lancaster City Council had little knowledge of the tourist industry. They were, therefore, ill-equipped to deal effectively with the running of the resort.

Despite opposition to change (Morecambe and Heysham Borough Council voted 17-9 against the merger), the status quo was not an option the Conservative government was prepared to accept.⁹⁵ Due to the lack of local consent for the reorganisation, the resentment generated by this reorganisation has continued to cause ill-feeling in Morecambe ever since. In addition, it has led to political and strategic problems for the resort, which have not been present to the same extent in Blackpool or Lytham St Annes. Lancaster City Council inherited costly tourist attractions from Morecambe and Heysham Borough Council. With pressures on local government funding and poor decision-making, few of these survived into the twenty-first century. Finally, unlike Morecambe and Heysham Borough Council, Lancaster City Council witnessed a much higher turnover of councillors, with less than half of those elected in 1973 still in place by 1979.⁹⁶ Although, in theory, this could bring new ideas and talent,

⁹³ Stephen Constantine and Alan Warde, 'Challenge and Change in a New Century', in *A History of Lancaster*, ed. by Andrew White, 2nd edn. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2001), p. 267.

⁹⁴ *Look North - Is It Worth It? - Tourism*, BBC1, 7 March 1977, 18:50.

⁹⁵ LA, MBMO-HE/ACC8327/19, Morecambe and Heysham Council Minutes 1971/72.

⁹⁶ Alan Sandham, 'New Faces Have a Quick Impact on Affairs', *Morecambe Guardian*, 21 August 1981.

it also signalled a significant loss of experienced councillors at a crucial time for the resort.

Before the merger, few tourists visited the deindustrialising Lancaster, and more infrastructure was needed to attract them. Along with capitalising on an expanding new university, there was, in the early 1970s, the hope of a tourism-led economic revival in the city. However, a survey conducted for the council reported that in 1972 only nine thousand people visited the information office, and just thirteen thousand went to Lancaster Castle. The Castle was perceived as Lancaster's principal tourist attraction, but only a small part was open to visitors, affected by the continued use of the Courts.⁹⁷ This report also highlighted that the city attracted visitors 'by default' and 'lacked any plan to attract tourists to Lancaster'.⁹⁸ A lack of experience in tourism management caused problems for the new Lancaster City Council in its early years. In 1976, the Tourist Development Officer noted that Lancaster City Council lacked any long-term policy for the Morecambe Illuminations, the provision of swimming, and associated facilities in the resort.⁹⁹ Also, local political interests became more concerned with the residents' needs than those of visitors. This contrasted with Blackpool, which retained its local borough council with a dedicated tourism department.¹⁰⁰ The lack of faith in Lancaster City Council was demonstrated in 1979 when the recently formed Winter Gardens Action Group (WGAG) began a campaign to save the building (closed in 1977). The Chair of the WGAG noted that recent developments in the resort had been 'inept, cheap and mundane' and that 'the Group does not wish Lancaster City Council to become involved in the functional operation of the building'.¹⁰¹ With the failure of various schemes in the 1980s and 1990s, this distrust in Lancaster City Council grew.

By the late 1980s, political tensions between Morecambe and Lancaster had led to the formation of a new political party, the Morecambe Bay Independents (MBIs).¹⁰²

⁹⁷ LUL, Tourism Working Group, Development of Tourism - Report of the Working Group (City of Lancaster Council, 1973), p. 2.

⁹⁸ Morecambe, Morecambe Library Local Collection, City of Lancaster, Development of Tourism, Report of the Working Group, January 1973, p. 3.

⁹⁹ LA, LAU 1/1/3, Lancaster District Council Minutes, 1975-76, Minute 1190, p. 559.

¹⁰⁰ Stuart Spence and Lancaster University, *Problems, Solutions and Strategies for a British Seaside Resort: The Case of Morecambe* (Lancaster University: Unpublished Sociology MA Dissertation, 2002), p. 16.

¹⁰¹ LA, 71 MorWin, Morecambe Winter Gardens Action Group, The Winter Gardens, 1979.

¹⁰² Walton, *The British Seaside*, p. 188

They were committed to removing the seaside town from the Lancaster City Council or at least winning additional resources for the resort. As Lancaster developed as a tourist centre, major tourist spending projects in Lancaster (especially those seen as taking visitors away from Morecambe) were criticised by the MBIs. While theatres in Morecambe were closing, the Dukes Theatre in Lancaster, which opened in 1971, operated in a Council-owned building rent-free and received a substantial subsidy.¹⁰³ The MBIs were highly critical of the actions taken by Lancaster City Council in Morecambe since 1974 as demonstrated in a cartoon included in a 1995 election leaflet (Fig 3.2). The cartoon illustrates the loss of tourist attractions in the resort over the previous twenty years, claiming that their loss was the responsibility of previous Conservative and Labour administrations. Described in the leaflet as a ‘typical scene from Morecambe and Heysham’s past’, the image it portrayed resonated with a considerable number of Morecambe voters.

Cartoon from 1995 MBI Election Leaflet removed for copyright reasons. Copyright holder is Morecambe Library.

Fig 3.2 - Cartoon from an MBI Election Leaflet, 1995.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ MLLC, Morecambe Bay Independent Leaflet ‘*Dukes Scene Costs £3m*’, 1994.

¹⁰⁴ MLLC, Morecambe Bay Independents Election Leaflet, Bay Typesetting, Morecambe, 1995.

Unlike Blackpool Council, which could commit its resources to promoting and developing one destination, Lancaster City Council's budget was spread across the whole district. This was summed up in the slogan 'City, Coast and Countryside' as Lancaster and the surrounding rural areas were increasingly promoted as tourist destinations.¹⁰⁵ A proposal in 1988 by the Liberal Democrat group on Lancaster City Council to rename the authority the 'City of Lancaster and Morecambe Council' was rejected. MBI councillor Mark Turner responded by arguing, 'It will take more than a lick of paint on a council van to halt the independence fight' and that it would be 'better ... splitting the two through the Boundaries Commission.'¹⁰⁶ The MBIs were increasingly successful electorally, winning fourteen seats in the 1991 local elections, mainly from the Conservative Party. The Labour Party tended to win more votes in Morecambe's most economically depressed wards, such as the Alexandra Ward in the West End of Morecambe. Having taken control of the Lancaster City Council between 1991 and 1999, Labour councillors attempted to deal with the MBIs by defending their record on redevelopment. They also attacked the MBIs by claiming they had no cohesive policies for the future.¹⁰⁷ The Labour administration argued that since 1991 the West End had begun to change, with practical action to improve housing conditions.¹⁰⁸ However, as Stephen Constantine and Andrew Warde argue, efforts by the Labour-led administration to stimulate Morecambe tourism were not appreciated by the resident population or were credited to MBI pressure, and the MBIs became the largest group on Lancaster City Council in 1999.¹⁰⁹ Politically, Morecambe has shown high political volatility in local government, which was absent before 1974.

In the period following the 1999 election, Lancaster City Council has had only short periods where one party has enjoyed overall control. Although the MBIs were able to form a minority administration between 1999 and 2003, it had a complicated working relationship with the Labour MP for Morecambe and Lunesdale, Geraldine Smith. In 2002 Lancaster City Council leader and MBI Tricia Heath accused Smith of playing party

¹⁰⁵ MLLC, Lancaster City Council, Economic Development & Tourism Service, Morecambe, Lancaster and the Lune Valley, Graphic Design, 2004.

¹⁰⁶ Jackie Rand, 'Group Reject New Name for Council', *Lancashire Evening Post*, 28 July 1988.

¹⁰⁷ MLLC, Labour Party Newsletters, The Alexandra Newsletter, Issues 15-17, 1995-1996.

¹⁰⁸ MLLC, Morecambe Newsletter (Labour Party), 1996/7.

¹⁰⁹ Constantine and Warde, p. 268.

politics over the resort's future and lacking integrity in her dealings with the city council. In the *Morecambe Visitor*, Smith replied, 'We have never had a clear vision for Morecambe (from the MBIs), and over the last few years, the council has been a little muddled. The council may have a wish list of projects and developments ... they most certainly do not have a blueprint detailing the cost necessary to produce any of them, let alone an overall delivery strategy.'¹¹⁰ Whatever the accuracy of these claims, public rows between the local authority and Morecambe's MP were not helpful in attracting the inward investment needed for the projects such as a new marina. Over the last thirty years, the authority has been dogged by political in-fighting. A series of coalition cabinets have had to balance the demands of Morecambe and Lancaster and the various political groups involved. Lancaster continued to be politically divided until 2011, when the Labour Party won back control, with the Conservative Party as the main opposition. After losing a sizeable number of councillors in 2019, Labour maintained a minority administration until replaced by a Green Party-led mixed cabinet between 2021 and 2023.¹¹¹ This volatility of results in Lancaster City Council, especially in Morecambe wards, has made long-term planning more problematic than in the more politically stable Blackpool and Fylde Councils.

The MBI campaign also led to the creation of a new authority, Morecambe Town Council, in May 2009.¹¹² This third-tier council initially had minimal resources, with a budget of just £300,000 by 2018/19. In recent years, the Town Council has increased its spending power by raising its share of council tax by 49.8 per cent in 2022 and 231.6 per cent in 2023. This has proved controversial, and it is too early to say what benefit this might bring to this resort.¹¹³ Even with this expansion of resources, they will still be a small fraction of those available compared to Lancaster City Council.¹¹⁴ When the originally stated aims of the MBIs could not be achieved, local support fell, and their

¹¹⁰ Letter from Geraldine Smith, MP, 'Resort is missing the opportunities', *Morecambe Visitor*, 14 August 2002.

¹¹¹ Lancs Live, *Lancaster City Council to Be Led by Greens After Tories Agree to Back New Leader* (2023), <<https://www.lancs.live/news/lancashire-news/lancaster-city-council-led-greens-20620328>> [accessed 24 March 2023].

¹¹² Morecambe Town Council, *About Us* (2018) <<http://www.morecambe.gov.uk/about-us/>> [accessed 2 August 2018].

¹¹³ Beyond Radio, *Morecambe Councillor Calls for U-Turn on Controversial 'Frontierland Tax'* (2023), <<https://www.beyondradio.co.uk/news/local-news/morecambe-councillor-calls-for-u-turn-on-controversial-frontierland-tax/>> [accessed 27 March 2023].

¹¹⁴ LA, MBMO/He/acc.6430, Box 4, Morecambe and Heysham Borough Council Yearbook 1970.

number of councillors began to decline between 1999 and 2015, as illustrated in Table 3.1. Unhappiness with the local Labour administration and national unpopularity led to a revival of fortunes for the MBIs in 2019 before another reversal of these gains in 2023. The rise of the MBIs added another layer of complexity to the political situation. While the group has voiced popular criticisms of decisions detrimental to Morecambe’s tourism industry, their rise has polarised political decision-making. This in turn, has made it more challenging to arrive at a consensus about the resort’s future.

Table 3.1 – Councillors elected in Morecambe Wards (Lancaster City Council) 1991-2023.¹¹⁵

Year	MBIs	Labour	Cons	Lib Dem	Others
1991	14	4	2	1	0
1995	8	10	1	2	0
1999	17	3	0	1	0
2003	11	8	2	2	1
2007	12	5	3	1	1
2011	8	9	3	0	2
2015	2	14	5	0	0
2019	14	2	6	0	0
2023	3	16	2	3	0

After a lengthy period of Conservative rule up to 1991, political control of Lancaster City Council has changed regularly, with a significant turnover of councillors. For example, after the 2019 election, half the councillors were newly elected, and only one councillor (out of sixty) has served continuously since 1995.¹¹⁶ With only four years of one-party majority rule (Labour 1995-1999), a series of minority administrations have attempted to promote the regeneration of Morecambe as a tourist resort. Despite the robust evidence of decline between 1974 and the mid-1980s, it was not until 1987 that

¹¹⁵ Andrew Teale, Local Elections Archive Project (LEAP) (2018) <<http://www.andrewteale.me.uk/leap/>> [accessed 29 July 2023].

¹¹⁶ Lancaster City Council, *Lancaster City Council - Seniority of Members* (2019), <<https://committeeadmin.lancaster.gov.uk/documents/s72929/new%20Council%202019%20seniority%20List.pdf>> [accessed 25 October 2019].

Lancaster City Council undertook its first major research programme into tourism in Morecambe and Heysham. This report was the first significant piece of research conducted since Riley's in the early 1970s and was based on a visitor survey of over 3,200 people combined with an accommodation report and occupancy survey. The findings in this report underlined that the local authority had undertaken little by way of strategic planning for tourism in Morecambe in the previous two decades. Despite being called 'Morecambe – the Renaissance of a Resort,' the findings were bleak. Comparison with the 1973 results presented a picture of a resort in severe decline. Despite local government amalgamation taking place over a decade earlier, the survey found that Morecambe was not a popular destination for residents in the rest of the Lancaster District.¹¹⁷ Since the late 1980s, Lancaster City Council has produced many reports and plans, such as those in 1988, 2002 and 2018, examining the future of Morecambe and Heysham. However, these have been better at highlighting problems than delivering solutions.

The failure of these plans to significantly increase the number of visitors meant council policy towards Morecambe and Heysham saw an attempt to refocus tourism policy away from traditional seaside attractions. The Morecambe Resort Action Plan published in 2002 argued that the resort should be rebranded, ironically using the old (pre-1974) Morecambe slogan of 'Health Abounds, Beauty Surrounds' and linking this to the promotion of health/spa facilities and eco-tourism. This can also be seen as repudiating the strategies adopted since the formation of the City Council. The Action Plan also highlighted that another significant period had elapsed without a detailed visitor survey. This meant insufficient tourism statistics to understand the micro-trends regarding the number of day and staying visitors. The report was highly critical of the role of Lancaster City Council, pointing to the high level of political division and stating that further infighting should not undermine delivery.¹¹⁸ Although evidence supports Constantine and Warde's evaluation of Morecambe as an 'old and struggling resort', council policymaking since the 1970s has caused damage to the brand of Morecambe. It also became clear that the sustainable regeneration of Morecambe could only be

¹¹⁷ MLLC, Morecambe City Architect and Planning Officer, Morecambe: The Renaissance of a Resort (Lancaster: Lancaster City Council, 1988) p. 1.

¹¹⁸ MLLC, Regenerating Morecambe-An Action Plan, Report by DTZ Piedad Consulting, 2002.

delivered by the renewal of housing areas in the West End, which would encourage people to live and invest in Morecambe in the longer term.¹¹⁹ As well as benefitting the area's residents socially and economically, the regeneration of the West End would help attract more visitors to Morecambe. This could boost local businesses and create new job opportunities.

More than a decade after it was suggested in the Morecambe Resort Action Plan, and following further research undertaken by Cairn Consultancy for Lancaster City Council, it was finally decided to separate the tourism promotion of Lancaster from that of Morecambe.¹²⁰ This reversed a policy dating back to 1978 of publicising the district as a whole, adding further inconsistency to the local authority marketing approach. The City Council would now promote Morecambe as part of the 'Morecambe Bay' brand, which had a more positive image with links to nature tourism and the Lake District. By 2014 over sixteen million people visited the Lake District spending an estimated £1,146 million.¹²¹ It, therefore, made economic sense to try to share in the benefits of the growing Lake District tourist market. As a result, standalone visitor websites for Morecambe Bay and Lancaster and separate visitor guides were also created. Although this can be seen as a positive move, as it allowed for wider marketing of the resort, it was also an explicit acknowledgement of the failure of previous approaches.

Earlier efforts to enhance the experience of Morecambe's seafront included the TERN project in the late 1990s, with sculptures placed along Morecambe's promenade.¹²² The seafront was steadily improved with new sea defences and the quality of both sea and sand along the front. In addition, in July 1999, a statue of the famous and locally-born entertainer Eric Morecambe was unveiled by Queen Elizabeth II. Thousands of people lined the promenade in the comic's hometown of Morecambe to see the bronze figure.¹²³ However, despite these improvements, little investment

¹¹⁹ Lancaster City Council, *West End Masterplan* (2018), <<https://www.lancaster.gov.uk/business/regeneration/west-end-masterplan>> [accessed 8 August 2018]

¹²⁰ 'Lancaster and Morecambe Tourism Brochures Scrapped as Council Enters 21st Century', *Morecambe Visitor*, 31 July 2014.

¹²¹ Heart of the Lakes, *Lake District Has Global Appeal* (2022), <<https://www.heartofthelakes.co.uk/blog/lake-district-has-global-appeal/>> [accessed 7 February 2022].

¹²² William Reginald Mitchell, *Around Morecambe Bay* (Chichester: Phillimore, 2005), p. 76.

¹²³ BBC Lancashire, Eric Morecambe statue brings seaside lasting sunshine (2009), <http://news.bbc.co.uk/local/lancashire/hi/people_and_places/newsid_8142000/8142137.stm> [accessed 3 January 2018].

occurred in privately owned buildings that lined the promenade.¹²⁴ An exception was the restoration of the Midland Hotel in 2008 by Urban Splash. Unfortunately, as Jarratt points out, this promising partnership ended in 2013 as they withdrew from the resort.¹²⁵ Following the guidance of the case officer's report, Lancaster City Council's planning committee (by twelve votes to one) refused an application by Urban Splash to redevelop the Central Promenade site next to the Midland. This would have included a mixture of retail, leisure and residential buildings. The committee concluded that 'there is substantial doubt as to whether the public benefits arising from the proposal can be delivered to outweigh the adverse impacts to the Midland Hotel and the wider Conservation Area.'¹²⁶ Leading English designer Wayne Hemingway, who has used the Midland Hotel as the centre-point for his successful 'Vintage Weekend' festival since 2013, was critical of this decision by Lancaster City Council. Hemingway argued that not enough had been done by the council in Morecambe to capitalise on this investment:

The problem is that, at the moment, the Midland is the only thing that's really brilliant in Morecambe. Sure, the Eric Morecambe statue on the prom is good, and people like to visit him, but that's the past, not the future. Most young people haven't heard of him. Morecambe needs to develop more truly brilliant things in order to encourage new people to visit. Average things won't do. The council needs to be encouraging entrepreneurs to open not just an average boutique B&B but the best boutique B&B in Lancashire; same with cafes and galleries.¹²⁷

Another critical issue that inhibited investment in Morecambe's visitor economy was inadequate transport connections, which became increasingly evident in the final decades of the twentieth century. Cheap and effective transport to a suitable coastline underpinned the growth of seaside resorts in Lancashire. The failure to provide either became a significant issue for Lancaster City Council's planning during this period. During the 1970s and 1980s, direct rail services to Morecambe were steadily reduced by British Rail, causing delays to tourists wishing to visit the resort. In 1977, Sunday services were

¹²⁴ Allan Brodie, Gary Winter and English Heritage, *England's Seaside Resorts* (Swindon: English Heritage, 2007), p. 185.

¹²⁵ Jarratt, p. 281.

¹²⁶ Lancaster City Council, *Planning Regulatory Committee, Minute 136, 4 February 2013* (2013), <<https://committeeadmin.lancaster.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?Cid=315&MID=5896#A127683>> [accessed 13 January 2021]

¹²⁷ Wayne Hemmingway quoted by Helen Pidd, *Morecambe's Revival Hopes Led by Art Deco Midland Hotel* (2013), <<https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2013/jun/07/morecambe-revival-deco-midland-hotel>> [accessed 1 August 2018].

withdrawn from Morecambe, and the future of the entire line was questioned by British Rail.¹²⁸ Although later re-instated, threats to the service have continued to the present day.¹²⁹ Those providing holiday accommodation in Morecambe and Heysham (primarily clustered around the old railway stations) were equally alarmed by this decline. In 1976, Betty Simpson, president of the Morecambe Hotel and Catering Association (MHCA), commented:

A rail link to Morecambe as a holiday resort is vital. A bus service wouldn't be any alternative. I wonder if those thousands of people would still come to Morecambe if we didn't have a railway line.¹³⁰

Morecambe's rail connection maintained a precarious existence during the 1980s. Indeed, had the proposals outlined in the Serpell Report of 1982 been implemented by British Rail, it would have meant the end of a rail connection to Morecambe.¹³¹ Although this line closure was avoided, there were further reductions in services and staffing at the Promenade Station, and its existence was threatened in 1990. Once again, the MHCA led the protests with President Lynn Pickford, saying, 'I don't think an unmanned station is good for the image when people are coming here on holiday.'¹³² Despite this reduction in rail services, only fifty-nine per cent of staying visitors travelled to the resort by car in 1987. This was significantly less than British holidaymakers (seventy-six per cent) and showed that many car owners were not visiting the resort.¹³³ By 1994 both Morecambe's stations had closed with a small functional replacement providing only a limited service.¹³⁴ This new station was a very modest affair, with the local authorities (Lancashire and Lancaster City Councils) having to step in, spending only £15,000 on a small ticket office. With a twenty-three per cent cut in central government funding to regional railways in 1993, Morecambe County

¹²⁸ 'Another Rail Shock for Morecambe', *Morecambe Visitor*, 11 August 1976.

¹²⁹ BBC News, *Northern Cancels Sunday Rail Services Again* (2018), <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-45155530?intlink_from_url=https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/topics/cwlw3xz0znpt/northern&link_location=live-reporting-story> [accessed 22 August 2018].

¹³⁰ Harry Kite, 'End of the line for Prom Station?', *Morecambe Visitor*, 2 February 1976.

¹³¹ Steve Becker, *Morecambe Guardian*, 6 May 1983.

¹³² 'Protest Over Rail Plans', *Morecambe Guardian*, 14 September 1990.

¹³³ MLLC, City Architect and Planning Officer, *Morecambe: The Renaissance of a Resort*, Lancaster City Council, 1988, p. 7.

¹³⁴ *Morecambe Visitor*, *100 Years of Action Stations* (2007), <<https://www.thevisitor.co.uk/news/100-years-of-action-stations-1-1205562>> [accessed 11 August 2017].

Councillor Derrick Stanley led a campaign to build the booking office and provide part-time staffing.¹³⁵ By the end of the twentieth century, reduced rail services to Morecambe had made it much more difficult to access the resort and negatively impacted the town's tourist economy.

Morecambe's road network struggled to cope with the shift away from the railways. Despite the growth of road traffic, little was done to develop new access routes. Most visitors travelling by car to Morecambe arrived through Lancaster's complex one-way system.¹³⁶ Constantine and Warde have described this one-way system as 'remarkably successful' and argued that it 'restored something like pleasure to shopping'.¹³⁷ This is an unduly favourable, Lancaster-centric verdict, as a shortage of road bridges across the Lune continued to be a significant obstacle to visiting Morecambe. The one-way system may have had commercial benefits for Lancaster but none for Morecambe. This was highlighted in a 2021 report commissioned by Lancashire County Council:

Lancaster's gyratory system is effectively throttling the city centre, impacting significantly on ease of movement. The A6 rings the main shopping area, making access difficult for everyone and potentially dangerous for pedestrians and cyclists. Natural connections between the railway station and the Castle to the west and the canal and public buildings to the east have been severed; there is no longer any clear way to navigate the city, particularly for visitors, which is a major drawback in a city with such a wealth of historic interest.¹³⁸

These transport problems had to be endured before a potential visitor arrived in Morecambe, as the M6 motorway did not provide a direct connection to the resort. The conversion of the Greyhound Bridge in Lancaster to carry road traffic eased the situation a little in the mid-seventies. However, as Bingham argues, this did not compare with Blackpool's direct fifteen-mile motorway link, the M55.¹³⁹ In 2002, the North West Tourist Board held discussions with developers and investors to gauge perceptions of Morecambe as a resort.' These groups highlighted access to the resort as a significant

¹³⁵ 'Office in on Track', *Morecambe Citizen*, 24 February 1994.

¹³⁶ Rhodes, p. 39. Lancaster introduced a one-way scheme in the City Centre in 1973, with a 'double loop' around George Street and Common Garden Street.

¹³⁷ Constantine and Warde, p. 263.

¹³⁸ Lancashire County Council, *Transforming Travel in Lancaster* (2022), <<https://lancashire.gov.uk/transforming-lancaster-travel/?page=5>> [accessed 7 February 2022].

¹³⁹ Roger Bingham, *Lost Resort? The Flow and Ebb of Morecambe* (Milnthorpe: Cicerone Press, 1990), pp. 279–82.

concern, with Morecambe seen as an 'end of the road' location. This issue would not be overcome even with a new link road to the M6.¹⁴⁰ Debates over a new link road for Morecambe continued until the 2010s when a northern link was finally built. During the 1980s and 1990s, Morecambe businesses and local MPs had favoured a southern link from Lancaster. Public opinion in Morecambe broadly supported this proposal, but there were strong objections from Lancaster residents.¹⁴¹ Arguments in favour were that it would allow traffic between the M6 and the towns of Morecambe and Heysham to bypass Lancaster and provide access to new and existing areas of employment.¹⁴² However, groups highlighting environmental concerns, especially the local Green Party, led a successful campaign against this project going ahead. The failure to address this critical transport issue for over thirty years meant that only a fraction of Morecambe's tourism remained when the new link road opened in 2017.

Bus usage in Morecambe declined significantly from the 1960s onwards. The bus fleet inherited by Lancaster City Council was extremely old, and with a rationalisation of services, passenger numbers fell dramatically from 13.9 million in 1975 to 5.6 million by 1983. Fewer residents using public transport added to traffic congestion in Lancaster, making access to Morecambe and Heysham more problematic.¹⁴³ As part of an aggressive expansion scheme following deregulation in 1985, Lancaster City Transport Ltd was acquired by Stagecoach in 1993 and integrated with Stagecoach Ribble's operations.¹⁴⁴ Stagecoach created a virtual private monopoly, leaving Lancaster City Council with no option but to sell its arms-length company to them. This led to criticism from the Monopolies and Mergers Commission and the Corporate Affairs Minister, but ultimately as Christian Woolmar points out, Lancaster (and with it Morecambe) became 'another Stagecoach town'.¹⁴⁵ Although the old municipal corporations could be criticised, there was at least a level of democratic accountability and a sense of where

¹⁴⁰ DTZ Pidea Consulting, *Morecambe Resort Action Plan* (Lancaster: Lancaster City Council, 2002), p. 14.

¹⁴¹ Rachel Ryan, 'A Bridge is the Answer', *Lancaster and Morecambe Citizen*, 31 July 2007.

¹⁴² MLLC, Morecambe and Lunesdale Labour Rose, 'Public have a vital role in the fight for M6 link road' Labour Leaflet, 2000.

¹⁴³ Thomas W.W Knowles, *Morecambe Bay's Municipal Buses, 1908-1983* (Lancaster: Sharpe, 1983), p. 37. The number of municipal buses running in Lancaster and Morecambe was reduced from 91 to 52 over this period. The record combined total had been 26.7 million passengers in 1952.

¹⁴⁴ Rhodes, p. 41.

¹⁴⁵ Christian Wolmar, *Stagecoach: A Classic Rags-to-Riches Tale from the Frontiers of Capitalism* (London: Orion, 1999), pp. 43-4.

services might sit within the broader needs of the resort. In addition, as the number of (bus-riding) students at Lancaster University grew rapidly from the 1990s, a lucrative revenue stream was lost to Lancaster City Council that could have been invested elsewhere in the district. The contrast with the success of Blackpool Transport could not be starker.

Since 1974, local government has struggled to manage the changing tourism market in Morecambe effectively, with divisions within Lancaster City Council playing a significant role. As Jarratt avers, Morecambe's decline was 'early and extreme' compared to other seaside resorts.¹⁴⁶ This was primarily due to a failure to plan and promote the resort's future effectively, with a local government structure that was fundamentally inadequate for the task. In addition, between 1974 and 1987, no detailed research into the local tourist market was undertaken by Lancaster City Council. Over the last twenty years, the complexity and fragmentation of local government have also impeded its capacity to promote tourism in the resort. This has continued to pose significant barriers to new strategies to diversify Morecambe's economy and re-brand the tourist product in the twenty-first century. By comparing Morecambe with other Lancashire resorts, it can be seen that the scale and pace of the decline of Morecambe's tourist industry were primarily related to these changes in local government structures and the subsequent actions of Lancaster City Council. As well as weakening the local authority's focus on tourism in Morecambe, it also led to a politically fragmented council, significantly impairing effective decision-making. This contrasts with the relative stability of Blackpool and Fylde Councils, who could pursue longer-term strategies focused on their coastal resorts.

Despite these problems, as Jarratt points out, there by the early 2020s, there was emerging evidence of regeneration and renewed confidence in the resort.¹⁴⁷ Popular annual festivals, such as the Vintage Weekend, suggested that Morecambe's appeal to tourists may have recovered in the last few years. Some private investment and tourist promotion has also been generated through the Morecambe BID.¹⁴⁸ Most significantly, the Eden Project Morecambe, with confirmed £100 million funding in 2023, offers a

¹⁴⁶ Jarratt, p. 279.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., p.281.

¹⁴⁸ Morecambe BID, *Morecambe BID* (2023), <<https://morecambebid.com/morecambe-events>> [accessed 11 May 2023]

significant promise for the renewal of Morecambe's tourism industry.¹⁴⁹ The team behind the first Eden Project in Cornwall will deliver this critical new tourist attraction alongside local partners, Lancaster City Council, Lancaster University, Lancashire County Council, and the Lancashire Enterprise Partnership. This is the type of collaboration, which Agarwal argues is necessary for resort development.¹⁵⁰ The Central Promenade location is the same as that which was to have been redeveloped by Urban Splash a decade earlier (See Fig 3.3). However, the level of public engagement has been much greater, and the project will be the most significant tourism development in the resort in decades. If successful, it will be Morecambe's first mass tourist attraction since the closure of Frontierland. Despite many setbacks and challenges, it appears that there are green shoots of recovery and promising signs for the future of Morecambe's tourism industry. A cohesive, long-term strategy that addresses the shortcomings of the past and capitalises on a renewed demand for seaside tourism and new opportunities like the Eden Project could well mark the beginning of a new, more prosperous era for the town.

¹⁴⁹ Eden Project, Eden Project Morecambe, UK (2023), <<https://www.edenproject.com/new-edens/eden-project-morecambe-uk>> [accessed 15 May 2023].

¹⁵⁰ Sheela Agarwal, 'Institutional Change and Resort Capacity: The Case of Southwest English Coastal Resorts', in *Managing Coastal Tourism Resorts: A Global Perspective*, ed. by Sheela Agarwal and Gareth Shaw, (Clevedon: Channel View Publications, 2007), 56-72, p. 69.

Artists Impression of Eden Project Morecambe removed for copyright reasons.
Copyright holder is Eden Project.

Fig 3.3 - An Artists Impression of Eden Project Morecambe, 2023.¹⁵¹

3.2.4 Fylde Borough Council (Lytham St Annes)

In 1974, the Borough of Lytham St Annes was merged with Kirkham Urban District Council and Fylde District Council. The new authority was renamed Fylde Borough Council and had to consider the needs of rural Fylde in addition to those of the coast.¹⁵² Fylde Borough Council represents a significantly smaller population than the other Lancashire coastal authorities, with an estimated 79,770 people in 2019 compared to 138,380 in Blackpool and 142,487 in Lancaster. Unlike in Lancaster, where Morecambe

¹⁵¹ Eden Project Morecambe will be a ticketed visitor attraction, with large indoor environments, housed within pavilions. It will combine exhibits, performance, learning, play, immersive experiences, horticulture, live music, art, food, beverage and retail spaces.. Eden Project, Eden Project Morecambe, UK (2023), <<https://www.edenproject.com/new-edens/eden-project-morecambe-uk>> [accessed 15 May 2023].

¹⁵² Peter Shakeshaft, *St Anne's on the Sea: A History* (Lancaster: Carnegie, 2008), p. 296. Since c2010, the authority has usually been referred to as Fylde Council, rather than Fylde Borough Council.

and Heysham residents are a minority of the population, most residents in Fylde (over sixty per cent) live in Lytham St Annes, resulting in the largest percentage of Council spending in the urban area, which also contains the coastal tourist resorts.¹⁵³ As Haley points out, while far more resilient than Morecambe and Heysham, the resort was not immune to changing holiday patterns in the 1970s and 1980s.

In contrast to the other resorts under consideration, what is notable is that rather than overseeing the economic decline, or a significant expansion of the role of the local authority as in Morecambe or Blackpool, Fylde Borough Council has continued to rely on private investment in the resort. By the twenty-first century, rather than directly running attractions or providing services, this meant working with a range of partners, including the private and third sectors. The visitor economy was recognised as a major element in the broader economy of the Fylde.¹⁵⁴ Unlike Blackpool and Lancaster, Fylde also has a solid manufacturing base, and there has been substantial growth in high-wage employment in the Fylde over the long term.¹⁵⁵ The privatisation and outsourcing of services, more pronounced in the Fylde since 1974, has led to a decreasing role for borough councillors. Despite this, as Shakeshaft contends, they have continued to have an important role in developing Lytham St Annes and its heritage. Since 2000, there has been substantial investment around Lytham and St Annes town centres and a range of new events in the resort, such as the Lytham Festival (a multi-day music event), attracting many new visitors.¹⁵⁶ The festival is organized by Cuffe and Taylor, a live events promoter based in the UK, in partnership with the Fylde Council and other organizations. It has become a major cultural event in the region, contributing to the local economy and attracting visitors.¹⁵⁷ More recently, the local authority has overseen a substantial regeneration project around Fairhaven Lake. Finally, should it be

¹⁵³ LGBCE, *Fylde* (2022), <<https://www.lgbce.org.uk/all-reviews/north-west/lancashire/fylde>> [accessed 10 January 2022].

¹⁵⁴ Fylde Borough Council, *Economic Development Strategy and Action Plan 2012-2030* (2013), <<https://new.fylde.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/ED034-Fylde-Economic-Development-Strategy-and-Action-Plan-2012-2030-2012-.pdf>>.

¹⁵⁵ Lancashire County Council, *Fylde District - Lancashire County Council* (2022), <<https://www.lancashire.gov.uk/lancashire-insight/area-profiles/local-authority-profiles/fylde-district/#Eco>> [accessed 8 February 2022].

¹⁵⁶ By 2022 the Lytham Festival, a 10-day live music event was predicted to generate £20 million of income for the Fylde Coast. See Fylde Council, *Lytham Festival Announces Plans To Expand Into Ten Day Event* (2022), <<https://new.fylde.gov.uk/lytham-festival-announces-plans-to-expand-into-10-day-event/>> [accessed 8 February 2022].

¹⁵⁷ 'Home - Lytham Festival' <<https://www.lythamfestival.com/>> [accessed 26 April 2022].

fully implemented, the St Annes Masterplan from 2022 would represent a significant investment in tourism infrastructure in that resort.

Since its formation, Fylde Council has been more politically stable than Lancaster or Blackpool, with the Conservative Party continuously forming the largest group since the first elections in 1973.¹⁵⁸ Indeed, since 1924, the voters of Lytham St Annes have been represented in Parliament by a Conservative MP, usually elected with a large majority. However, significant numbers of independents and ratepayer councillors have been elected locally, resulting in the Conservative group having only a small majority of councillors and losing overall control in the 1995 local election. Many of these independent councillors have represented wards outside Lytham St Annes. Councillors in these rural wards have often expressed the view that Lytham St Annes has benefitted at the expense of other parts of the Fylde. For example, Wesham Councillor George Bamber, in the *West Lancashire Evening Gazette* in 1974, expressed his regret at the transfer of administration and decision making, saying, 'all the chiefs with be at St Annes and all the Indians at Wesham'.¹⁵⁹ Although there are similarities to the impact of local government reform in Morecambe, the divisions in Fylde Borough Council were much more uneven than those in Lancaster City Council. The population balance was weighted, favouring Lytham St Annes, which became the centre of administration for Fylde Borough Council. In Lancaster, Morecambe and Heysham were significant enough to keep both Lancaster and Morecambe Town Halls in operation, but Morecambe councillors could always be outvoted by their Lancaster colleagues. As in Morecambe, residents of Lytham St Annes did not feel strongly connected to their new authority. Even after twenty years, a MORI survey conducted across Lancashire in 1993 found that only fifty per cent of respondents felt a sense of belonging to the Fylde district council area. This was the second-lowest figure of the fourteen districts in Lancashire and compared with an average figure of sixty per cent. Even more striking was that only forty-eight per cent felt a sense of belonging to their nearest town (for most, this would be Lytham or St Annes). Eighty-one per cent of Fylde respondents, in contrast, identified with their neighbourhood/village.¹⁶⁰ This sense of local identity saw a push for more

¹⁵⁸ Colin Rallings and Michael Thrasher, 'Fylde Borough Council Election Results 1973-2011', p. 12.

¹⁵⁹ 'St Annes has the chiefs, Wesham gets the Indians', *West Lancashire Evening Gazette*, 23 January 1974, p. 10.

¹⁶⁰ Cited in Banham, pp.35-44.

autonomy for parish councils and the creation of St Annes Town Council in 2006. Fylde Council also restored a more inclusive committee structure (rather than a Cabinet) for the Council in 2014 following a local referendum.¹⁶¹ Its supporters promoted this as offering a more democratic, transparent, and effective way of organising Fylde's decision-making process.

Before the 1990s, Fylde Borough Council showed less interest in detailed market research than neighbouring authorities, such as Blackpool. However, it did undertake a modest £1500 project in 1987 in association with Blackpool and Fylde College. The College conducted this survey to improve their knowledge of the local tourism potential of the Fylde (and Lytham St Annes in particular) and to develop an appropriate marketing response.¹⁶² Fylde Borough Council tourism materials emphasised Lytham St Annes in its annual holiday guides. Until 1990 the holiday guides were titled *Lytham St Annes*, then from 1991 to 1999, *Lytham St Annes and the Fylde Countryside* and then changed to *Lytham, St Annes-on-Sea, and the Fylde Countryside*. Despite these changes, these guides consistently had an introduction from the Mayor of the Fylde and a prominent message from the Holiday Association of Lytham St Annes.¹⁶³ The resort benefitted from this promotion, while in contrast, during the same period, Morecambe and Heysham became subsumed within Lancaster's marketing. Although the name 'Fylde' has steadily increased in marketing materials, for example, on the *Discover Fylde* website, the attractions of Lytham and St Annes are still the primary focus in promoting tourism to the area. 2002, Fylde Borough Council produced statistics to demonstrate the value of the holiday guide. At that time, it was estimated, based on a survey of 3,000 recipients, that visitors booking from the guide spend £7.3 million in Fylde Borough. That was a return of £150 for every £1 spent on the guide.¹⁶⁴ With an increasingly competitive tourism market, effective promotion of seaside resorts against an often-hostile national media was essential to any local tourism strategy.

¹⁶¹ 'Voters back change at Fylde', *Lytham St Annes Express*, 23 May 2014.

¹⁶² LA, LAU 5/1/1/13, Fylde Borough Council Minutes 1986-87, 19 May 1987, Minute 11, p. 15.

¹⁶³ StAL, Lytham, St Annes Holiday Guides, 1988- incomplete, Lytham St Annes: Fylde Borough Council, 1985-2001.

¹⁶⁴ Discover Fylde, 'Discover Fylde - Lytham, St Annes and Rural Visit Fylde Tourist Information' <<https://www.discoverfylde.co.uk/#>> [accessed 11 January 2022].

Marketing of Lytham St Annes was easier as public investment in the resort also improved its attractiveness to visitors. In 1996 Fylde Borough Council allocated a modest £400,000 to the regeneration of St Annes, primarily used to enhance the appearance of St Annes Square.¹⁶⁵ The link between investment and tourism growth was shown as, despite a national decline in seaside tourism in the late 1990s, the number of staying tourists in Lytham St Annes increased during this period. Public investment in St Annes Square undoubtedly improved trade for local businesses. The dereliction of Blackpool and Morecambe in this period was largely absent in St Annes. As Fylde tourism officer Paul Norris explained in 2002, 'The general impression we are getting from businesses in St Annes and Lytham is that they are doing good trade, and they are managing to keep good occupancy levels. Work on the Square isn't the only reason people are coming.'¹⁶⁶ By 2005, it was reported in the *Lancaster Guardian* that the cost of properties in Lytham St Annes, on average, were seventy-four per cent higher than in Blackpool and seventy-nine per cent greater than in Morecambe.¹⁶⁷ In addition, Lytham St Annes property values meant that the resort largely avoided becoming like many other 'bucket and spade resorts', in the words of the chair of the English Tourism Council in 1999, a 'ghetto for the dispossessed.'¹⁶⁸ Therefore, unlike Blackpool and Morecambe, the appeal of Lytham St Annes to visitors and residents was not significantly damaged by a proliferation of HMOs.

Decision-making improved during the 1990s as Fylde Council benefitted from better access to tourism data and market research. In 1997 and 1998, for example, investigations were undertaken by the North West Tourist Board looking at leisure and 'other' visitors. The key findings of these studies were that amongst leisure visitors, forty-eight per cent were retired, and forty-one per cent were on two or three-night breaks. In contrast to Blackpool, general sightseeing and leisure shopping were the most popular pastimes for visitors to Lytham St Annes. Also, unlike Blackpool, many tourists intended to visit the Lake District during their stay on the Fylde.¹⁶⁹ The NWTB conducted

¹⁶⁵ Editorial, 'Deadline looks for arts centre', *This is Lancashire*, 15 February 2001.

¹⁶⁶ Tom Halstead, 'Garden-on-Sea', *This is Lancashire*, 9 August 2002.

¹⁶⁷ 'Grab yourself a seaside bargain', *Lancaster Guardian*, 2 September 2005.

¹⁶⁸ Richard Girling, 'No, we don't like to be beside the seaside', *Sunday Times Magazine*, 23 April 2006, p. 14.

¹⁶⁹ North West Tourist Board, *Tourism Development Services for the North West, Fylde Select Visitor Survey 1998* (Bolton: North West Tourist Board, 1998).

these surveys to give business support to Tourism SMEs in the Fylde and to establish good practice. This survey also supported regeneration bids and Lancashire Tourism SRB (European) funding.¹⁷⁰ Rather than directly or indirectly running tourist attractions and events, the approach taken by Fylde Council has been primarily to support the voluntary and private sectors through partnership agreements.

Although agencies like NWTB could take a broader strategic approach, their involvement could also be problematic for established resorts. For example, in the North West Regional Development Agencies' 'Strategy for Tourism in England's Northwest 2003-2010', the areas deemed worthy of aggressive marketing were the Lake District, Manchester, Liverpool and Chester. The RDA referred to Blackpool as a 'mature brand' needing investment and repositioning, and the report did not refer to Lytham St Annes at all.¹⁷¹ This focus on promoting city tourism as part of an attempt to regenerate former industrial centres such as Manchester inevitably drew attention and resources away from the coastal towns. In addition, with the development of city regions, competition for scarce resources has become even fiercer. As a result, in 2019, Lancashire County Council's ruling Conservative group proposed breaking up the authority into three unitary councils. This would have resulted in Blackpool, Fylde, Wyre, Lancaster, and the Ribble Valley having a single local authority and arguably a more powerful voice. Whatever the arguments in favour of this change, the presentation of the plan as a 'Greater Blackpool Authority' proved unpopular in the other authority areas such as Fylde. Ultimately, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government did not approve this reorganisation.¹⁷² However, in common with the other Lancashire authorities discussed, continued uncertainty over the shape of local government is unhelpful for longer-term strategic planning.

Fylde Council outlined (in 2010) a Lytham St Annes *2020 Vision* in which they hoped to secure private investment to improve St Annes and Lytham railway stations and develop a new café quarter. The schemes cost five million pounds, and council

¹⁷⁰ North West Tourist Board, *Fylde Local Challenge 1997-2000 Local Challenge: 'Growth Through Partnership'* (Bolton: North West Tourist Board, 1999).

¹⁷¹ North West Regional Development Agency, *The Strategy for Tourism in England's Northwest 2003-2010: Developing the Visitor Economy*, 2nd edn (Warrington: Northwest Regional Development Agency, 2007).

¹⁷² Paul Faulkner, 'Will Lancashire get a Better Chance at Devolution from Government's County Deals?', *Lytham St Annes Express*, 26 July 2021.

leader John Coombes strongly linked these plans to The Open Golf Championship in 2012.¹⁷³ Unusually for a smaller resort, this major sporting event enabled the resort to be showcased to potential visitors by the world's media. This event was estimated to have brought 200,000 visitors to the resort and delivered £35 million to the local economy.¹⁷⁴ It also appears to have begun a period of growth in tourism to Lytham St Annes following the 2008 recession. During the 1990s, Fylde Council also attracted investment to the former open-air swimming pool, renamed 'Pleasure Island' and then later 'The Island'. The Council continued to own the freehold to the site, subletting to a range of private businesses. A new cinema, restaurants and other leisure activities were developed with private investors to create a year-round venue for tourists and visitors.¹⁷⁵ However, by the 2020s, aspects of this redevelopment and its tenancy structure were criticised in the St Annes Masterplan (2022), 'The Island is the main site for leisure activities across the seafront, but the quality of this destination is undermined by poor building design and the domination of car parking.'¹⁷⁶ In common with early regeneration projects in Blackpool and Morecambe, little effort was made to connect with either the seaside or the resort's heritage.

Like other seaside resorts, the pressure on Fylde Council's finances increased during the early twenty-first century. As a result, non-statutory commitments, such as spending on tourism and leisure, came under severe stress. Consequently, local authorities like Fylde have had to find alternative funding sources. For example, in St Annes, the new indoor pool, which replaced the open-air baths, was closed by Fylde Borough Council for a year in 2008/09 due to budget cuts. After reopening, it is now operated by the YMCA on behalf of the community. As well as economic pressures, the issue of climate change has also crept up the agenda, with significant investment in coastal defences. Lytham St Annes did, however, demonstrate much higher resilience to the effects of the post-2010 austerity period than Blackpool or Morecambe. The underlying strength of the Lytham St Annes brand, which was effectively marketed by the local authority through high-profile events such as the Lytham Festival, certainly

¹⁷³ Nick Hyde, 'Multi-Million Pound Fylde Masterplan', *Blackpool Gazette*, 15 January 2010.

¹⁷⁴ 'Entertainment all the way!', *Lytham St Annes Express*, 6 July 2012.

¹⁷⁵ 'Exciting Plans for The Island', *Blackpool Gazette*, 9 June 2016.

¹⁷⁶ Fylde Council, *St Annes Town Centre Masterplan* (2022), <<https://new.fylde.gov.uk/st-annes-town-centre-masterplan/>> [accessed November 17 2022], p. 17.

helped with this. Fylde Council also secured funding in 2020 through various partners to improve Fairhaven Lake facilities. This project includes restoring the Japanese garden and increasing the range of events and activities.¹⁷⁷ Without expensive buildings such as the Blackpool Tower and the Winter Gardens to maintain, Fylde Council were able to improve the attractiveness of Lytham St Annes to visitors. This positive image, in turn, meant that private sector partners were more willing to risk their capital in the resort.

As in Morecambe, one barrier to private sector investment has been a failure to improve public transport, especially the rail network. Lytham St Annes has, therefore, yet to benefit from the growth of rail passenger numbers over the last twenty-five years. This growth is in stark contrast to the rapid growth of railway passenger numbers in seaside resorts elsewhere in the UK. Margate, for example, saw a sixty-four per cent rise in passenger numbers between 2014 and 2019, benefitting from a high-speed link to London.¹⁷⁸ Since rail privatisation in 1994, the UK has experienced a renaissance in rail travel.¹⁷⁹ However, Table 3.1 below shows that the resort's railway stations did not share this rapid growth. The configuration of the railway network on the Fylde Coast partly explains the failure to benefit from the increased popularity of rail travel. The inheritance of the 1960s and 1970s 'modernisation' programme has led to an inconvenient main terminal at Blackpool North. The Lytham Coast railway line has limited capacity, and there is no longer a connection to Fleetwood. Besides, Blackpool's tramway has (at present) no interchange with the mainline.¹⁸⁰ Although there are good links to the motorway network with access to Manchester and Liverpool city regions, movement is hindered by an overburdened road network. As noted by Fylde Council in a 2021 report, 'commuting outside the area is challenging with an underdeveloped rail infrastructure.'¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁷ Blackpool Gazette, 'REVEALED: Plans for Major Redevelopment of Fairhaven Lake' <<https://www.blackpoolgazette.co.uk/arts-and-culture/revealed-plans-major-redevelopment-fairhaven-lake-262471>> [accessed 13 May 2020].

¹⁷⁸ National Archives, *Previous Statistical Releases, Office of Rail and Road* (2020), <<https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20190603113509/https://orr.gov.uk/statistics/published-stats/previous-data/previous-statistical-releases>> [accessed 12 May 2020].

¹⁷⁹ Stephen J. Page, *Transport and Tourism Global Perspectives*, 2nd edn (Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2005), p.75.

¹⁸⁰ Bairstow, p.102.

¹⁸¹ Fylde Council, *Council Size Submission for Boundary Commission*, (Lytham St Annes: Fylde Council, 2021) p. 1.

Table 3.1 – Railway Station Usage at Selected Seaside Stations.¹⁸²

Station	1997/98	2007/08	2017/18	Change
Blackpool North	1.64m	1.68m	1.58m	-3.7%
Blackpool South	66k	105k	117k	+77.3%
St Annes	127k	128k	112k	-11.8%
Lytham	72k	71k	82k	+13.9%
National	0.72bn	1.02bn	1.71bn	+137.5%

The municipal bus service of Lytham St Annes became known as Fylde Borough Transport in 1974. Following deregulation in 1986, the local authority formed a limited company called Blue Buses. Initially, as in other areas, this temporarily increased services and competition. There was intense rivalry between Blue Buses and Blackpool Transport, with additional vehicles sourced from around the country to provide additional routes.¹⁸³ This period of competition was short-lived. As in the early 1990s, the Conservative government was encouraging local authorities to sell their transport undertakings, and after a brief interim, the company was sold to Blackpool Transport in May 1994.¹⁸⁴ In contrast to Blackpool, but in common with most other authorities, Fylde Council has minimal powers to influence the development of transport links to and from Lytham St Annes. The issue of improved rail links was raised again in the 2022 St Annes Masterplan:

St-Anne’s-on-the-Sea station is currently a poor arrival point to the town. There is an infrequent rail service (once an hour each way to Blackpool South and Preston for onward national connections), and the station facilities are limited to a small ticket office and rail user car parking. The masterplan proposal is for the transformation of the site to create a major gateway development to the town, to help anchor the eastern end of the Square and town centre and to welcome visitors to the town.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸² Lancashire County Council, *Railway Stations Usage* (2020), <<https://www.lancashire.gov.uk/lancashire-insight/transport/railway-stations-usage/>> [accessed 2 April 2020].

¹⁸³ Postlethwaite, p. 42.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

¹⁸⁵ Fylde Council, *St Annes Town Centre Masterplan* (2022), <<https://new.fylde.gov.uk/st-annes-town-centre-masterplan/>> [accessed November 17 2022], p. 37.

Despite this barrier and the loss of some key tourist attractions, Fylde Council has managed changes in the Lytham St Annes tourism market more effectively than elsewhere. Primary through partnership working and modest public-sector spending. Fylde Council could and did support smaller-scale projects while leaving the private sector to take the lead in most instances. Fylde Council was a small, second-tier authority, so this was the only practical route. Due to the nature of its development as a seaside resort, Lytham St Annes has not required large-scale local authority intervention of Blackpool and Morecambe. The resort benefits from an affluent resident population and an aspirational middle-class image. As a result, Lytham St Annes has attracted significant private sector investment in the last twenty years, which Blackpool and Morecambe have struggled to achieve. To a certain extent, the desire of many older visitors for 'peace and quiet' has meant that any facilities provided can be more modest. It can also be seen that, overall, Fylde Council has successfully dealt with the coastal tourism challenges facing it over the last twenty years. Fylde Council's handling of Lytham St Annes offers important lessons in local governance and strategic planning, particularly in the context of small-scale coastal tourism. By adopting a flexible partnership-driven approach and carefully tailoring its tourism offerings to the unique characteristics of its target market, Fylde Council has managed to achieve significant success. However, issues related to public transport, regional competition, and long-term governance structure continue to pose challenges that will require further strategic action.

3.3 Conclusions

Before 1974, local authorities of Blackpool, Morecambe and Lytham St Annes were strongly connected to the resorts they represented and the tourist industry. In addition, the role of local government in tourism policy before 1974 was primarily felt at this county or municipal borough level. Lancashire County Council had limited influence on developing Lancashire's resorts as tourist destinations. However, the 1974 reorganisation caused significant disruption to this well-established local government system. Despite an increased strategic role for Lancashire County Council and other regional bodies in developing tourism strategies from the 1980s onwards, their overall impact is questionable, as the underlying problems they identified remained

unresolved. It was also evident that by the 2010s, while parts of Lancashire were attractive to tourists, the Lancashire County Council had failed to achieve most of its objectives. Indeed, with continued institutional and policy churn, the capacity of higher tiers of local government to address these issues is doubtful.

Blackpool had its own district authority and maintained its popularity as a seaside resort until the 1990s despite some concerning trends. This period confirms the Walton thesis of resort resilience, with Blackpool's attractions competing against domestic and foreign competition. Despite this, Blackpool did suffer a significant decline in visitor numbers (both staying and day visitors) during the 1990s. However, since 1998, Blackpool has gained increased autonomy from unitary authority status, enabling the acquisition of major tourist attractions that would have disappeared without public-sector involvement. Blackpool's local planners have had mixed success but have now crucially recognised the critical importance of maintaining the historic built environment and conducting adequate market research as part of the resort's regeneration strategy. With local government taking the lead, Blackpool Council has developed effective relationships with the private sector and has successfully managed various regeneration projects.

Despite losing key tourist attractions, Lytham St Annes (which dominated Fylde Borough Council) managed changes in the tourism market through modest public-sector intervention. Fylde Council could and did support smaller-scale projects while leaving the private sector to take the lead in most instances. Lytham St Annes has not required large-scale local authority intervention from Fylde Borough Council, and the resort continues to benefit from an affluent resident population and an aspirational middle-class image. Lytham St Annes has attracted significant private sector investment in the last twenty years, which Blackpool has struggled to achieve. To a certain extent, the desire of many older visitors for 'peace and quiet' has meant that any facilities provided are more modest. However, had Blackpool Council accepted the declinist view and scaled back its interventions, the town would have suffered a terminal loss of tourist attractions and visitors. The resort's future is still uncertain, but the Blackpool Council has shown imagination in seeking to attract new visitors while preserving its heritage. It also shows the importance of effective local government at the resort level, developing and implementing place-specific policies. Agarwal, who analysed regeneration projects

in South-West England over the last twenty-five years, argues that local authorities must devote considerable energy to managing effective partnerships if resort restructuring is to be successful. She also claims that planning for renewal needs to be proactive and include a preparedness to respond to change. Finally, she points out that the strategy must be adequately resourced.¹⁸⁶ Blackpool Council, especially since 1998, has demonstrated more of these features than Lancaster City Council.

Compared to Blackpool and Lytham St Annes, Morecambe and Heysham have seen the most significant decline in tourist numbers since 1974 and the weakest response from local government. Lancaster City Council assumed responsibility for the resort of Morecambe and Heysham following a period of increasing local authority intervention in planning and delivering tourist attractions. However, by the end of the century, the Morecambe no longer rely on this. Morecambe and Heysham's challenges would have been trying for even the most determined local authority supported by external private investment and central government finance. However, when Morecambe and Heysham Municipal Borough was abolished in 1974, the resort was administered by an authority that became severely divided along geographic and political lines. In addition, compared to Blackpool and Fylde Council, the Lancaster City Council has seen much greater political instability, with minority control and a high turnover of councillors. It is telling that committees with limited tourism knowledge took crucial decisions in the late 1970s and 1980s. Between 1976 and 1987, no significant tourist survey or market research was undertaken to inform a medium to long-term strategy for Lancaster City Council. Since the late 1980s, council reports, and regeneration plans have been better at highlighting problems than delivering solutions for Morecambe and Heysham. External funding has helped to regenerate parts of the resort since the 1990s, but public money has been limited in recent years, and few private investors have been willing to put their faith in Morecambe.

Overall, because of the different approaches of their local authorities there has been variable levels of success in revitalising or maintaining the tourist industries in their resorts. Blackpool has been the most resilient, especially post-1997, when the unitary authority allowed it more autonomy for local planning and development. The strategic

¹⁸⁶ Sheela Agarwal, 'Relational Spatiality and Resort Restructuring', *Annals of Tourism Research*, 39.1 (2012), 134-54, (pp. 149-50).

approach and public-private partnerships played a key role in maintaining its status as a major tourist resort. On the other hand, Morecambe and Heysham suffered from a lack of a focused strategy and investment, exacerbated by political instability within Lancaster City Council. The case of Lytham St Annes represents a middle ground where modest public-sector intervention had been enough, due to the resort's affluent resident population and less resource-intensive tourist attractions. It shows that different resorts have diverse needs and strengths, requiring tailored approaches rather than one-size-fits-all policies.

Chapter 4 'Fresh Air and Fun' – Providing Seaside Entertainment Before 1974

4.1 Introduction – The Development of Entertainment and Amenities at Lancashire's Seaside

Prescription for Pleasure

Take seven miles of golden sands, tide washed twice in every day, and crisp breezes zesty with the tang of the sea. Add majestic ballrooms and star-studded shows to appeal to all the family; hotels and boarding houses which set new standards of hospitality; stir in the spirits of gaiety, friendliness and fun. Colour with beautiful parks with extensive sporting facilities and quiet floral arbours.

The result? ... BLACKPOOL.¹

The above quotation is taken from the 1965 Blackpool Holiday Guide. It encapsulates the core appeal of the resort and its tourist offer. Over the previous century, natural attractions had been supplemented by a wide selection of entertainment and leisure options. While not developing to the same extent as Blackpool, Morecambe and Lytham St Annes had also become well-established holiday resorts by the 1960s. Having examined the growth of municipal power in Lancashire's resorts in chapter two, I analyse the relationship between private investors and the local government in providing tourist amenities and entertainment from the late nineteenth century until the watershed reorganisation of 1974. Local councils were critical in managing each resort's entertainment venues and other tourist amenities. Fred Gray's central argument is that distinctive architecture helped define the seaside resort as an arena for leisure. Through planning and commissioning public buildings and parks, resort authorities have had a critical influence on shaping this arena.² In this chapter, I argue that it was effective local government that was critical in the development of the distinctive range of attractions and amenities in Lancashire's resorts. Following a model of municipal conservatism model, all three resorts added a range of publicly funded tourist attractions to support those provided by private enterprises. During the 1960s, however, many of the larger attractions were sold by local owners to regional or national companies. As a result, the direct local business connection in these resorts was

¹ LA, Library Collection, County Borough of Blackpool – The Official Holiday Journal, 1965, p. 3.

² Fred Gray, *Designing the Seaside, Architecture, Society and Nature* (London: Reaktion Books, 2006), pp. 14-16.

significantly weakened.³ The gradual erosion of the municipal conservative model, and wider changes in the tourist market and local government, would provide significant challenges to the survival of its attractions from the 1970s onwards.

To better understand the changing relationship between private enterprise and local government before 1974, I investigated five broad categories of amenities across the three Lancashire resorts. Each of these played a critical role in developing each location as a centre of mass tourism. The sea first attracted visitors to the Lancashire coast, and this and its sandy beaches remained the primary attraction until the 1970s. To complement the sea and sand, each resort erected sizeable open-air public swimming pools in the early twentieth century, providing safe seawater swimming for visitors each summer. For those who wished to enjoy the sea without getting wet, pleasure piers opened along the Lancashire coast, allowing tourists to promenade and enjoy a range of entertainments. With unpredictable weather, indoor pleasure palaces and theatres became essential to a seaside resort's entertainment offer. In addition, although not present in Lytham St Annes, Blackpool and Morecambe developed substantial amusement parks appealing to millions of thrill-seekers over the decades. Finally, as millions stayed in Lancashire's seaside towns, local authorities were required to regulate the vast range of holiday accommodation established by private enterprises, from grand hotels to boarding houses. I analyse the relationship between local government and private enterprise in developing Lancashire's seaside resorts by examining key areas, such as in the provision of leisure and entertainment amenities, where this relationship is most visible and impactful. This study of the pre-1974 era is crucial for establishing these relationships and their subsequent challenges post-reorganisation.

Although this is not an exhaustive list of all these resorts had to offer, these case studies give a critical insight into resort development and the relationship between the private and public sectors. The connections between private enterprise and the local authority helped establish its identity in these areas. As shown in previous chapters, the local governance framework established in Blackpool, Morecambe, and Lytham St Annes and their relationship to local business networks proved crucial to their

³ John Urry and Jonas Larsen, *The Tourist Gaze 3.0*, Theory, Culture & Society, 3. ed. (London: Sage, 2011), p. 46.

development as successful seaside resorts. As Walton notes, despite the economic challenges of the interwar period, local authorities were able to invest heavily in a range of seaside attractions.⁴ This investment laid the basis for the post-Second World War boom. It also meant that these local authorities had considerable expertise in tourism management. Examining how this earlier relationship operated before 1974 and assessing strengths and weaknesses is vital to understanding the impact of resort development after local government reorganisation.

4.2 Seaside Entertainment and Amenities in Lancashire Before 1974

4.2.1 The Beach, Swimming and Open-Air Pools

The earliest visitors to the English coast came to bathe in the sea, and this would still be central in resort publicity two centuries later. The alleged health-giving qualities of sea-bathing were integral to early resort development. However, from the end of the eighteenth century, the English seaside resort also provided distinctive entertainment and attractions besides the shoreline and sea. For example, seaside donkeys were being ridden at Margate from the 1790s and were soon joined by beach stalls and entertainers during the early nineteenth century.⁵ Brodie points out that the range of attractions on the beach grew throughout the nineteenth century.⁶ Such was the popularity of sea and sand that local authorities were keen to regulate the activities on Lancashire's beaches by the end of the nineteenth century. This was to maintain an appropriate social tone and to raise revenue through licensing these entertainers.⁷ Although local authorities wanted visitors to come in large numbers, they also wished to regulate how they spent their money and time at the resort. Blackpool Council, for example, began to control activities on the beach and along the promenade more forcibly during the 1890s. This included a crackdown on shoreline amusements considered to be anti-social, such as hawkers and phrenologists.⁸ Walton argues that this was primarily for public morality

⁴ John K. Walton, *The British Seaside: Holidays and Resorts in the Twentieth Century*, Studies in Popular Culture (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 2006), p. 106.

⁵ Kathryn Ferry, *The British Seaside Holiday* (Oxford: Shire, 2009), p. 78.

⁶ Allan Brodie, *The Seafront* (Swindon: Historic England, 2018), pp. 144–45.

⁷ For example, LA, MBL/acc553, Lytham St Annes Council and Committee Minutes, 1972-73, Foreshore Standings, Minute 740, 8 January 1973, p. 281.

⁸ Lee Jackson, *Palaces of Pleasure: From Music Halls to the Seaside to Football, How the Victorians Invented Mass Entertainment* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019), p. 201.

and that visitors would not, in the words of Alderman Sir John Bickerstaffe in 1893, be 'pestered to death.'⁹ As well as being a prominent member of Blackpool Council, Bickerstaffe also ran the Blackpool Tower Company, so he was keen to regulate the growing resort. This regulatory role would grow during the twentieth century as they controlled foreshore entertainment and provided an increasing range of municipal infrastructure on the promenades constructed next to these beaches.

Although spending time on the beach and sea bathing remained a primary motivating factor for visitors until growing concerns over pollution emerged from the 1970s, alternative attractions began to be provided during the late nineteenth century. Initially dominated by private schemes, these also included the provision of large swimming facilities by Lancashire's resort. These required large-scale public investment, indicating their significance for local authorities in the early and mid-twentieth century. For example, by 1972, spending on its municipal pools represented almost twenty per cent of Blackpool Council's attractions and amenities budget.¹⁰ This level of public spending on outdoor pools became more challenging to maintain by the end of the twentieth century due to changing tourist tastes and a reduction in local government autonomy.

The dangers of sea bathing, and the associated risk of drowning, also encouraged the development of municipal pools. Gray argues that the sea had disadvantages for holidaymakers and that it 'could be inaccessible, dangerous, or unpleasant, and, apart from the bathing machines, it was also challenging for private investors to profit from'.¹¹ However, as swimming grew in popularity in the twentieth century, large publicly funded outdoor pools were built in St Annes (1916), Blackpool (1923) and Morecambe (1936). With striking and innovative designs, these pools enhanced the locations in which they were constructed and became an integral part of the resort experience and promoted a sense of civic pride. How these pools connected with, and complemented the resorts in which they operated, contrasts markedly with their later replacements.

Lancashire's local authorities were keen to capitalise on the increasing demand for swimming during the early twentieth century. Smith and Inglis argue that by the

⁹ Cited in John K. Walton, *Blackpool, Town and City Histories* (Keele: Keele Univ. Press, 1998), p. 74.

¹⁰ BHC, LE02, Blackpool County Borough Minutes, 1972, Policy and Finance Committee, Minute 14, 23 November 1972, p. 830.

¹¹ Gray, *Designing the Seaside*, p. 177.

1930s, open-air pools (or lidos) had become emblems of municipal pride and a belief in a brighter, more enlightened future.¹² (The name lido stemmed from an island in the Venice Lagoon where Europe's wealthiest tourists had bathed in the nineteenth century). As James McLachlan points out, in Britain, it reflected the efforts to attract upwardly mobile working and middle-class visitors who had better wages and more free time than at any point in history.¹³ The 1938 Holidays with Pay Act accelerated this trend. In July of that year, the *West Lancashire Evening Gazette* reported that there would be 'a rail and road invasion of almost unprecedented magnitude' and that 'the "holidays-with-pay" movement is finding increasing favour will mean an added influx.'¹⁴ Compared to the functional municipal buildings of the late twentieth century, these pools were built by local authorities to impress. Along with other shoreline attractions, they became crucial to each resort's appeal. By 1931, the total number of admissions to Blackpool's Open-Air Baths was over 685,000. On Bank Holiday Monday in August 1938 alone, 12,500 paid for entry to the Blackpool Open-Air Baths and 7,000 to the pool at St Annes.¹⁵ Morecambe's Swimming Stadium also reported almost 700,000 visitors in its first two years. Promotional material from Morecambe and Heysham Corporation publicising the resort and its new pool was sent to various media outlets in 1937, stating, 'Municipal and private enterprise have seen to it that health and enjoyment go hand in hand'.¹⁶ This exemplifies the vital role played by these municipal pools in each resort's tourism offer until their closure and demolition in the 1970s and 1980s.

After the First World War, Lancashire's resort authorities were keen to celebrate athleticism and fitness as emblems of modernity. The erosion of Victorian class and gender barriers also encouraged their growth. Significantly, after 1914 gender

¹² Janet Smith and Simon Inglis, *Liquid Assets: The Lidos and Open-air Swimming Pools of Britain*, Played in Britain (London: English Heritage: S&P Architects, 2005), p. 19.

¹³ James McLachlan, *The Rise and Fall and Rise Again of Britain's Lidos* (2019) <<https://theculturetrip.com/europe/united-kingdom/england/london/articles/the-rise-and-fall-and-rise-again-of-britains-lidos/>> [accessed 12 June 2022].

¹⁴ 'Peak of the Season is Here - Huge Holiday Rush to Blackpool', *West Lancashire Evening Gazette*, 30 July 1938, p. 5. The same article also notes that St Annes was 'full', and Lytham was expecting a 'big weekend' with visitors using the Corporation amenities extensively.

¹⁵ 'Summing up Bank Holiday- Blackpool returns its Verdict', *West Lancashire Evening Gazette*, 2 August 1938, p. 2.

¹⁶ LA, MBMO-HE/ACC6430/31/3, Promotion of Morecambe, Correspondence, Press Releases & Newspapers, 1928-1937.

segregation no longer applied in these open-air pools as public attitudes had shifted.¹⁷ As Ina Zweinger-Bargielowska argues, although women's competitive sports remained controversial, many women embraced sports such as swimming as an expression of liberation. In addition, central to the popularity of lidos was their democratic nature. This particularly suited resorts such as Blackpool and Morecambe, which had primarily working-class tourists. Open-air pools also held advantages over the older enclosed swimming baths, as local authorities considered open-air swimming cheaper and healthier than that in covered pools. This municipal enterprise was not confined to the seaside. In the 1920s and 1930s, over two hundred were built by local authorities across Britain.¹⁸ However, it was at the coast where some of the most significant and costly were constructed.¹⁹ Among the most impressive of these seaside lidos were the open-air pools of St Annes, Blackpool, and Morecambe.

The first large open-air seaside pool in Lancashire was opened in St Annes, despite the background of the First World War, in 1916 by St Annes Corporation. The St Annes Open-Air Baths was eighty yards long and forty yards wide, costing £18,000. It became alternatively known as 'The Roman Baths' and was popular with locals and holidaymakers despite being unheated until 1972. In keeping with the middle-class tone of the resort, during the interwar period, the local authority engaged an orchestra to play at the Open-Air Baths to entertain visitors during the summer season.²⁰ In addition to swimming, the St Annes pool was used for aquatic shows and bathing beauty competitions from the 1930s, when an Art Deco café was added with additional local authority funding.²¹ Impressive as the building was, the new open-air pool in Blackpool soon overshadowed it. Blackpool's South Shore Baths, which opened on 9 June 1923, was reputedly the world's largest. Modelled on the Coliseum in Rome, it cost more than £80,000 to build, a considerable investment at that time. That Blackpool Corporation

¹⁷ Ina Zweinger-Bargielowska, 'The Making of a Modern Female Body: Beauty, Health and Fitness in Interwar Britain', *Women's History Review*, 20.2 (2011), 299–317 (p. 299).

¹⁸ Smith and Inglis, p. 26. This building programme was largely due to the efforts of London County Council (LCC). Herbert Morrison, the LCC chairman from 1934-40 had promised to turn London into a 'city of lidos' in 1937.

¹⁹ Ferry, p. 74.

²⁰ LA, MBLS/acc5401/box3, Lytham St Annes Corporation Minutes 1924-25, 2 February 1925, Minute 334, p. 244.

²¹ Red Rose Collections from Lancashire County Council, *Open-Air Baths, St Annes on Sea*, (2021), <<https://redrosecollections.lancashire.gov.uk/view-item?i=231444>> [accessed 13 February 2021].

was able to undertake this municipal enterprise is explained by the firm financial base and strong revenue position, which the authority had at that time. The *Blackpool Gazette and Herald* reported in January 1923 that the resort continued to be the borough with the lowest local taxation rates in the country. In addition, each rate of 1d in the £ produced £3,340 in revenue. This was, for example, £1,240 more than neighbouring Preston County Borough. Other seaside authorities, such as Brighton, Bournemouth, and Southport, also maintained low rates and high revenues during this period.²² Positive stories relating to the local authority spending were common during the inter-war period in the pro-Conservative *Gazette*. This became the resort's dominant publication following the demise of the main Liberal newspaper, the *Blackpool Times* in 1933.²³ South Shore Baths formed an amphitheatre with a pool that was 376 feet long and 170 feet wide. The enormous building had a huge capacity, with space for eight thousand spectators, five thousand of whom could be seated. Fifteen hundred bathers could be accommodated. The pool proved enormously popular; by the end of the 1930s, visitors to the South Shore Baths had totalled over nine million people.²⁴ This building represented a statement of intent for the resort and civic pride, which is even more impressive as it was constructed during post-war national austerity.²⁵ This highlights the level of autonomy that county and municipal boroughs enjoyed in this period and their ability to raise money locally despite severe national cuts. The financial freedom granted to local authorities in the 1920s and 1930s was much less likely to be available in the late twentieth century as local government spending became more strictly controlled by the central government.

With Lytham St Annes and Blackpool Councils having constructed substantial open-air pools, the newly formed Morecambe and Heysham Borough Council (1928) decided to build their own pool.²⁶ They could do this by taking advantage of a government loan scheme for works commissioned in the public interest to generate

²² 'Blackpool's Municipal Eminence', *Blackpool Gazette and Herald*, 23 January 1923, p. 2.

²³ John K. Walton, *Blackpool*, p. 127.

²⁴ Live Blackpool, *Open-air Baths at South Shore, Before the Sandcastle* (2021), <<https://www.liveblackpool.info/about/history/open-air-baths-at-south-shore-and-the-sandcastle/>> [accessed 11 June 2022].

²⁵ David Heald and Christopher Hood, 'The Politics of Fiscal Squeeze', in *When the Party's Over*, ed. by Christopher Hood, David Heald and Rozana Himaz, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 20.

²⁶ LA, MBMO/HE/acc8327, Box 1, Morecambe and Heysham Borough Council Minutes 1928-29, 19 November 1928, Minute 234, p. 52.

employment during the 1930s Depression.²⁷ Work began in 1934, and the project would eventually cost the authority £185,000.²⁸ The result was the world's largest heated open-air swimming pool, which Morecambe could boast over their rival Blackpool. This was a clear demonstration of municipal pride and competition influencing the future direction of each resort. The location of these pools was significant in all three resorts. The pools were built close to the piers and other seaside attractions and became critical drivers for further infrastructure investment. It gave private investors in both Blackpool and Morecambe confidence in the future success of each resort. Morecambe's Super Swimming Stadium was completed in 1936 and echoed the neighbouring Midland Hotel's modernist style. Built on reclaimed land, the Stadium dominated the central promenade in front of the Winter Gardens and was a popular tourist destination. This development was seen as vital for the resort and highlighted the dynamism and innovation of the period.²⁹ The lido had to be about more than swimming to repay the considerable investment, so cafes were provided for the thousands of spectators who came to watch on ordinary days and for galas, diving displays, and water polo matches.³⁰ However, it would be beauty competitions that would provide the highest regular income for this venue.

In addition to swimming, Lancashire's seaside pools became venues for various beauty and aquatic shows. Their size meant large-scale events could be held as these venues could hold thousands of swimmers and spectators. A producer of one of the aquatic revues staged in Morecambe emphasised the financial necessity of such events, 'Since the first season's experience (in 1936), it was found necessary, apart from swimming and bathing, to fully utilise the baths, owing to dull days and the water temperature.' In a good year, during the 1950s, Morecambe's aquatic displays could make a profit of over £6,000.³¹ As a publicly owned venture, the consequences of a successful or unsuccessful season would dramatically affect council finances.

²⁷ Lancaster Guardian, *The Story of Morecambe's Famous Super Swimming Stadium* (2022), <<https://www.lancasterguardian.co.uk/news/people/the-story-of-morecambes-famous-super-swimming-stadium-3657984>> [accessed 12 June 2022].

²⁸ Roger Bingham, *Lost Resort? The Flow and Ebb of Morecambe* (Milnthorpe: Cicerone Press, 1990), p. 212.

²⁹ Smith and Inglis, p. 126.

³⁰ Ferry, pp. 74–5.

³¹ Smith and Inglis, p. 41.

One of the UK's most significant beauty competitions also occurred at Morecambe's Swimming Stadium. This was the National Bathing Beauty Competition, or *Miss Great Britain*, held in Morecambe between 1945 and 1989.³² Heats were held weekly, and the winners were awarded prizes by whoever was top of the bill at the Morecambe Winter Gardens. For example, during Morecambe's record season of 1959, the *Morecambe Guardian* reported a crowd of more than 3,000 people attending the Miss Morecambe final, with the gate receipts for the contests increasing to £5,254 (an increase of £1,000 from 1958).³³ Even as in-person attendances declined from the early 1960s, television broadcasts of the Miss Great Britain final, beginning in 1971, showed the continuing popularity of the competition and brought national attention to the resort.³⁴ While television entertainment was often seen as a threat to live entertainment, the popularity of these programs helped to raise the profile of Morecambe in an attempt to promote the link between these destinations and beauty and glamour. Opposition to beauty contests did emerge during the 1960s because of their exploitative nature. However, their popularity and the revenue they generated meant that local authority-sponsored pageants continued to be hosted in Blackpool, Morecambe, and Lytham St Annes throughout this period.

By the end of the 1960s, the future of open-air municipal pools had become uncertain. One early sign of change came in 1960 with the Wolfenden Report on Sport in the Community. This concluded that although more swimming baths were urgently needed, 'as a general rule, this provision should be indoor.'³⁵ As a result, Lancashire's local authorities were increasingly keen to develop indoor leisure centres with warm water swimming pools. Aquatic shows had become less popular due to television, and as early as the mid-1960s, some Blackpool councillors started seeing their open-air pool as a white elephant. Pools constructed in the 1920s and 1930s and exposed to extreme weather conditions needed constant investment. For example, in 1974, Blackpool Borough Surveyor reported extensive cracking of the glazed brick facing, which 'had

³² Stuart Spence, 'Problems, Solutions and Strategies for a British Seaside Resort: The Case of Morecambe' (unpublished master's dissertation, Lancaster University, 2002).

³³ 'Heysham Shop Girl Miss Morecambe', *Morecambe Guardian*, 4 September 1959, p. 1.

³⁴ Miss Great Britain, *History* (2021), <<https://www.missgreatbritain.co.uk/history/>> [accessed 13 February 2021]. According to *The Stage* (9 September 1971), the Yorkshire Television broadcast attracted a viewing figure of 6.75 million people.

³⁵ Cited in Smith and Inglis, p. 41.

been deteriorating for many years.’ On this occasion, Blackpool Council were prepared to spend £20,000 on repairs.³⁶ Open-air pools could still attract large attendances, especially on sunny days. For example, on August Bank Holiday 1969, 2,319 bathers paid to swim at Morecambe’s Super Swimming Stadium.³⁷ However, this was still considerably lower than the peaks of the 1950s. For example, on August Bank Holiday 1956, over four thousand attended.³⁸ Although changing public attitudes began to raise questions about the future of these pools, this was not an insurmountable challenge. Ultimately, they were closed during the 1970s and 1980s due to the withdrawal of financial support from local government. In other parts of the United Kingdom where this support continued, they have survived to the present day.³⁹ Local political backing and significant public financial support were fundamental in developing these municipal swimming amenities. As part of a wider crisis of confidence, removing local government support would result in their demise.

³⁶ BHC, LE02, Blackpool Borough Council Minutes 1974, Minute 19, 28 August 1974, p. 449.

³⁷ Bingham, p. 299.

³⁸ ‘Rain Robs Town of a Bumper Week-End’, *Morecambe Guardian*, 10 August 1956, p. 1.

³⁹ allthelidos.co.uk, *ALL THE LIDOS Your Guide To Every Outdoor Pool In The UK* (2023) <<https://allthelidos.co.uk/all-the-outdoor-swimming-pools-and-lidos-in-the-uk-the-complete-and-updated-list/>> [accessed 17 December 2023].

4.2.2 Piers

Photo of Blackpool North Pier removed for copyright reasons. Copyright holder is Lancs Live.

Fig 4.1 - Blackpool North Pier, June 1960. Thousands of visitors were enjoying the sun in a typical scene from the post-war era.⁴⁰

The pier is one of the most iconic symbols of the British seaside holiday. Complementing the natural attractions of sea and sand, holidaymakers could walk out to sea or later sit in a deck chair to enjoy the sun without worrying about the incoming tide. Blackpool's three piers, for example, have become a unique selling point for the resort. These piers have not only been crucial from a tourism perspective but also hold great cultural and historical importance for local communities. They represent a blend of public and private interests and have adapted over the years to shifting trends in entertainment, architecture, and leisure activities. The World Monument Fund recognised this in 2018 when it reported that 'the resort's three piers are a flagship tourist attraction and a key

⁴⁰ Lancs Live, *Memory Lane: Blackpool from 1949 – 1985 Featuring Weddings, The Beatles and More* (2020), <<https://www.lancs.live/news/lancashire-news/gallery/memory-lane-blackpool-1949-1985-19240108>> [accessed 12 June 2022].

component of Blackpool's identity as a seaside resort and a fundamental part of the story of the seaside holiday.'⁴¹ Although a precise definition of what constitutes a pleasure pier is debated, according to the National Piers Society (established in 1979), four such piers have survived to the present day in Lancashire: three in Blackpool and one in St Annes. Other piers have been lost in recent decades, including Morecambe's pleasure piers, which suffered from multiple storms and fires in the 1970s and 1980s.⁴² As well as being popular tourist attractions (see Fig 4.1), seaside piers have also been vital to coastal communities regarding resort identity, heritage, employment, and community pride. Although the building and maintenance of Lancashire's seaside piers were initially undertaken within the private sector, a strong relationship emerged between those individuals and companies involved and Lancashire's resort authorities.

Local authorities increasingly judged and determined each resort's architecture and what should be built through planning controls. Whilst the funding and designing of individual seaside buildings, such as new pier pavilions, were done within the private sector, these structures' broader context and planning were part of the public domain. This can be seen in the colourful and eye-catching British Railways poster from 1957 (see Fig 4.2). Lancashire's piers were integral to the tourist offer made by its seaside resorts, promising the visitor an 'invigorating change of scene.' This was true of all three resorts, but especially Blackpool. Jackson argues, 'In truth, Blackpool was unique not for its miraculous sea air, but the depth of its pockets and the superior quality of its marketing.'⁴³ This may be seen as an exaggeration, with the tremendous autonomy that Blackpool's council enjoyed until the 1970s enabling it to create a large and well-funded publicity department that effectively promoted the critical attractions of the town of which the three piers were a crucial element.

⁴¹ World Monuments Fund, *Blackpool Piers* (2021), <<https://wmf.org.uk/Projects/blackpool-piers/>> [accessed 19 January 2021].

⁴² National Piers Society, *Piers in the North West & Isle of Man* (2022), <<https://piers.org.uk/piers-north-west-iom/>> [accessed 12 June 2022].

⁴³ Jackson, p. 218.

British Railways Poster advertising the Lancashire Coast removed for copyright reasons. Copyright holder is the Science Museum Group.

Fig 4.2 - Lancashire Coast 1957 British Railways Poster, London Midland Region.⁴⁴

The main period of pier building along Britain's coastlines occurred during the late nineteenth century. Originally purely functional structures, Lancashire's piers quickly developed into amusement places as their owners sought to increase profits.⁴⁵ Although the First World War ended the era of pier-building, most piers remained popular and profitable until at least the 1960s. Thus, they became an essential part of the traditional English seaside resort. James Walvin, in the late 1970s, wrote that seaside piers represented 'classic examples of Victorian and Edwardian architecture and style, and it is consequently important to preserve them.'⁴⁶ Piers complemented the attraction of sun, sea and sands when concerns over polluted waters were not

⁴⁴ Science Museum Group, *Lancashire Coast*, *Science Museum Group Collection* (2021), <<https://collection.sciencemuseumgroup.org.uk/objects/co230137/lancashire-coast-poster>> [accessed 18 January 2021]. The poster describes Lancashire as 'Playground of the North where lively holiday resorts abound with gaiety and amusement – where all can enjoy an invigorating change of scene and even the air is a tonic.'

⁴⁵ Ferry, p. 101.

⁴⁶ James Walvin, *Beside the Seaside: A Social History of the Popular Seaside Holiday* (London: Allen Lane, 1978), pp. 152–3.

widespread. As a result, Lancashire's piers were repaired and restored by their owners until the 1960s, often at enormous expense despite repeated damage through fire and storms. Private owners and local authorities before 1974 saw the value of these structures in ways that were not replicated later. However, as Lancashire's coastal authorities turned away from the sea, piers were no longer considered essential for their tourism offer.

Lancashire's resorts were at the forefront of building pleasure piers from the 1860s onwards. Across the three Lancashire resorts under examination, seven pleasure piers were constructed between 1863 and 1896. The Blackpool Pier Company opened the first in 1863, later known as Blackpool North Pier. The opening ceremony was reported nationally, with the *Illustrated London News* estimating the crowd at almost twenty-thousand and that 'the appearance of the town itself was as gay as any holiday could make it...(and) the ceremony of the opening the pier began with a procession, which represented all the local interests of the town.'⁴⁷ Although it predated the formation of Blackpool Council, it was an important step in the evolution of the resort. Gray argues that the completion of this new pier was a cause of civic pride and created a growing sense of identity amongst Blackpool residents. This was reflected by the fact that thirty per cent of shares were taken by people from Blackpool.⁴⁸ In November 1919, after over half a century of successful operation, the *Blackpool Gazette & Herald* reported a sixteen per cent dividend, with a profit of over £18,000. The Pier was described at the annual meeting of shareholders that year as the 'finest structure in the country.' Also, despite these generous payments to shareholders, a 'great deal of money had been spent on repairs'.⁴⁹ Unlike half a century later, there was no need for large-scale public investment in these structures or any doubt in their value to the resort.

The immediate success of the North Pier led to a split in the Blackpool Pier Company. A minority of shareholders saw this as an opportunity to build a second pier aimed at a broader customer base. The breakaway faction formed the South Blackpool Jetty Company in September 1864. It was opened in 1868, and by 1890 Blackpool Central Pier (as it came to be known) welcomed around a million visitors annually, guaranteeing

⁴⁷ 'The Opening of Blackpool Pier', *Illustrated London News*, 30 May 1863, p. 18.

⁴⁸ John K. Walton, *Blackpool*, p. 37.

⁴⁹ 'North Pier Profits', *Blackpool Gazette & Herald*, 18 November 1918, p. 3.

investors' profits.⁵⁰ The success of these two piers resulted in the construction of a third pleasure pier. It was initially called the Victoria Pier (renamed 'South' Pier in 1930) and opened on Good Friday in 1893. The piers of Blackpool had become a key attraction for the resort and Blackpool Council. This is indicated by the choice of a photograph taken from the end of North Pier that was featured on the cover of the 1914 Blackpool Official Guide.⁵¹ The type of entertainment available on each pier reflected the class divisions of the period, but also that Blackpool could cater for all tastes and backgrounds. For example, the *Blackpool Gazette & Herald*, in its Easter 1916 entertainment guide, reported, 'all tastes well catered for' and that 'everyone should spend a merry holiday and forget for a while the worries and anxieties of the war.' On North Pier, there would be a performance of Haydn's oratorio, 'Creation' by the North Pier Orchestra. In contrast, Central Pier hosted a vaudeville show by an entertainment company called 'The Gaieties' and South (Victoria) Pier a music hall production called 'Victorians'.⁵² Although Blackpool was predominantly a working-class resort, its entertainment offer varied enough to appeal to visitors of all social classes.

As Blackpool's popularity grew, pier owners maximised their income by offering more facilities and entertainment to their customers to raise revenue, including some large pavilions by the 1870s. Between 1874 and 1875, a new pavilion was constructed at the seaward end of Blackpool's North Pier.⁵³ As a result of increased demand for leisure and steamer travel, the deck widened in the 1870s when the new Pavilion opened.⁵⁴ In this pre-First World War period, sailing between Lancashire's piers and beyond reached its peak. From Blackpool North Pier, it was possible to travel on services to Southport, Morecambe, Barrow-in-Furness, and North Wales.⁵⁵ Using these steamers, tourists visiting one resort could also spend time and money in another. As shown in the advertising by the Blackpool Steam Navigation Company, these also connected with the extensive railway network so that tourists could travel by boat and

⁵⁰ Brodie, *The Seafront*, p. 161.

⁵¹ Showtown Blackpool, Publicity Department, Blackpool Official Guide, 1914 (2023), <<https://www.showtownblackpool.co.uk/collections/galleries/publicity-department#&gid=1&pid=>> [accessed 16 January 2023]

⁵² 'Our Easter Fare', *Blackpool Gazette & Herald*, 21 April 1916, p. 6.

⁵³ Brodie, *The Seafront*, p. 163.

⁵⁴ John K. Walton, *Blackpool*, p. 38.

⁵⁵ Martin Easdown, *Lancashire's Seaside Piers* (Barnsley, South Yorkshire: Wharnccliffe Books, 2009), p. 108.

return by train.⁵⁶ Although not directly concerned with the day-to-day running of these ventures, these piers benefitted from municipal investment. As discussed in chapter two, this was demonstrated by building new promenades and the development of the tram network.

In Blackpool, during the post-war period, the traditional pleasure pier business of variety shows, music and dancing continued to thrive into the 1960s. For example, rather than being challenged by changes in entertainment consumption, pier theatres attracted a range of household names in the television age. However, as the pier business developed, all three piers evolved architecturally. North Pier had a controversial redevelopment in the early 1960s. In the 1960s, an amusement arcade and the Merrie England bar were opened. The replacement of previous buildings with a 'modern' 1960s entrance and the new structures' commercialism seemed at odds with the traditional, more refined nature of the North Pier established in the Victorian era. Interviewed in 1970 by writer Colin Welland for a television documentary, the changes were defended by a Blackpool council officer who said the public wanted 'leisure centres, not drab, old Victorian ideas.'⁵⁷ This attitude indicated a broader antipathy to Victorian seaside architecture among council officials during the 1960s and 1970s.

In contrast to the more up-market North Pier, Blackpool's Central Pier (the so-called 'People's Pier') was known for its popular entertainment, including open-air dancing.⁵⁸ Central Pier was then adapted to meet changing public tastes in the post-Second World War era. The 1903 White Pavilion at the entrance to the pier was demolished by the owners in 1966, and two years later, the Dixieland Showbar and Golden Goose amusement arcade opened. Objections made to the private owners, Entram Ltd, about removing the jetty in the early 1970s from Blackpool Council were ignored, with steamboat visits discontinued.⁵⁹ The South Pier also adapted to changing tastes during the 1950s and 1960s.⁶⁰ During the post-Second World War, most of the

⁵⁶ Blackpool Steam Navigation Co. Ltd, 'Sailings from the North Pier', *West Lancashire Evening Gazette*, 5 July 1938, p. 4.

⁵⁷ *Blackpool on Film*, BBC4, 1 November 2011, 20:30.

⁵⁸ 'Blackpool Central Pier - National Piers Society' <<https://piers.org.uk/piers/blackpool-central-pier/>> [accessed 3 April 2022].

⁵⁹ BHC, LE02, Blackpool County Borough Minutes 1970, 24 June 1970, Minute 16, p. 370.

⁶⁰ National Pier Society, *Blackpool South Pier* (2021), <<https://piers.org.uk/pier/blackpool-south-pier/>> [accessed 19 January 2021].

earlier class distinctions finally disappeared between Blackpool's pier, reflecting a general trend across the resort.

Morecambe's first pier was opened in 1869 and was later known as Morecambe Central Pier.⁶¹ Local investment to provide the £10,000 needed was again the key, with many investors buying five-pound shares.⁶² As in Blackpool, Morecambe's first pier's success prompted a second in the West End. Like other piers, it was to have a chequered history due to storms and fire. However, it remained a centre for Variety Theatre despite losing the concert building due to one of those fires in 1917.⁶³ The pavilion on Morecambe's Central Pier dubbed the 'Taj Mahal of the North', was destroyed in 1933 by fire.⁶⁴ Adapting to the current trends, a large new Art Deco pavilion opened in July 1936 with other additions on the pier, including an open-air dance floor, the Floral Hall (which contained a 2000-seat pavilion/ballroom) and a modernist two-storey and double-bayed 'Don Café' close to the entrance.⁶⁵ During the 1930s, this Art Deco style was replicated in the resort's seafront Midland Hotel and the massive Super Swimming Stadium. The newly created Morecambe and Heysham Borough Council funded the Swimming Stadium through public finance. These developments would prove highly popular with tourists for the next thirty years, as record numbers visited the resort. As Gray argues, Morecambe was remade by the local authority in their promotional literature as a sunny modern seaside place equipped for holidaymakers.⁶⁶ At this point, the basis of the resort's success was a true public-private partnership.

As in Morecambe, two pleasure piers were also constructed in Lytham St Annes. Following Blackpool's first pier, Lytham's 914-foot pier opened in 1865. It cost £5,890 and was paid for by the private Lytham Pier Company, reflecting local enthusiasm for such schemes. In 1892, the pier was reconstructed at the cost of £12,000 with a pavilion. However, during the early twentieth century, Lytham Pier began to lose money as tidal

⁶¹ National Piers Society, *Morecambe Central Pier* (2021), <<https://piers.org.uk/pier/morecambe-central-pier/>> [accessed 20 January 2021]. The 912-foot structure included a large pier-head, ideal for the steamers that called until 1914.

⁶² Bingham, p. 89.

⁶³ National Piers Society, *Morecambe West End Pier* (2021), <<https://piers.org.uk/pier/morecambe-west-end-pier/>> [accessed 20 January 2021].

⁶⁴ David Jarratt, 'The Development and Decline of Morecambe in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries: A Resort Caught in the Tide', p. 286.

⁶⁵ Fred Gray, *Architecture of British Seaside Piers*. (Ramsbury: The Crowood Press Ltd, 2020), p. 151.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 151.

changes eroded the sandy beach at Lytham. As a result, it was offered for sale by the Pier Company to the new Lytham St Annes Corporation in 1923.⁶⁷ Following the rejection of this offer and a major fire in 1927, the pier then fell into disrepair and was, by the 1950s, in a dangerous condition. Despite a petition (dismissed by a local councillor as not reflecting local opinion), the remaining structure was demolished in 1960 at the cost of £7,320.⁶⁸ The refusal of the authority to intervene to save the pier can be seen as wise in hindsight, for without a sandy beach and safe swimming, Lytham Pier was effectively redundant. Those wishing to spend a day on the beach, now encouraged by the local authority, travelled north to St Annes.

Following the building of Lytham Pier, investors in neighbouring St Annes opened its pier in June 1885 at the cost of £18,000. An entrance pavilion was added in 1899, and in January 1901, the directors decided to widen and enlarge the entire pier.⁶⁹ Unlike Lytham Pier, St Anne's Pier was a popular tourist attraction into the 1950s and 1960s, adapted to the changing demands. For example, the owners added an £8,000 amusement arcade to the pier entrance in 1954. Further confidence in the St Annes Pier's future was demonstrated when in 1962, the Amalgamated Investment & Property Company bought it for £240,000. The new owners renovated the entrance pavilion, Floral Hall, landing jetty and children's section. These changes resulted in the pier being at its peak, with a quarter of a million adults and 100,000 children going through the turnstiles each year.⁷⁰ Adding amusement arcades and bingo to St Annes Pier also proved highly popular with visitors as national reform of gambling legislation enabled arcades' growth from the 1960s.⁷¹ At the same time, the sector expanded as local entrepreneurs could take advantage of suitable buildings' ready availability.

It is a testament to these Victorian structures' durability that, at least until the 1970s, private investors were willing to spend large sums on their maintenance and development. Built on sand and pounded by the weather, piers are inherently

⁶⁷ LA, MBLs/acc5401, Box 1, Lytham St Annes Corporation Minutes, 1922/23, 26 February 1923, Minute 437, p. 223.

⁶⁸ National Piers Society, *Lytham Pier* (2021), <<https://piers.org.uk/pier/lytham-pier/>> [accessed 20 January 2021].

⁶⁹ Peter Shakeshaft, *St Anne's on the Sea: A History* (Lancaster: Carnegie, 2008), p. 173.

⁷⁰ National Piers Society, *St Annes Pier* (2021), <<https://piers.org.uk/pier/st-annes-pier/>> [accessed 19 January 2021].

⁷¹ Bingham, p. 300.

problematic structures, often hit by storms and fire, as has been highlighted. Increasingly, the resort authorities saw piers as a crucial asset. Across the country, councils became more involved if a privately owned enterprise was threatened – perhaps because a pier was making a loss or had suffered significant damage.⁷² As a result, a complex relationship developed between private investors and local authorities in maintaining and transforming these structures. However, unlike elsewhere in the UK, this did not extend to municipal ownership for the three local authorities under consideration.

4.2.3 Pleasure Palaces and Theatres

While offering an indoor alternative in English seaside resorts where pleasant weather could not be guaranteed, resort entertainment buildings or ‘pleasure palaces’ were usually constructed as near the sea as possible. These venues were not just about entertainment but also about a particular kind of social interaction, which made them important cultural amenities. In addition, these entertainment centres were not isolated businesses but were intrinsically linked to the resort's broader tourism industry. Although these buildings, like pleasure piers, were initially financed through private capital, a close relationship with the local government developed even before many seaside theatres were transferred into public ownership from the 1970s. These were often monumental structures as competition occurred within and between seaside resorts. Gray argues that the desire for resorts to stand out from each other led to buildings with striking facades or enormous towers.⁷³ These buildings were multi-purpose, and their uses changed over time, but they usually had live theatre as a core function. Blackpool’s Winter Gardens, for example, initially featured a pavilion theatre with a glass promenading area, but numerous additions were made over the decades. Blackpool was one of many seaside resorts to build an indoor amusement complex incorporating a range of entertainments under one roof. However, the expansion of the Winter Gardens shaped and echoed Blackpool’s ambitions as a seaside resort, as the Gardens evolved within the national and local context of the entertainment landscape

⁷² Gray, *Architecture of British Seaside Piers*, p. 23.

⁷³ Gray, *Designing the Seaside*, p. 245.

in which it operated.⁷⁴ Private investors in Morecambe also developed Winter Gardens and other theatres from the 1870s on a smaller- but still impressive scale. Due to close competition from Blackpool and the desire to maintain a more elite social tone, Lytham St Annes had no similar development except for the St Annes Pier complex. Smaller theatres operated in St Annes until the 1970s on the Pier and within the Ashton Gardens. However, Blackpool developed a range of attractions, including theatres, that no other resort could rival in scale and variety.

Live theatre entertainment, especially summer shows, has been a fundamental part of UK seaside resorts' attraction for over a century. As the largest resort, Blackpool saw the development of an extensive range of theatres that provided holiday entertainment for millions throughout the twentieth century. Local newspapers played an important role in marketing the range of entertainment available to visitors. For example, prominent advertisements in the *Blackpool Gazette and Herald* from August 1909 showed the array of options available to visitors. Amongst the many examples of live entertainment on offer, a ballet entitled *Amsterdam* was being performed at the Winter Garden's Pavilion Theatre, gymnastics in the Blackpool Tower Ballroom, a variety programme at the Palace Theatre and a musical play at the Grand Theatre.⁷⁵ Over the following decades, Blackpool's theatres were adapted to changing tastes and remained remarkably popular. For example, the Blackpool and District entertainment guide in the *West Lancashire Evening Gazette* on 6 August 1959 listed ten summer shows running across the resort.⁷⁶ Despite cultural and technological changes during the twentieth century, theatre-based entertainment has continued to be provided by local authorities even when loss-making. This was done in the belief that live entertainment is an integral and expected part of the traditional seaside holiday experience and is necessary to ensure a competitive advantage over other resorts.⁷⁷ Also, as noted in *The Stage Guide* of 1971, it had become accepted that the theatre was a cultural amenity that the

⁷⁴ Vanessa Toulmin, *Winter Gardens, Blackpool: The Most Magnificent Palace of Amusement in the World* (Huddersfield: Boco Publishing Ltd., 2009), pp. 10–11.

⁷⁵ 'Entertainment', *Blackpool Gazette & Herald*, 8 August 1909, p. 4.

⁷⁶ 'Blackpool and District Entertainment Guide', *West Lancashire Evening Gazette*, 6 August 2022, p. 22-3.

⁷⁷ Howard Hughes and Danielle Allen, 'Entertainment and its Significance in the Holiday Experience at UK Seaside Resorts', *Tourism Recreation Research*, 33.2, (2008), 131-141, (p.135).

community should support.⁷⁸ This live entertainment has been an expected part of the cultural offer for over a century.

From the beginning, there was a strong link between Blackpool's live entertainment venues and the local council. Wishing to provide more indoor amusement facilities, Dr William Cocker, the first Mayor of Blackpool, decided in 1875 to provide an indoor alternative to Raikes Park, nearer the town centre.⁷⁹ In a demonstration of growing municipal pride in Blackpool at the Winter Gardens opening in 1878, Cocker arranged a parade and invited seventy mayors, including the Lord Mayor of London.⁸⁰ After an uncertain start, the Blackpool Winter Gardens grew more profitable with an entertainment programme adapted to attract the broadest possible range of visitors.⁸¹ The complex ultimately developed a ballroom, two theatres, and several function rooms, including an exhibition space, bars and cafes.⁸² The Winter Gardens was richly decorated, emphasising the spectacular, including from the 1890s a giant Ferris wheel.

Built to challenge the Winter Gardens' success, Blackpool Tower (which opened in 1894) ushered in rapid growth in the town's entertainment venues.⁸³ Walton argues that the Tower was a democratic place where all classes could meet without undue discomfort, reflecting the town's enduring concern to retain as many middle-class visitors as possible.⁸⁴ Between 1898 and 1904, Frank Matcham was employed to transform the main venues in Blackpool Tower. This was in response to the recent enlargement of the Winter Gardens, the adjacent lavish Alhambra Theatre, and the nearby Hippodrome.⁸⁵ Although the money invested came from the private sector, the Bickerstaffe family controlled the Blackpool Tower Company (who later acquired the Grand Theatre, Alhambra, and Winter Gardens). These connections exemplify the links between Blackpool Council, the local business community, and the Conservative Party.

⁷⁸ Michael Holden, *The Stage Guide: Technical Information on British Theatres Published by The Stage Newspaper* (London: Carson and Comerford Ltd, 1971), p. 6.

⁷⁹ Bill Curtis, *Blackpool Tower* (Lavenham: Dalton, 1988), p. 12.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁸¹ Jackson, p. 211. The current 3,000-seat Opera House is the third theatre on the site, with the original Her Majesty's Opera House designed by Frank Matcham in 1889, being replaced in 1911 by a 2,500-seat theatre.

⁸² 'Blackpool Tower and Winter Gardens', *Archaeological Journal*, 169.1 (2012), 44–5.

⁸³ Brodie, *The Seafront*, pp. 200–1.

⁸⁴ John K. Walton, *Blackpool*, p. 92.

⁸⁵ Brodie, *The Seafront*, p. 201.

The Company's founder, Sir John Bickerstaffe was a freeman, alderman, and ex-mayor of the town. He was knighted in 1926 for his services in the development of Blackpool and to the Conservative Party. His 1930 obituary in the *Lancashire Daily Post* said, 'Sir John's lifetime had been one devoted to working not only in a private capacity but also on behalf of the town of which he was a native and which he loved well.'⁸⁶ Bickerstaffe's most important contribution to the town, Blackpool Tower, became the central symbol of the resort, prominently featured on numerous front covers of the municipal guides.

Other resorts attempted to copy the success of Blackpool Tower. For example, Morecambe planned a larger tower, which was never completed due to a lack of finance. More successful was Morecambe's Winter Gardens. Opened in 1878 and originally known as 'The People's Palace', it was initially financially unsuccessful and was relaunched in 1896 as the 'Morecambe Winter Gardens Company'. The new owners removed the original aquarium, and a new theatre called the Victoria Pavilion was built. With this new investment, the Morecambe Winter Gardens company was successfully floated.⁸⁷ Expertise from Blackpool was brought into the enterprise, which must have given confidence to these investors. *The Era* newspaper reported that the new manager Louis Holland was the son of William Holland, 'well known in connection with Blackpool Winter Gardens and other enterprises and has had valuable training under his father in Blackpool.'⁸⁸ At this point, Morecambe had not yet been granted municipal borough status and lacked the supporting infrastructure available in Blackpool.

In contrast, the Blackpool Tower Company was profitable from the start and always paid dividends. Under the leadership of John Bickerstaffe, the Blackpool Tower Company expanded its operations in the early twentieth century to include a range of other attractions, including the Tower Circus, the Tower Ballroom, and the Tower Aquarium. They also acquired other entertainment venues in the Blackpool area, such as the Winter Gardens and the Palace Theatre. By exerting its influence on the local authority, the Tower Company was granted a licence to remain open until the last of the crowds left for home.⁸⁹ It remained profitable until at least 1966/67 when EMI took over

⁸⁶ 'A Blackpool Pioneer', *Lancashire Daily Post*, 6 August 1930, p. 6.

⁸⁷ 'Music Hall Gossip', *The Era*, 19 December 1896, p. 20.

⁸⁸ 'Music Hall Gossip', *The Era*, 3 October 1896, p. 19.

⁸⁹ Curtis, p. 67.

(independent figures are unavailable after that date).⁹⁰ Not all of the Tower Company's shareholders supported the £4.7 million deal, but an attempt to block the EMI deal by a minority of Tower Company shareholders failed. As a result, John Read (EMI's finance director) and Bernard Delfont (the Grade Organisation) were appointed to the board.⁹¹ Overall, the Blackpool Tower Company was a successful private enterprise with close links to Blackpool Council, and it had been crucial in developing Blackpool as a leading holiday destination. The sale was not necessarily a problem for the Tower Company as it brought in outside expertise, but it ended the business's long-standing local ownership.

When John Bickerstaffe died in 1930, he left behind the dominant company in Blackpool entertainment. His family then continued to run it successfully without substantial changes.⁹² Connections with the local authority were maintained as Tom Bickerstaffe (younger brother of John) served as chairman of the Blackpool Council's advertising committee for thirty years.⁹³ The line between the public and private sectors became somewhat blurred in this period, as Blackpool's leading entrepreneurs had close ties to the Corporation. This was also the case with William Bean, the founder of Blackpool Pleasure Beach, who was elected to Blackpool Council in 1907 and became an Alderman in 1926 until he died in 1929. He also occupied the position of Treasurer of the Blackpool Parliamentary Borough Conservative Association.⁹⁴ At its closest before the Second World War, by the end of the 1960s, the close relationship between the council and the owners of Blackpool's largest venues had been eroded by changes in ownership. Although still attractive to private sector investors, as Peter Walton argues, until 2010 Blackpool Tower (and the other entertainment venues) became part of a changing set of assets owned by companies whose interests were primarily elsewhere and whose operating strategy was not exclusively focused on Blackpool.⁹⁵ Although the era of municipal conservatism was ending, these attractions were still profitable.

⁹⁰ Peter Walton, *Blackpool Tower: A History* (Stroud: Amberley, 2016), p. 66.

⁹¹ '£4,700,000 EMI-Tower deal opposed', *The Stage*, 9 November 1967, p. 1 and 'Light Entertainment', *The Stage*, 4 January 1968, p. 3.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 114.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 115.

⁹⁴ 'Died on Liner', *Hartlepool Northern Daily Mail*, 18 January 1929, p. 10.

⁹⁵ Peter Walton, p. 157.

Therefore, unlike in Morecambe and Heysham, direct ownership by the local authority was not considered necessary.

Morecambe also had a range of theatres, though fewer than Blackpool. As in Blackpool, musical entertainment and variety were a central part of Morecambe's popular appeal during the first three-quarters of the twentieth century.⁹⁶ The Morecambe Winter Gardens Victoria Theatre was the leading resort venue, but other theatres supplemented it. For example, for the 1937 season, Morecambe and Heysham Council awarded stage play licences to nine venues across the town.⁹⁷ As discussed in chapter two, building upon strong pre-war growth, Morecambe's appeal expanded during the 1950s. In 1959, *The Stage* reported that during a very successful summer season, 'all records had been broken at the Palace Theatre' and that 'capacity business' had been a regular feature elsewhere.⁹⁸ Until the 1960s, the private sector owned and managed these venues, following the local authority's decision not to purchase the Alhambra Theatre before the Second World War.⁹⁹ However, as public tastes changed rapidly, by 1971, only three theatres remained in operation in the resort, the Winter Gardens, Palace, and Central Pier theatres. In addition, even the largest (with over two thousand seats) at the Winter Gardens could no longer attract the 'big' names to its stage. One of the other venues, the Palace Theatre, stuck to shows similar to those before the Second World War. Falling ticket sales meant that the lease of the Winter Gardens Theatre had first been offered in October 1967 by the then owners, Moss Empires, to Morecambe and Heysham Borough Council. In 1970, following the early closure of the Winter Gardens summer show, the owners made it clear that no show would be put on for the 1971 season without public financial involvement. Negotiations dragged on from November 1970 to March 1971, when an agreement was finally reached between the two parties in the belief that the show receipts would cover all costs.¹⁰⁰ During the following years, it became clear that these summer shows could only continue with local authority support.

⁹⁶ Jarratt, p. 267.

⁹⁷ LA, MBMO/He/acc8327, Morecambe and Heysham Borough Council Minutes 1936-37, 21 December 1936, Minute 44, p. 128.

⁹⁸ 'Summer Shows, Morecambe', *The Stage*, 3 September 1959, p. 7.

⁹⁹ LA, MBMO/He/acc8327, Morecambe and Heysham Borough Council Minutes 1928-29, 3 September 1929, Minute 2547, p. 524.

¹⁰⁰ LA, MBMO/He, Morecambe and Heysham Council Minutes 1970-71.

Unlike Blackpool, traditional live entertainment struggled to generate profits in smaller Lancashire resorts by the 1970s, such as Morecambe and Lytham St Annes. The Ashton Theatre in St Annes was also in severe financial difficulty. With falling attendances, it had been converted in the late 1960s into a bingo hall before being restored as a theatre. On reopening in 1970, the new owners claimed they had 'averaged ninety per cent capacity' at the Ashton with a production starring popular film actor Richard Todd.¹⁰¹ However, the Ashton then ran into further financial difficulties, with Lytham St Annes Corporation intervening in 1972 to prevent its conversion into a cinema.¹⁰² At the time of reorganisation, the theatre's future was precarious as it relied on continued financial support from the local authority. As in Morecambe, the survival of live theatre by the 1970s was determined by the financial commitment shown by their councils. Enquiries made by C.E. Bottomley Morecambe's Tourist Development Officer to other resort authorities showed this to be a widespread practice in other resorts such as Torquay and Hastings. By this time, private theatre production companies offering summer shows to local authorities expected to enjoy most of the profit (typically two-thirds, if any were made) but to have any losses underwritten by the local taxpayer.¹⁰³ Other resorts saw this as necessary in order to maintain a high standard of provision and support the wider tourist economy.

Facing the same challenges to traditional variety theatre from television, in contrast to Morecambe, Blackpool's theatre owners were able to adapt to changing tastes by embracing a new national rather than regional entertainment culture.¹⁰⁴ Television spread into UK homes between the 1950s and 1970s. By 1978 of 20 million homes, 19.5 million had a TV.¹⁰⁵ Against this background, Blackpool's primarily Victorian theatres had to adapt. The most significant example of Blackpool adapting to the impact of television on live entertainment was the ABC Theatre's redevelopment in the early 1960s. The ABC Theatre (built on the same site as the Victorian Hippodrome Theatre) was used by ABC for stage shows in the summer seasons and films and concerts in the

¹⁰¹ 'Success at the Ashton', *The Stage*, 5 November 1970, p. 15.

¹⁰² LA, MBL/5538, Box 28, Lytham St Annes Corporation Minutes 1971/72, Minute 600/1027.

¹⁰³ LA, MBMO/He/Acc6473, Box 19, Winter Gardens 1974-77, letter from Borough of Torbay to CE Bottomley, Tourist Development Officer, 1975.

¹⁰⁴ John K. Walton, *Blackpool*, p. 152.

¹⁰⁵ Michelle Hilmes, *The Television History Book* (London: British Film Institute, 2003) p. 60.

winter. The Theatre, now Blackpool's second largest, was also used by ABC Weekend Television, who broadcast their 'Blackpool Night Out' variety shows from the theatre during the 1960s.¹⁰⁶ Television was perceived by many in the industry as an existential threat to live variety theatre. However, Blackpool's surviving venues were able to emphasise the opportunity to see television stars in person. Including these high-profile entertainers led to highly successful summer seasons until the early 1990s in contrast to Morecambe and Lytham St Annes.¹⁰⁷ As noted, this also provided a significant income for Blackpool's piers. For a time at least, Blackpool's theatre owners had discovered a successful formula that had met and utilised television's popularity.¹⁰⁸ Blackpool's TV-based summer shows continued to be popular, enabling the local authority to prioritise expenditure in other areas.

¹⁰⁶ Arthur Lloyd.co.uk, *The Hippodrome Theatre, Church Street, Blackpool* (2020), <<http://www.arthurlloyd.co.uk/BlackpoolTheatres/HippodromeBlackpool.htm>> [accessed 18 September 2020].

¹⁰⁷ John K. Walton, *Blackpool*, p. 153.

¹⁰⁸ BHC, LE02, Blackpool County Borough Minutes 1972, Minute 25, 13 October 1972, p. 709.

4.2.4 Fairgrounds and Amusement Parks

As noted, in the late nineteenth century, the newly created municipal and county boroughs in Lancashire's seaside resorts began to play a more active role in regulating seaside attractions. This included the travelling fairgrounds that visited these resorts during the summer season. As the crowds on beaches grew, fairgrounds began appearing on or next to popular parts of the beach in the larger resorts. The yearly fair tradition continued in many resorts and was particularly important for those resorts that did not establish permanent amusement parks. This was true in Lytham St Annes, where instead, Lytham Club Day (taking place each June) and the St Annes Carnival (July) continued the tradition of travelling fairgrounds. In its present form, Lytham Club Day has continued for over 120 years. As well as including the visit of a travelling fairground, a procession takes place along with other events. St Annes Carnival has followed a similar format since the 1930s.¹⁰⁹ These events also have a civic function as a yearly gathering of the local community with its elected representatives in attendance. Although small-scale permanent fairgrounds were later developed along the promenade in St Annes, unlike Blackpool and Morecambe, no large amusement park was built in the resort.

In England, the permanent seaside amusement park only developed in the Edwardian era. Cross and Walton define an amusement park as 'a large, enclosed area controlled by a single company regulating or directly owning various entertainments within'.¹¹⁰ Although there were early proto-amusement parks in England, the United States had taken the lead in their development. Brodie points out that the immediate antecedents for Blackpool Pleasure Beach and subsequent amusement parks in the UK were in the entertainment complexes created along the beach at Coney Island in New York.¹¹¹ Blackpool Pleasure Beach and Southend's Luna Park are examples of the inspiration taken from the United States. Having witnessed their success in the US, those

¹⁰⁹ Amounderness.co.uk, *Lytham & St Annes on the Sea Lancashire, Local History, St Annes Carnival* (2021), <https://amounderness.co.uk/Stannes_carnival_1933.html> [accessed 2 February 2021].

¹¹⁰ Gary S. Cross and John K. Walton, *The Playful Crowd, Pleasure Places in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), p. 39.

¹¹¹ Allan Brodie, *Historic Amusement Parks and Fairground Rides* (Swindon: Historic England, 2015), pp. 2-4.

developing the parks understood the potential profit that could be made by establishing similar parks at the English seaside.

The significance of Pleasure Beach's development in the growth of Blackpool's popularity, and the benefits for the wider resort, cannot be underestimated. Steve Weaver, Chief Executive of Blackpool Council, stated in 2011, 'Blackpool would not be Blackpool without the Pleasure Beach, and the Pleasure Beach would not be as it is without Blackpool.'¹¹² On a smaller scale, the Blackpool model's success would be imitated in Morecambe, not least by the owners of the Blackpool Pleasure Beach itself, the Thompson family.¹¹³ These seaside amusement parks' initial success would be followed by continued growth and development for the next sixty years. Amusement parks, especially Blackpool Pleasure Beach, adapted successfully to changing public tastes with new rides and attractions. As a result, a mutually beneficial relationship between the Pleasure Beach and the local authority developed, which in turn helped to shape the character of the resort.

The site of Britain's first enclosed seaside amusement park evolved from the mid-1890s onwards on a stretch of sand dunes (with traveller encampments) at the south end of Blackpool. This area was becoming increasingly accessible due to the southward extension of the tram and the opening of Blackpool South Station in 1903.¹¹⁴ As seen in Fig 4.3, the initial development came at the southern edge of the resort, but with close proximity to the Victoria/South Pier, boarding houses growing tram network and most importantly, the railway. When William Bean and his partner John Outhwaite, who had connections with the amusement business, purchased this forty-two-acre plot of land in Blackpool in 1896, they had a vision of what they wanted to create. Bean wanted to build an American-style theme park, a place 'to make adults feel like children again and inspire gaiety of a primarily innocent character.'¹¹⁵ The first attractions were small-scale, created as concessions in the dunes on rented land plots. However, in August 1904, the Sir Hiram Maxim Captive Flying Machine was opened, and it is now the

¹¹² Brodie, *The Seafront*, p. 170.

¹¹³ Jason Wood, *Amusement Park: History, Culture and the Heritage of Pleasure*. (Abingdon-on-Thames: Routledge, 2018), p. 5.

¹¹⁴ Martin Bairstow, *Railways of Blackpool and the Fylde* (Leeds: Amadeus Press Ltd, 2001), p. 100.

¹¹⁵ Visit Blackpool, *Blackpool Destination Guide 2021* (2021), <https://issuu.com/visitblackpool/docs/blackpool_destination_guide_2021> [accessed 22 January 2021], p.43.

oldest continuous working amusement park ride in Europe. The title of 'The Pleasure Beach' first appeared in advertisements and the municipal guide in 1906.¹¹⁶ While the Pleasure Beach was a private enterprise, this appearance in the guide illustrates the interconnections between public and private in this period. By 1906, the future expansion of the park was discussed in the *Fleetwood Express*:

Sooner or later, I have no doubt that Blackpool will get the real Coney Island fever, and I seem to see it coming already. However, a few years will show whether Englishmen are prepared to sink the capital necessary to make a high-class pleasure park and set up the large and intricate mechanical contrivances that draw the crowds.¹¹⁷

The Pleasure Beach quickly became a success, attracting huge crowds of visitors each summer.¹¹⁸ Most early visitors came from the North West of England but then increasingly from further afield. Journalists from across the United Kingdom would also be entertained to generate positive reports. The *Belfast Evening Telegraph*, for example, recorded in 1909 that 'if you visit the Pleasure Beach, you will see the great fancy fair in all its glory. Every variety of amusement under the sun is there'.¹¹⁹ Visitors from across Ireland would continue to be an important part of Blackpool's tourist market throughout the twentieth century, with regular visits from council officers to encourage this and advertising in the local press. Even at this early stage, the Pleasure Beach was, therefore, establishing a national significance. As Walton argues, it was carving out a clear and unique identity within what was already the world's first working-class seaside resort and the most popular pleasure town in Europe and gaining the recognition from the town's government necessary to secure its future.¹²⁰ However, Josephine Kane points out that the Pleasure Beach's appeal was not just for the working class; the target audience was 'socially all-encompassing'. As a result, it is estimated that two hundred thousand people visited Blackpool Pleasure Beach on a typical Bank Holiday weekend

¹¹⁶ 'The Pleasure Beach', *Blackpool Gazette & Herald*, 8 June 1906, p. 1.

¹¹⁷ 'Blackpool and Coney Island, An Impression and a Contrast', *Fleetwood Express*, 15 August 1906, p. 5.

¹¹⁸ 'The Pleasure Beach', *Blackpool Gazette & Herald*, 26 July 1907, p. 3.

¹¹⁹ 'Blackpool Pleasure Beach', *Belfast Evening Telegraph*, 1 June 1909, p. 9.

¹²⁰ John K Walton, *Riding on Rainbows: Blackpool Pleasure Beach and Its Place in British Popular Culture* (St Albans: Skelter Publ., 2007), p. 38.

by 1914.¹²¹ The Pleasure Beach needed to appear 'respectable' to appeal to a middle-class audience. As Brodie points out, part of this process involved the local authority-led removal of the original traveller encampment.¹²² However, they were served by Blackpool Council with an eviction order in 1910.¹²³ The Council would also attempt, with less success, to remove fortune tellers from the sands.

Having overcome initial controversy and opposition, the new Pleasure Beach's massive success was noticed by investors in Morecambe, with a smaller park opening in 1906, initially titled the West End amusement park.¹²⁴ Until the 1930s, it was most commonly known as Figure 8 Park, after the rollercoaster that dominated the fairground.¹²⁵ Unlike Blackpool Pleasure Beach, Morecambe's amusement park had not enjoyed the same level of investment and, by the mid-1930s, appeared old-fashioned in comparison. In August 1937, for example, the Publicity and Entertainments Manager of Morecambe and Heysham Council received a letter from a Manchester visitor complaining that the 'fairgrounds haven't changed since I was in the boy scouts.' In response, the Manager admitted, 'the Figure 8 Park, I agree, is not one of the best and you will be interested to learn that this is to be removed at the close of the season, and further, that proposals are now being considered for the erection of a Super Amusement Park to be erected on the same site.'¹²⁶ From 1937 until its closure in 2000, Morecambe Pleasure Park was owned and operated by the Thompsons of Blackpool. While this undoubtedly brought expertise to the enterprise, it also meant that Morecambe's principal amusement park would always be in the shadow of Blackpool Pleasure Beach.

A close relationship was established between Blackpool Corporation and the Pleasure Beach company. To enable the further development of Blackpool Pleasure Beach and help gain the Council's support, William Bean won election in 1907 to the town council. Bean capitalised on his new position and, in 1913, negotiated a deal with

¹²¹ Josephine Kane, 'Mechanical Pleasures, The Appeal of British Amusement Parks, 1900-1914', in *The Amusement Park: History, Culture and the Heritage of Pleasure*, ed. by Jason Wood (Abingdon-on-Thames: Routledge, 2017), p. 33.

¹²² Brodie, *The Seafront*, p. 166.

¹²³ 'The Expulsion of Gypsies', *Blackpool Gazette & Herald*, 31 May 1910, p. 8.

¹²⁴ Flora Byatt, *The inside Story of Morecambe's Lost and Derelict Theme Park* (2020), <<https://www.lancs.live/news/lancashire-news/inside-story-morecambes-lost-derelict-18694921>> [accessed 29 January 2021].

¹²⁵ Bingham, p. 183.

¹²⁶ LA, MBMO-HE/ACC6430/21/2, Complaints Relating to Holiday Accommodation and Tourist Guide, 19 August 1937.

the local authority whereby he gave up some of his seafront property for a municipal promenade extension costing £66,250.¹²⁷ In return, he received an exemption from planning permission for future development within the Pleasure Beach.¹²⁸ As Jackson notes, Blackpool Corporation, whose entertainment company interests had initially shown signs of a hostile attitude towards its competitor, decided to regulate rather than suppress, remove the unlicensed traders, and welcome the increasingly sophisticated electrical rides.¹²⁹ The privately owned Pleasure Beach, and the municipal Open-Air Baths, complemented the South Pier and encouraged others to invest along its south shore. During this period of expansion, a range of new hotels and guest houses were also added to the resort.

Further architectural innovations directly opposite the South Pier resulted in the first Casino building in 1913. In contrast to travelling fairgrounds, as Toulmin argues, it epitomised the Pleasure Beach's permanent and respectable nature, which now offered more modern and upmarket forms of 'fairground attractions.'¹³⁰ As Kane points out, these attractions could transform visitors into racing drivers, pilots, or explorers. This led to huge crowds of holidaymakers 'eager to experience the excitement of new mechanical rides.'¹³¹ Attitudes were also influenced by the Pleasure Beach's growing importance as an employer (600 staff by 1914), generator of traffic for the Corporation's trams (up to one hundred thousand visitors on an ordinary day and two hundred thousand on a Bank Holiday), and consumer of electricity.¹³² Even during the First World War, when investment in the park stopped due to the difficulty in importing rides from the USA, profits continued to soar, and the company was one of the most significant employers in Lancashire.¹³³ As *The Fleetwood Chronicle* reported in July 1915, despite the conflict in Europe, the Pleasure Beach was 'visited by nearly every visitor to Blackpool', and they 'can never spend a dull moment, as the Pleasure is with

¹²⁷ 'Blackpool's Big Scheme', *Liverpool Daily Post*, 29 July 1913, p. 5.

¹²⁸ Jackson, p. 216.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 217.

¹³⁰ Vanessa Toulmin and others, *Blackpool Pleasure Beach, More Than Just an Amusement Park* (Hathersage, Derbyshire: Boco Publishing, 2011), p. 26.

¹³¹ Kane, p. 51.

¹³² John K. Walton, *Blackpool*, p. 94.

¹³³ *Destination Blackpool 2021*, p. 44.

inexhaustible features of interest'¹³⁴ During both World Wars, Blackpool could provide an escape from the dark reality elsewhere.

Photo of Blackpool Pleasure Beach and surrounding area removed for copyright reasons. Copyright holder is Britain from Above.

Fig 4.3 - Blackpool Pleasure Beach and Victoria (South) Pier, 1920.¹³⁵

Blackpool Pleasure Beach built upon this success during the 1920s with new attractions, including Noah's Ark and The Virginia Reel, added to the park. This was followed in 1923 by the Big Dipper wooden rollercoaster.¹³⁶ The success of the Pleasure Beach made Bean a dominant figure in Blackpool's business community and local politics. When he died in 1929, the *Sheffield Daily Telegraph* recorded that 'Alderman William George Bean ... who had built up an enormous business from very simple beginnings ...died at sea while on a pleasure cruise, aged 60, has left £289,062.'¹³⁷ The

¹³⁴ 'Pleasure Beach', *Fleetwood Chronicle*, 13 July 1915, p. 7.

¹³⁵ Britain from Above, *The Pleasure Beach and Victoria Pier, Blackpool, 1920* (2021), <<https://britainfromabove.org.uk/en/image/EPW002058>> [accessed 26 January 2021].

¹³⁶ *Destination Blackpool 2021*, p. 45. The Big Dipper was fast, modern and presented the holidaymakers of the 1920s with a ride that contrasted with the previous roller coasters on the park. It was designed by engineer William Strickler who was also responsible for the Figure 8, which opened on the West End Amusement Park in Morecambe in July 1909.

¹³⁷ 'William George Bean', *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 13 April 1929, p. 13.

scale of his achievements can again be seen in Fig 4.3, an aerial photograph taken in 1920, shortly before the promenade's southern extension and the construction of the open-air pool by the local authority.

Private investment within Blackpool Pleasure Beach was matched by public investment in the surrounding area by Blackpool Council. Before World War One, the area south of the Pleasure Beach mainly remained in its natural state, but extending the promenade and tramway southwards to the borough was a logical decision for a booming resort that required extra seafront space to create new properties with valuable and coveted sea views. Work began on the new roadway, tramway, and sea defences between 1922 and 1926. A master plan was drawn up in 1926 by the Borough Surveyor Francis Wood and the landscape architect Thomas Mawson, following his work at Stanley Park.¹³⁸ The level of investment by Blackpool Council during this time was more significant than any other resort in the country, with £1,500,000 spent on seven miles of promenade extensions, £300,000 on indoor baths, £75,000 on the open-air pool, and £250,000 on Stanley Park in 1926.¹³⁹ This level of public investment underlined the local authority's ambition for Blackpool and gave confidence to private businesses.

A notable change to the operation of the Pleasure Beach began in 1933 when Leonard Thompson (Bean's son-in-law), who had been running the park with his wife since the late 1920s, decided to employ Joseph Emberton, a leading modernist architect. Until the early 1930s, Blackpool Pleasure Beach had not developed with a single vision. However, under Thompson and Emberton, the need for some uniformity of design was recognised, with the 1930s representing a period of investment and innovation.¹⁴⁰ An ambitious building programme culminated with the construction of the new Casino, which opened in May 1939.¹⁴¹ As Gray notes, commentators increasingly emphasised the modernity and distinctiveness of the Pleasure Beach in contrast to the tradition of the larger resort.¹⁴² The modernist approach of both Emberton for the Pleasure Beach and Wood for Blackpool Council complemented each other and created a new stylish

¹³⁸ Allan Brodie and Matthew Whitfield, *Blackpool's Seaside Heritage* (Swindon: English Heritage, 2014), pp. 95–6.

¹³⁹ Toulmin and others, p. 31.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

¹⁴¹ Brodie and Whitfield, pp. 86–7.

¹⁴² Gray, *Designing the Seaside*, p. 273.

look for the resort. Lord Stamp, president of the LMS Railway and a Freeman of Blackpool, at the opening of the Casino, also emphasised the partnership of municipal and private interests. The *Lancashire Evening Post* reported that he 'spoke in high terms of the enterprise of civic and business interests along the Fylde Coast, from Fleetwood to Lytham'.¹⁴³

Unlike most other attractions in Blackpool, such as Blackpool Tower, the park has remained in one family's control throughout its history.¹⁴⁴ The park's financial success meant that as well as investing in the Pleasure Beach, Leonard Thompson also had the resources and ambition to acquire Morecambe's Figure 8 Park. Thompson was responsible for the most significant pre-war change in Morecambe, with the construction of the Cyclone rollercoaster, originally from the Paris exhibition of 1937, which replaced the original Figure 8.¹⁴⁵ The 3,000-foot Cyclone opened in 1939 and was described as the fastest in Europe, underling the Thompson's ambition.¹⁴⁶ As seen in Fig 4.4, the Park was ideally located next to the promenade, close to the Midland Hotel and Swimming Station, and most importantly, adjacent to Morecambe Promenade Railway station.

Blackpool Pleasure Beach and Morecambe Pleasure Park fared well during the Second World War, as did North West resorts in general. Unlike resorts on the South Coast, Lancashire's resorts remained open throughout the war. Although they suffered from issues such as backlogs in maintenance and a lack of suitable labour, it was also able to take advantage of people's desire for fun when peace returned.¹⁴⁷ On an architectural front, the early post-war years did not result in many changes in the parks, and few rides were purchased.¹⁴⁸ However, by 1957, an improving domestic economy and the relaxation of currency restrictions made it possible to buy new American rides.¹⁴⁹ With the Pleasure Beach's success, it was during this era that investment also

¹⁴³ 'Apostle of Saving Health, Lord Stamp Opens the Blackpool Casino', *Lancashire Evening Post*, 27 May 1939, p. 6.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 275–6.

¹⁴⁵ Bingham, p. 224.

¹⁴⁶ Wood, p. 14.

¹⁴⁷ Brodie, *The Seafront*, p. 169.

¹⁴⁸ Toulmin and others, p. 75.

¹⁴⁹ John K Walton, *Riding on Rainbows*, pp. 89–90. The Pleasure Beach began a return to popularity during this decade by opening the Wild Mouse rollercoaster in 1958, followed in 1959 by the Derby Racer.

increased at Morecambe Pleasure Park. It grew rapidly from the 1940s when bought by Leonard Thompson, whose family would continue to run the site until its closure at the end of the twentieth century.¹⁵⁰ As in Blackpool, the Thompson family played an essential role in developing the Morecambe Pleasure Park and helped to establish it as a significant attraction in the resort.

Photo of Morecambe in 1949 removed for copyright reasons. Copyright holder is Britain from Above.

Fig 4.4 - The Midland Hotel, Swimming Stadium and Central Pier overlooking Morecambe Bay, Morecambe, from the southwest, 1949. Morecambe Pleasure Park is in the bottom right-hand corner.¹⁵¹

One crucial difference between the two resorts was that unlike Blackpool, where the private sector continued to take the lead, the local authority increasingly took control of the resort's attractions in Morecambe. Except for Morecambe Pleasure Park and the piers, by the early 1970s, Morecambe and Heysham Council had become

¹⁵⁰ Jarratt, p. 280.

¹⁵¹ Britain from Above, *The Midland Hotel, Swimming Stadium and Central Pier, Morecambe, 1949* (2021), <<https://britainfromabove.org.uk/en/image/EAW026226>> [accessed 26 January 2021].

responsible for the continued operation of the major tourist venues across the resort. With the declining private sector involvement in the town, the council's policy decisions became more crucial than ever. Like Blackpool, the Swimming Stadium, Harbour Band Arena, and Illuminations were long-standing local authority commitments. However, during the 1960s, significant additional attractions came under municipal ownership. These were an 'Oceanarium' called Marineland and a New Heysham Head leisure park. Initially a private sector development, Marineland had gone into liquidation during the summer of 1965. A special meeting of Morecambe and Heysham Council voted 20 to 10 to acquire and run the attraction with a sub-committee established to oversee the venue's running.¹⁵² By the early 1960s, a privately-run attraction at Heysham Head had become very run down, with little interest from private investors.¹⁵³ Therefore, in 1966 a New Heysham Head Park was opened with Britain's biggest aviary, 'Winged World' and a Go-Kart track, amongst other attractions.¹⁵⁴ By the summer of 1966, these new attractions were overseen by a New Heysham Head and Marineland sub-committee.¹⁵⁵ Initially, this public investment did provide added interest in Morecambe and Heysham, with the number of visitor inquiries at the Information Bureau increasing from 29,775 in 1966 to 42,734 by 1968.¹⁵⁶ Although both projects would fail after reorganisation, there were grounds for optimism that Morecambe's new attractions could succeed. Importantly, they were an attempt to offer something distinctive from Blackpool. It also represents two distinct philosophies of resort development by the 1960s: one leaning heavily on private entrepreneurship and the other becoming more dependent on public stewardship to keep attractions running.

4.2.5 Hotels and Accommodation

Holiday accommodation, the tourist attractions discussed above, and local government were interconnected in several ways at Lancashire's seaside resorts. As visitor numbers grew, especially after the railway network development, a hierarchy of accommodation

¹⁵² LA, MBMO/He, Morecambe and Heysham Borough Council Minutes 1965-66, Minute 654.

¹⁵³ Bingham, p. 296.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 298.

¹⁵⁵ LA, MBMO/He Morecambe and Heysham Council Minutes, 1966-1967, Minute 202.

¹⁵⁶ LA, MBMO/He/Acc6430, *Information Bureau Statistics*, Box 33.

became increasingly evident, with cheap lodging houses, all-inclusive boarding houses and private hotels, and more exclusive accommodation.¹⁵⁷ For the rich, grand hotels were built by entrepreneurs on the seafront at Blackpool, Lytham St Annes and Morecambe. Otherwise, most staying visitors took rooms in the streets and terraces behind the seafront. As demand for staying visits grew, local government became involved in the provision of this accommodation firstly through planning and regulation and then through marketing and promotion. Although not the only factor, the role of local authorities has been instrumental in shaping the landscape of holiday accommodation. As a result, a partnership between local government and owners' associations developed, becoming another strand of municipal conservatism. Public investment in infrastructure development, including transportation, parks, and recreational facilities, also enhanced the resorts' appeal and encouraged longer stays. After the Second World War, however, the nature of the visitor economy changed with increasing numbers of day visitors and fewer staying for extended periods. Especially in Morecambe and Blackpool, this shift in tourism patterns created a large surplus of under-used holiday accommodation, causing significant planning challenges by the 1970s.

Unsurprisingly, because it had the widest variety of attractions, Blackpool also had the most extensive range of accommodation of the three resorts. The first comprehensive survey by the English Tourist Board in 1972 suggested the number of staying visitors was over 3 million a year, spending £55 million during their stay. By comparison, although there were 12.8 million day visitors, they only spent £15 million, with little benefit for Blackpool's hotels.¹⁵⁸ There would also be a knock-on effect on other businesses in the resort, such as piers and theatres. With shorter visits to the seaside, the number of attractions that would be visited by those coming would also be fewer. Finally, by the 1960s and 1970s, many older establishments required substantial modernisation, which their owners could not afford. Rising visitor expectations also meant the basic and regimented provision offered by traditional boarding houses were no longer appealing.

¹⁵⁷ Karen Averby, *Seaside Hotel* (Stroud: Amberley Publishing, 2018), p. 10.

¹⁵⁸ Research Unit, English Tourist Board, *Blackpool Visitors and Tourism Survey 1972* (London: English Tourist Board, 1973), p. 3.

Expectations of holiday accommodation varied between social classes and also shifted over time. Marketing to different social classes was crucial, and as Ferry points out, as the accommodation prices went up, so did behaviour expectations.¹⁵⁹ Landowners, such as the Cliftons in Lytham, initially regulated these expectations. Local authorities and associations of hotel and boarding house owners then took this role. As shown in earlier chapters, there was also significant overlap between these associations and local government in the twentieth century, as hotel owners sought to influence the policies of their local authorities. This was often through election to an existing political grouping or, as in Blackpool during the 1930s, forming a separate group.¹⁶⁰ More typical was lobbying via their associations. The accommodation guides produced throughout the twentieth century expressed the relationship between the local associations of owners and the local authorities. In the pre-internet era, removal from the directory would profoundly damage a business and was a powerful regulatory tool. Pressure for this to happen could come from dissatisfied visitors or the associations. In September 1931, for example, the Morecambe and Heysham Hotel and Apartment Association asked Morecambe Corporation to take more direct control of the advertising, claiming that low-charging advertisers were responsible for most complaints. When dealing with complaints, although replies from the local authority often included the phrase, ‘the Corporation can in no way be held responsible for the accommodation’, correspondence and reports from the 1930s onwards reveal that pressure was applied to the owners of such accommodation and properties were subsequently removed.¹⁶¹ This was part of a trend whereby local authorities took a more active role in regulating holiday accommodation, with resorts establishing specific departments or committees to oversee this task.

In the post-war era, however, these associations’ influence began to wane. The *West Lancashire Evening Gazette* reported in May 1974 that although the Blackpool Hotel and Guesthouse Association still had over 1,800 members, only twenty-six attended their half-yearly meeting. Even though Blackpool Council’s treasurer was present, and with reorganisation approaching, the president of the Association, Stella

¹⁵⁹ Ferry, p. 31.

¹⁶⁰ John K. Walton, *Blackpool*, p. 127.

¹⁶¹ LA, MBMO-HE/ACC6430/21/2, Complaints Relating to Holiday accommodation & Tourist Guide, 1929-1937.

Scott, called the lack of engagement ‘disastrous.’¹⁶² The declining influence of these groups would be more evident in the 1980s and 1990s, as staying visitor numbers fell further and the number of business failures increased.

Quantifying the range of accommodation is very challenging due to a lack of reliable data and changing definitions of accommodation.¹⁶³ In 1972, according to Demetriadi, it was claimed that Blackpool could accommodate half a million people at one time when according to the 1971 Census, it only had thirty-two thousand hotel rooms.¹⁶⁴ It should also be noted that a range of holiday camps and caravan sites developed during the post-war period, which would have supplemented this capacity.¹⁶⁵ The expansion of the UK’s road network after the Second World War and the increasing availability of cars also played a role in the growth of caravan and holiday parks. These parks offered a range of facilities and amenities, including swimming pools, entertainment venues, and restaurants, to cater to the needs of holidaymakers.

Blackpool Bailey’s Hotel, with thirty-four bedrooms, began the trend for coastal hotel building in Lancashire. Further south in Lytham, the greatest range of accommodation options was to be found until the mid-nineteenth century.¹⁶⁶ The Clifton family owned many inns and hotels in Lytham, the first being the *Wheat Sheaf* in 1794 and then the Clifton Arms Hotel in 1796. By 1825, Baines’ History and Directory claimed that ‘Accommodation is to be had [at Lytham] here of all sorts, from the highest to the humblest, regulated by the charge, and by other circumstances.’¹⁶⁷ However, as Blackpool developed, working-class visitors at Lytham migrated there, encouraged by new attractions. Also, the range of accommodation offered in Lytham and then St Annes tended to be at a price range beyond that of poorer working-class visitors. As Brown argues, development from the mid-nineteenth century onwards was established on

¹⁶² ‘Attendance at hoteliers’ meeting “disastrous”’, *West Lancashire Evening Gazette*, 23 May 2022, p. 9.

¹⁶³ Nelson, P.M., ‘A Paradox of Prosperity’, *Morecambe in the Post-War Era* (Unpublished MA Dissertation, Lancaster University, 2004) p. 65.

¹⁶⁴ Julian Demetriadi, ‘The Golden Years: English Seaside Resorts 1950-1974’, in *The Rise and Fall of British Coastal Resorts*, ed. by Gareth Shaw and Allan Williams (Guildford: Biddles Ltd, 1997), p. 65.

¹⁶⁵ For example, Middleton Tower Holiday Camp, near Heysham (opened 1939) could accommodate three thousand people and Squires Gate Holiday Camp, between Blackpool and St Annes (opened 1949) around the same number. Both camps were bought by Pontins in the early 1960s. See: Butlins Memories, *Pontins* (2022) <<http://www.butlins-memories.com/pontins/index.htm>> [accessed 18 March 2022].

¹⁶⁶ Chris Bottomley and Allan W Wood, *Lost Blackpool* (Stroud: Amberley, 2019), p. 11.

¹⁶⁷ E. Baines, *History, Directory and Gazetteer of the County Palatine of Lancaster*, vol.2 (Wales & Co., 1825), pp. 54-5.

prime sites and were very definitely hotels and not inns, 'Those inns of the past, along with the boarding houses and cheap entertainment, were now strictly for Blackpool.'¹⁶⁸ After slow growth in the early nineteenth century, Blackpool's population had grown from 3,506 in 1861 to 47,348 by 1901.¹⁶⁹ Blackpool's holiday guide for 1901, published by the Blackpool Corporation, claimed that the resort was now 'unrivalled', boasting of 'hotels, hydropathic establishments, boarding houses and company houses'. The accommodation was divided into three classes, with company houses for those with the most limited means:

Many of the visitors to Blackpool adopt this plan: Engaging beds in one of the ordinary "Company Houses" at so much per night per individual – one day's notice terminating the agreement – they buy their own food, which is cooked and served in well-furnished rooms, or dining rooms after the style of the hotel. By this arrangement, the visitor may, if he chooses, obtain his meals at a restaurant or absent himself all day without the disagreeable knowledge that his bill for food is running up. Good music and good singing are often indulged in; coarseness and vulgarity is strictly put down, and altogether, the system has much to recommend it to those of moderate or limited means.¹⁷⁰

This is an early example of how a local authority would attempt to use their holiday guide to regulate accommodation and the type of visitors who might be attracted to the resort. Although welcoming working-class visitors, in contrast to Lytham and then St Annes, Blackpool Corporation still showed concern about potential, 'coarseness and vulgarity'.¹⁷¹ By the end of the nineteenth century, and on a smaller scale, Morecambe also provided accommodation for working-class visitors. *Cooks Guide* of 1899 named 450 proprietors of apartment houses, and *Bulmer's Guide* of 1901 364 boarding houses.¹⁷² Although the range of accommodation would expand later, this is approximately the same number of boarding house owners recorded in the 1971 census, with considerable overlap between the two lists. Therefore, a variety of accommodation was provided by the owners in both Blackpool and Morecambe, and they both became

¹⁶⁸ Kath Brown, *Lytham and St Annes: The Reluctant Resorts* (Preston: Lancashire County Books, 1992), p. 9.

¹⁶⁹ Vision of Britain, *Blackpool CP through Time* (2022), <https://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10342132/cube/TOT_POP> [accessed 18 March 2022].

¹⁷⁰ Blackpool Corporation, *Blackpool 'Unrivalled' Seaside Resort* (Blackpool: Miller & Co, 1901).

¹⁷¹ John K. Walton, *Blackpool*, p. 68.

¹⁷² Bingham, p. 117.

established as mass-market resorts in contrast to the emphasis on quality accommodation and exclusivity in both Lytham and St Annes.

During the twentieth century, the building of large hotels at existing resorts continued, sometimes on the site of existing structures at prime locations. In 1900 the Metropole Hotel, Blackpool, resulted from a drastic remodelling of the former eighteenth-century Bailey's Hotel, which doubled its size.¹⁷³ The Art Deco/Seaside Moderne Midland Hotel opened in 1933 in Morecambe to replace its predecessor, commissioned by the LMS railway company. As Jarratt notes, its striking design made it a successful destination hotel.¹⁷⁴ During the 1930s, several Art Deco hotels built on a smaller scale dominated their landscapes, such as the Manchester Hotel in Blackpool, rebuilt in 1936 as a streamlined modernist building.¹⁷⁵ This, in turn, complemented the modernist approach taken by Blackpool Council and other developments such as the Blackpool Pleasure Beach Casino. With booming visitor numbers during the interwar period, the local authority encouraged private investors to develop new buildings designed in this Art Deco style. These buildings included hotels, cinemas, and other entertainment venues, as well as private homes and apartment buildings.

After the Second World War, these larger hotels were much less successful because, as Demetriadi notes, higher-income, upper and middle-class support for Lancashire's resorts gradually eroded.¹⁷⁶ However, working-class visitors remained loyal to Lancashire's resorts and non-holiday trade, such as that generated by conferences, offered some immunity from these trends. The expense of modernisation led many larger hotels to move downmarket, such as the Midland Hotel in Morecambe or close altogether, as did the Imperial Hydro (then the Majestic) in St Annes. Gabriel Harrison of the St Annes-on-the-Sea Land and Building Company noted in 1971 (four years before its demolition) that the hotel had been 'built for a different era'.¹⁷⁷ The loss of the Majestic Hotel in St Annes was fairly typical. In the post-Second World War era, local authority planners usually equated modernisation with demolition. Few seaside

¹⁷³ Averby, p. 28.

¹⁷⁴ Jarratt, p. 270.

¹⁷⁵ Averby, p. 44.

¹⁷⁶ Demetriadi, p. 59.

¹⁷⁷ Gabriel Harrison, *Rage of Sand: The Story of the Men Who Built Their Own Seaside Town*. (London: Benn, 1971), p. 187.

buildings enjoyed the protection of listed status before 1974 (and even in 2022, only twenty-three were listed in St Annes), and it was much cheaper for developers to demolish these buildings than modernise or adapt them.¹⁷⁸ Renovating older buildings can be costly and complex, especially if the building requires significant structural repairs or upgrades to meet modern building and safety standards.

As larger hotels began to struggle, boarding houses and the smaller 'private hotels' continued to be highly popular with visitors to resorts such as Blackpool and Morecambe well into the post-war era.¹⁷⁹ Working with the local authority's publicity department, organisations such as the Morecambe Hotel and Caterers Association (MHCA) and the Holiday Association of Lytham St Annes (HALSA) helped advertise the resort and establish minimum standards for accommodation. Hundreds of such establishments would be listed in each year's holiday guidebook, published by the local authority in each resort. In Blackpool, for example, if an 'above average' number of complaints were received about any establishment, these could be withdrawn from the following year's holiday guide.¹⁸⁰ Despite this, Blackpool headed the list of decline in the number of hotels in the largest thirty-nine English resorts from 1950 to 1971, with the resort providing a forty per cent decrease in hotels according to the 1971 census.¹⁸¹ This surplus of holiday accommodation would become an increasing problem for Blackpool over the next fifty years.

Changing expectations also impacted the demand for seaside accommodation. By the 1970s, much of it did not meet the rising expectations of visitors, and with a lack of capital investment, improvements were slow. As Walton noted in 1978, a new generation of holidaymakers was rejecting the restrictions of the boarding-house system.¹⁸² Small establishments, usually run by owner-managers, dominated Blackpool's hotel sector. Increasingly, the quality of accommodation had become an

¹⁷⁸ British Listed Buildings, *Listed Buildings in Saint Anne's on the Sea, Fylde, Lancashire* (2022), <<https://britishlistedbuildings.co.uk/england/saint-annes-on-the-sea-fylde-lancashire#.YqYQWHbMKM8>> [accessed 12 June 2022].

¹⁷⁹ Ferry, p. 33.

¹⁸⁰ BHC, LE02, Blackpool County Borough Minutes, Attractions and Amenities Committee, 30 September 1970, Minute 23, p. 531.

¹⁸¹ Demetriadi, p. 65.

¹⁸² John K. Walton, *The Blackpool Landlady: A Social History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1978), p. 76.

integral part of the attraction of the destination.¹⁸³ A similar picture was evident in Morecambe, where most Victorian and Edwardian hotels and guest houses lacked car parking spaces, lifts and ensuite facilities. Setting a minimum standard for members' accommodation, the MHCA requirements for hotels did not keep up with changing public expectations. Even by 1980, it was still considered by the MHCA as acceptable for a hotel to provide only one toilet per fifteen guests.¹⁸⁴ The lack of capital investment in seaside holiday accommodation during the post-war period increased the number of run-down areas in Blackpool and Morecambe and diminished the appeal of both resorts.

Although there were undoubtedly long-term pressures facing the accommodation sector by 1974, this does not mean these were felt evenly across all of Lancashire's resorts. As Demetriadi also points out, the closure of holiday accommodation from 1945 to 1974 did not necessarily mean that a resort lost significant numbers of its summer visiting public. However, it resulted in a smaller amount of spending per visitor. Instead, the problems lay in a change in demand for several types of accommodation. Larger hotels, having lost the wealthy visitors, began to struggle first, followed by smaller establishments with limited facilities and high levels of regulation. However, visitor numbers increased with holiday camps and caravan parks, catering to large numbers and becoming increasingly popular during the 1960s and 1970s, as did self-catering apartments. Gray argues that the holiday camp, caravan park, and the makeshift landscape of self-made plotlands were an escape from traditional seaside accommodation in the established resorts.¹⁸⁵ In addition, the increased numbers of day visitors to Blackpool arriving by car also offset the loss of some longer-staying visitors. The legacy, however, of hundreds of buildings in Blackpool and Morecambe no longer required for holiday accommodation would become a significant challenge for their local authorities in the decades after reorganisation. These challenges required a comprehensive approach for revival, involving both public and private sectors. With shifts in tourism patterns and consumer preferences, places like Blackpool and Morecambe had to adapt or risk falling into decline.

¹⁸³ Victor T.C. Middleton and others, *Marketing in Travel and Tourism*, 4th edn (Oxford: Elsevier, 2009). p. 366.

¹⁸⁴ MLLC, *Holiday Guides, Morecambe and Lancaster 1981 Brochure*.

¹⁸⁵ Gray, *Designing the Seaside*, p. 301.

4.3 Changes and Challenges by the 1960s

The range of entertainment in Lancashire's seaside resorts was closely linked to the nature of each resort's development. As outlined in chapter two, whereas Lytham St Annes's growth was planned and controlled by a few landowning families, many individuals were involved in Blackpool's and Morecambe's development. These individuals became increasingly engaged in these resorts' municipal life and the development of their entertainment provision. Local authorities then adopted an interventionist role at the seaside, moving into recreational and entertainment provision. This was evident in various tourism-related enterprises, including open-air public swimming pools, pleasure piers, indoor pleasure palaces and theatres, and amusement parks. This municipal investment was crucial as it provided vital infrastructure and promoted their resort to the outside world. Even when the private sector instigated the development, there was an economic partnership between local entrepreneurs and their representatives at the municipal level. This relationship was strongest in the mid-twentieth century, after which it began to erode.

Although the relationship between the private and public sectors was crucial to developing seaside resorts in the interwar period, the post-Second World War boom also depended on the local authority's expertise in tourism management. In the twentieth century, large publicly funded outdoor pools were built in St Annes, Blackpool and Morecambe. These pools clearly demonstrate municipal achievement and pride in these resorts. Although local authority involvement in seaside piers was more limited, the promenades on which they were located also saw considerable public investment in the first half of the twentieth century. The strong relationship between the public and private sectors in Lancashire's seaside theatres is also evident in this period. Even when an attraction like Blackpool Pleasure Beach was in private hands, a good relationship between the owners and the local authority was critical to its success. Underpinning the success of all these enterprises was the provision of accommodation that could appeal to a wide range of visitors. Local government also played a key role here through regulation and marketing.

As noted in previous chapters, local government involvement often came from the business community, with a personal stake in the resort's success. This relationship was not always harmonious and severely eroded by the 1970s. Either directly or indirectly, those involved in the provision of seaside attractions sought to influence local decision-making. For example, people connected to the tourism industry dominated Blackpool Council until the 1960s. This meant that local policymaking was geared towards supporting the town as a tourist destination, even when the main attractions were predominantly in private ownership. The extent to which each resort adapted to changing public tastes varied, although all faced some shared challenges. The expense of maintaining and adapting a largely pre-First World War entertainment infrastructure was proving increasingly problematic by the end of the twentieth century. Although local authorities continued to invest in and promote their resorts after 1945, some earlier dynamism and innovation were gradually lost as record visitor numbers encouraged a sense of complacency. Thus, while older attractions remained highly popular until at least the 1970s, a lack of new investment would be exposed during the last few decades of the twentieth century as Lancashire's resorts faced the twin challenges of a rapidly changing holiday market and the radical reform of local government.

As the physical infrastructure of Lancashire's resorts deteriorated, cultural shifts impacted the demand for domestic seaside holidays and facilitated their decline. From the 1960s, there was a shift from blue to white-collar employment and a weakening of regional and class identities. This had profound implications for resorts with attractions and amenities primarily designed to appeal to northern working-class visitors. Despite this, Blackpool's attractions adapted to these changes relatively successfully, and surveys conducted in the early 1970s paint a generally positive picture. This shift was much less evident in Lytham St Annes, with its middle-class tourism base. However, these trends impacted Morecambe and Heysham much earlier, as falling visitor numbers became apparent in the late 1960s. In response, the local authority actively intervened, and new attractions were opened during the 1960s and early 1970s to attract visitors. Despite challenges, seaside resorts like Blackpool maintained popularity through public and private investment in new attractions and amenities to appeal to changing leisure preferences.

Blackpool was more successful in holding on to its tourism market than Morecambe. The first English Tourist Board survey shows that an estimated sixteen million visitors came to the resort in 1972.¹⁸⁶ However, as the ownership of key attractions (such as Blackpool Tower) was no longer locally based, profits were transferred elsewhere. Lacking the necessary investment, older buildings became increasingly unsuited to the potential visitor's lifestyles and cultural aspirations. Therefore, as demonstrated in chapter five, the need for an active local government increased as the private sector became more distant or withdrew altogether. Unfortunately, this would occur at a time when the capacity of local authorities to intervene successfully would face significant challenges, given the increasing competition in the tourism market influenced by both economic forces and societal shifts.

¹⁸⁶ Research Unit, English Tourist Board, *Blackpool Visitors and Tourism Survey 1972* (London: English Tourist Board, 1973), p. 3.

Chapter 5 ‘Oh I Do Like to Be Beside the Seaside?’ – Providing Seaside Entertainment Since 1974

5.1 Introduction – A Shifting Cultural and Political Context

In this chapter, I analyse local authority attempts in Lancashire to maintain and regenerate the tourism industry after the reorganisation of the early 1970s. The five broad categories of attractions and tourist infrastructure analysed in the previous chapter are revisited to understand how successful this has been. Despite common challenges, such as negative publicity and a lack of care for historic built environments, the outcomes have varied based on how effectively local authorities managed partnerships and resources. As a result, the loss of attractions in Morecambe and Heysham occurred earlier and to a greater extent than that in Blackpool and Lytham St Annes. Unlike Morecambe, Blackpool maintained healthy visitor numbers during the 1970s and 1980s, as major national companies acquired the resort’s key leisure assets. Although visitor numbers did fall in Blackpool at the end of the twentieth century, the proactive response of its local authority meant that this was reversed before the Covid-19 pandemic. Local authority support and effective private sector partnerships have saved most of Blackpool’s major tourist attractions, such as the Tower and Winter Gardens. Lancaster City Council failed to develop similar partnerships, leading to the loss of most of Morecambe’s attractions. In addition, until the 1990s, local authorities tended to follow the Butler thesis of resort rejuvenation. This model implies that a complete re-invention was required involving the replacement of older attractions such as piers and theatres. However, this often led to new retail developments with little connection to their coastal locations and eroded the unique appeal of each resort. In contrast to earlier plans, the renewal of existing attractions and a better understanding of the value of seaside heritage has underpinned recent regeneration strategies.

The case studies presented in this chapter demonstrate that local government effectiveness in planning and delivering tourism strategies has been a critical factor in the capacity of these resorts to respond to challenges through various regeneration schemes from the 1990s onwards. Often formed with the best intentions, these schemes failed to meet their objectives because they did not connect with their coastal location, heritage, culture, or local communities. As a result, more recent regeneration

plans, such as the Eden Project Morecambe, have had to address these failures. In addition, raising the necessary finances to fund the regeneration plan became difficult as local authority spending was curtailed at a time when private investment was also challenging to obtain.¹ Allan Brodie and Matthew Whitfield note, for example, that although the public and private sectors were renewing parts of Blackpool in the post-war era, this was without the landmark pieces of architecture that characterised its earlier evolution.² When discussing the localised typography at the English seaside, Justin Burns and David Jarratt argue that resorts developed 'distinctive cultural practices and built environments'.³ However, it is evident that until recently, local authorities in Lancashire showed little enthusiasm for preserving this distinctiveness that developed over the previous century and underpinned the appeal of seaside tourism.

As older buildings were considered too expensive to maintain, hopes were instead placed on developing new retail parks as the engine of regeneration. Rather than traditional seaside attractions, shopping would lure people back to the coast. We have already seen figures such as Marc Etches espousing this view. As Walton summed up in 2000, 'the seaside resort as shopping mall was perhaps its dominant identity at the end of the twentieth century.'⁴ This strategy largely failed, especially in Morecambe, for several reasons. Firstly, retail chains that were widely available elsewhere in the UK and offered few incentives to visit from outside the resort. Secondly, the new buildings were often cheaply constructed box structures with low architectural value. Finally, as online shopping has grown in popularity, visitor numbers to locations such as these have declined.⁵ However, the fundamental problem with this approach was how, in contrast to earlier developments, it failed to take advantage of these resorts' seaside location or complement existing buildings. Although genuine concern and negative publicity relating to the coastal environmental concerns encouraged this approach, it also diminished what had made them attractive to visitors in the first place.

¹ Julian Demetriadi, 'The Golden Years: English Seaside Resorts 1950-1974', in *The Rise and Fall of British Coastal Resorts*, ed. by Gareth Shaw and Allan Williams (London: Pinter, 1997), p. 72.

² Allan Brodie and Matthew Whitfield, *Blackpool's Seaside Heritage* (Swindon: English Heritage, 2014), p. 114.

³ Justin Burns and David Jarratt, 'Typography and Tourism Places: The Case of the English Seaside Resort', *Annals of Tourism Research*, 97 (2022), p. 1.

⁴ John K. Walton, *The British Seaside: Holidays and Resorts in the Twentieth Century*, (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 2006), p. 78.

⁵ 'Retail Parks Reel from Rise of Online Shopping', *Financial Times*, 12 December 2014.

The failure to appreciate the value of seaside piers, theatres and hotels at a local level was compounded by a general apathy amongst groups that might have pressed for their preservation. As Chapman and Light point out, historians and conservation bodies paid little attention to the architecture of seaside pleasure for much of the twentieth century. Neither English Heritage nor the National Trust owns a single building connected with 'popular holidaymaking at the seaside.'⁶ Between 1960 and 2000, Blackpool, Morecambe and Lytham St Annes Councils demolished their open-air swimming pools. Victorian and Edwardian theatres and piers were lost, as preservation was expensive, and money was more readily available for cheaper replacements. This contrasts with other inland locations, which have become increasingly attractive to tourists. As Lisa Woods of the *Financial Times* highlighted in 1983, 'many inland towns have started to lavish attention on their Roman and Georgian buildings while seaside cities allow their piers, parks, and promenades to decline and decay with neglect. Twenty years ago, Bath, York, and Chester might not have been seen as rivals to the seaside. Today they certainly are.'⁷ In any case, Lancashire's local authorities were more likely to support the replacement of tourist attractions in the name of modernisation. Other attractions, especially in Morecambe, were allowed to close and fall into a state of dereliction. The loss of these attractions had a significant long-term impact, not just from an economic standpoint but also in terms of community identity and collective memory. Only in the last twenty years, as the discourse around seaside heritage shifted, has the value of the remaining buildings begun to be recognised by local authorities. These are now seen as an essential part of the appeal of each resort, but only Blackpool Council could attract anything approaching the funding needed to support them.

Combined with the legacy of neglect of the built environment, as highlighted in the *Financial Times* article, there was also a growing antipathy amongst sections of the British public for the traditional seaside resort. This was especially true of those in the North, which both local and national media increasingly reflected on and encouraged. Throughout the 1980s, negative media coverage of these coastal resorts was widespread and came from local and national outlets. In addition, although it was

⁶ Duncan Light and Anya Chapman, 'The Neglected Heritage of the English Seaside Holiday', *Coastal Studies & Society*, 1.1 (2022), 34-54 (p. 41).

⁷ Lisa Wood, 'Kiss-me-quick hats and deep-pile carpets; Britain's seaside resorts', *Financial Times*, 27 August 1983, p. 15.

sensationalised, it undoubtedly did have a basis in fact. In 1988, the *Daily Mirror* (a mass circulation tabloid with a largely working-class readership) ran a typical story headlined ‘Shame of Britain’s filthy beaches’, which reported that Blackpool’s beaches were amongst the filthiest in Europe. As well as being portrayed as dirty, seaside resorts were perceived as deeply unfashionable.⁸ This negative view can also be seen clearly in a *Daily Mirror* cartoon from 17 July 1981 (Fig 5.1 - below). This cartoon shows that as well as poor weather, the visiting family also has the problem of polluted seawater to deal with. It was well known that much of the Lancashire coastline was severely polluted by this time. As Hassan points out, in addition to negative national coverage, Lancashire’s local and regional press in the 1980s and 1990s gave great attention to the problem of nuclear contamination in the Irish Sea.⁹ In the cartoon, the vandalised bus shelter and general scene of misery are juxtaposed with a background poster advertising ‘Fun for all!’ Despite Blackpool continuing to invest heavily in marketing, a steady stream of negative images and stories like this made it increasingly difficult to promote the resort.¹⁰ By the turn of the twentieth century, Blackpool Council’s objective of marketing the resort to families was undermined by stories of younger visitors engaging in anti-social behaviour linked to the consumption of alcohol and drugs. In the summer of 2000, North West Tourist Board Chair Anthony Goldstone claimed that the impact of ‘loutish behaviour’ posed a serious threat to holiday towns. He argued that ‘consideration should be given to families and older visitors who often feel intimidated by this anti-social behaviour.’¹¹ Although stories like these were not new, a heightened perception of them, combined with decaying buildings and unsafe seawater, undermined attempts to attract private investment into Lancashire’s resorts.

⁸ ‘Shame of Britain’s filthy beaches’, *Daily Mirror*, 15 March 1988, p. 11. At this point according to the Audit Bureau of Circulation the *Mirror* had an average circulation of over three million copies each day.

⁹ John Hassan, *Seaside, Health and the Environment in England and Wales Since 1800*. (Aldershot: Routledge, 2016), p. 256.

¹⁰ Monopolies and Mergers Commission, *The Newspaper Industry* (1985), <http://www.mmc.gov.uk/rep_pub/reports/1985/fulltext/190c02.pdf> [accessed 9 November 2022].

¹¹ Victoria Rouse, ‘Laddish Gangs Tourist Threat’, *Blackpool Gazette*, 25 July 2000, p. 7.

Keith Waite, *Daily Mirror*, cartoon removed for copyright reasons. Copyright holder is the *Daily Mirror*.

Fig 5.1 - Keith Waite, *Daily Mirror*, 17 July 1981.¹²

All three authorities struggled to adapt their tourism infrastructure and attractions to changing consumer tastes during the later twentieth century. Despite this common problem, responses varied dramatically across the three resorts, as the effort to counter these negative trends came primarily from local authorities. This role became increasingly prominent as the private sector investment fell in these resorts, and the public sector took the lead in regeneration planning. All Lancashire resorts suffered from negative publicity, a lack of care for the historic built environment and examples of poor local decision-making. This neglect has impacted all aspects of the local tourism industry, but it has been most evident in the areas under investigation in this chapter. In recent

¹² Keith Waite, 'The world of Keith Waite', *Daily Mirror*, 17 July 1981, p. 13.

decades, the adaptive reuse of historic buildings in seaside resorts has become essential for economic, social, and cultural renewal. However, it is impossible to adapt buildings which no longer exist. The demolition of piers, theatres and other attractions appeared to be the most cost-effective solution at the time of the decision. However, replacements were often cheaply constructed and lacked any relationship to their coastal location. Regeneration attempts based around retail parks, while potentially beneficial for residents, offered little appeal to visitors from elsewhere. More recent local authority plans in Blackpool, Morecambe and Lytham St Annes have begun to address these issues. Still, their starting points are vastly different due to earlier decisions by local authorities.

In Morecambe, the above negative trends were evident earliest and with the longest-lasting consequences. As private investment in tourist facilities declined, Morecambe and Blackpool increasingly relied on various forms of public investment to develop and promote tourist attractions. In Blackpool, the Tower and Winter Gardens remain in operation due to their transfer into public ownership. Their continued operation has maintained the tourism base on which further large-scale regeneration projects could be added. Morecambe, in contrast, lost most of its major heritage tourist attractions, including both piers, Winter Gardens and fairgrounds. This loss, compounded by the reputational damage done by Lancaster City Council's management of the resort in the 1990s, to which I shall return below, has made it much more challenging to attract new investment and promote regeneration. Finally, as key entertainment infrastructure was lost in Lytham St Annes (such as its two largest theatres), they could maintain the resort's attractiveness to visitors and investors through smaller scale but more successful intervention. Indeed, by the 2010s, with effective private initiatives and investment (such as the Lytham Festival) supported by Fylde Borough Council, the resort had re-established itself as a significant entertainment centre. As reorganisation and increasing financial constraints limited the ability of local government to make interventions as they had before 1974, their priorities and strategies, especially in developing effective partnerships, continued to be critical for each resort.

5.2 Seaside Entertainment and Amenities in Lancashire After 1974

5.2.1 Swimming and the Beach

Historically seaside resorts were created to provide access to the sea. In the nineteenth and early twentieth century, as I explored in the previous chapter, the sea air and saltwater were seen as having health-giving properties.¹³ In this section I explore the decline of open-air swimming in these resorts, focussing on the issues of beach pollution, changing tourism trends, and the impact on local economies. Enjoying a day on the beach and sea-bathing had been prime reasons for holidaymakers to visit the towns. However, by 1990, it was reported that North West England had the most polluted coastline in the UK, with beaches (including Lancashire's) failing to meet EC safety standards.¹⁴ As Hassan points out, British beaches became viewed by the public as increasingly dangerous places to visit.¹⁵ This was, and is, an existential problem for seaside resorts, not least because it encouraged a move away from the type of attractions that had initially brought tourists to the coast. Although local authority representatives in Lancashire pressurised the water and sewage providers to improve standards and reduce beach pollution, it also encouraged councils to support developments with little or no connection to the sea.

Only at the beginning of the twenty-first century did significant investment from North West Water/United Utilities start to address the issue of coastal pollution. In July 2000, the *Blackpool Gazette* hoped the resort could 'look forward to the day when the North West can boast some of the country's best beaches and pure, clean water to swim in.'¹⁶ Unfortunately, severe reputational damage had already been done by then, and Blackpool, in particular, had effectively become, in Hassan's words, 'a land-based entertainment centre that just happened to be on the coast.'¹⁷ The influence on local authority priorities and policies was profound. Seawater filled the impressive open-air pools in St Annes, Blackpool, and Morecambe. However, with fewer holidaymakers venturing onto the beach, the number visiting these lidos also declined, as did the

¹³ Allan Brodie, *The Seafront* (Swindon: Historic England, 2018), p. 109.

¹⁴ Barry McLoughlin, 'Labour Attack On 'Polluted Beaches'', *West Lancashire Evening Gazette*, 8 May 1990, p. 3.

¹⁵ Hassan, p. 169.

¹⁶ Editorial, 'Now for our sea water....', *Blackpool Gazette*, 13 July 2000, p. 14.

¹⁷ Hassan, pp. 258-59.

popularity of their beauty pageants. During the 1970s and 1980s, their local authorities demolished and replaced outdoor pools with smaller, heated indoor facilities. However, rather than connecting with their environment, these new facilities effectively separated the resort from the seaside.

One key indicator of the falling popularity of Lancashire's beaches was the loss of the banks of council-owned deckchairs located at stations along the seafront. Thousands of holidaymakers had once hired these as part of a thriving beach economy with its associated attractions. However, the pastime of spending the afternoon on the beach declined rapidly from the 1970s onwards. In Blackpool, a report from January 1988 showed that the number of chairs hired had fallen from 1,252,380 in 1970 to 276,292 by 1987.¹⁸ As a result, the council cut the seventeen deck chair stations that had been in operation to eleven. Further cuts followed, and the hiring of deck chairs stopped in 2010, with the remaining stores sold in 2014.¹⁹ Only in 2021 was a single-deck chair station, with 500 chairs, reopened near Blackpool Central Pier. Local entrepreneur, Andrew Beaumont, seeing the potential in a summer of staycation holidays, leased a section of the Promenade from Blackpool Council.²⁰ With increasing visitor numbers and wider investment in Blackpool, this is a sign that public confidence in the safety of Blackpool's beaches and seawater is returning. However, despite improvements in the early twenty-first century, environmental challenges remain. In June 2023, for example, a 'no swim' advisory notice was issued across eight Lancashire beaches due to a sewage leak by United Utilities at Fleetwood. Blackpool Council Lyn Williams leader described the situation as 'appalling' and added, 'We're just at the start of our summer season with some glorious weather, and we're faced with having to put out advisory notices telling people not to go into the sea because of the discharges of sewage'.²¹ This concern is understandable, and the return of the sewage issue could seriously undermine regeneration efforts in Lancashire's seaside resorts.

¹⁸ BHC, LE02, Blackpool Borough Council Minutes 1988, Minute 31, 20 January 1988.

¹⁹ Chris Bottomley and Allan W Wood, *Lost Blackpool* (Stroud: Amberley, 2019), p. 67.

²⁰ Jane Rabbit, *Deckchairs Are Back in Blackpool! Live Blackpool* (2022)

<<https://www.liveblackpool.info/about/seafront/deckchairs-are-back-in-blackpool/>> [accessed 5 December 2022].

²¹ Paul Gallagher and Tom Earnshaw, *Manchester Evening News, Blackpool Beaches Still Under 'Don't Swim' warning a week after 'appalling sewage leak* (2023),

<<https://manchestereveningnews.co.uk/news/uk-news/blackpool-beaches-still-under-dont-27180243>> [accessed 23 June 2023].

In Morecambe, the decline in beach users was even more rapid than in Blackpool. The hiring of deckchairs ended in the early 1990s when no one could be found to operate the business. Bill Bryson, writing in 1994, commented, 'When a seaside resort can't find anyone willing to set up deckchairs, you know business is bad.'²² This indicated visitors no longer wished to spend a day on the sands. As previously discussed, despite its location on Morecambe Bay, the town's coastline was not perceived as a well-used asset. In 1992, a report by Ventures Consultancy for Lancaster City Council argued that Morecambe was one of the worst resorts in the United Kingdom for regular seaside beach activities such as swimming.²³ This was a fundamental problem for the resort as it harmed all other aspects of Morecambe's tourism industry. It also added to the reputational damage to Morecambe as a holiday destination, accelerating the decline in the number of tourists who choose to visit the area. This had a long-term impact on the local economy, as visitors decided to go to other destinations perceived as cleaner and safer.

As swimming in the sea and the attractiveness of Lancashire's beaches declined, so did the popularity of open-air pools. In addition, swimmers increasingly preferred indoor heated pools or the warmer waters of the Mediterranean. To combat this, for example, the Morecambe baths manager created a 'Shiverers Club', with the first person to enter the water at the beginning of the season given membership.²⁴ In recent years, cold water swimming has again become popular, but long after Lancashire's seaside outdoor pools were closed.²⁵ In addition, as Pussard contends, lidos gradually diminished in number in the later twentieth century as other forms of leisure, sport, exercise, and holidays superseded the municipal, outdoor swimming pool.²⁶ In Lancashire, local authorities increasingly looked towards indoor replacements. In Blackpool, for example, Councillor James Blake (a member of the Blackpool Attractions

²² Bill Bryson and Neil Gower, *Notes from a Small Island: Journey Through Britain* (London: Black Swan, 2015), p. 155.

²³ MLLC, Morecambe Central Promenade Area Study, May 1992, Ventures Consultancy, Hampshire, p. 37.

²⁴ Barry Guise and Lesley Guise, *In the Swim, Morecambe's Super Swimming Stadium* (Thame: Broadlands Press, 2022), p. 109.

²⁵ BBC News, *Can Cold Water Swimming Treat Depression?* (2018), <<https://www.bbc.com/news/health-45487187>> [accessed 1 December 2022].

²⁶ Helen Pussard, 'Historicising the Spaces of Leisure: Open-Air Swimming and the Lido Movement in England', *World Leisure Journal*, 49.4, (2007), 178-88 (p. 181).

and Leisure Committee) argued in 1974 that ‘the bath these days is a Promenade ornament that is closed for nine months of the year. It is a beautiful building, but does Blackpool need it anymore?’.²⁷ As pressure grew on local authority budgets in the 1970s and 1980s, this became an increasingly common view. As well as a decline in swimmers, rising maintenance costs increased pressure on local authorities to replace their swimming facilities. These issues affected all the pools in Lancashire’s resorts, as their local authorities were primarily responsible for constructing and managing replacements.

The first of Lancashire’s seaside lidos to close was Morecambe’s Super Swimming Stadium, demolished forty years after opening in 1936.²⁸ During the 1970s, the Stadium’s future became uncertain with falling visitor numbers and increased maintenance costs. In 1975 it was reported to the council that a crack in the wall of the shallow end of the pool indicated the possibility of collapse and that it could not be repaired at a reasonable cost. As a result, it would not open for the following summer season.²⁹ It was replaced with a leisure park and a smaller fun pool following demolition, but not until 1979. This demolition came against a background of national spending restraints and a general re-evaluation of the role of local government. Despite a local petition signed by 18,000 people asking for a roof on the new leisure pool, this was rejected based on cost and time delay.³⁰ When it opened in July 1979, visitor numbers to the new leisure park were disappointing, with only 104,200 attending in 1981.³¹ In 1988 an indoor pool called ‘Bubbles’ was added, which also ran into financial difficulties as marketing could not overcome Morecambe’s increasingly negative image. By 1993 Bubbles was attracting only 63,000 annual visitors, well below the numbers needed to break even.³² Although a private management company took over the running of Bubbles from Lancaster City Council, the council was still responsible for repairs.³³ By

²⁷ Seaside’s Diary, ‘Sell open-air bath’ urges councillor’, *West Lancashire Evening Gazette*, 27 August 1974, p. 6.

²⁸ Roger Bingham, *Lost Resort? The Flow and Ebb of Morecambe* (Milnthorpe: Cicerone Press, 1990), p. 299.

²⁹ LA, LAU1/1/2, Lancaster District Council Minutes 1974-75, p. 368.

³⁰ LA, LAU1/1/4, Lancaster District Council Minutes, 1976-77, p. 615.

³¹ English Tourist Board, *Tourism Fact Sheets: North West 1981* (London: English Tourist Board, 1981), p. 12c.

³² LUL, Lancashire County Council, *A Tourism Strategy for Lancashire*, 1995, p. 52.

³³ Chris Starrs, ‘Bubbles Saved’, *Lancashire Evening Post*, 4 March 1993

1999, Bubbles Leisure Group was revealed insolvent, with debts of over £174,000 and owing £32,000 in business rates.³⁴ After this revelation, and despite all of the public money previously invested, Lancaster City Council withdrew financial support, and the pool closed that year before being demolished in 2000. Despite its position at the centre of Morecambe's Promenade, the location has not been redeveloped at the time of writing, despite the proposals of Urban Splash in 2013 and Eden Project Morecambe in 2023.³⁵ Like others in the resort, this venue suffered from inconsistent management and political infighting on Lancaster City Council. The churn of democratic representation on the council exacerbated this inconsistency. As a result, short-term savings often outweighed a longer-term vision for Morecambe.

As the debate over the future of Morecambe's Swimming Stadium continued during the mid-1970s, Blackpool's open-air pool also came under question. By the 1970s, Blackpool Council sought to sell the pool to private sector investors for redevelopment. Although there was a nostalgic feeling amongst some councillors, as illustrated by Councillor Blake, modernisation and cost-savings were higher priorities in this period. By 1978, Blackpool Council were keen to sell the site, with reported losses amounting to £43,000 that year alone, with only 36,304 attending during the season.³⁶ Due to the falling number of visitors and mounting repair costs, in 1983, Blackpool's outdoor pool was demolished. The replacement facility was the Sandcastle Water Park, which opened in 1986. Although built in the exact location of the old pool, the design of the new complex had only a nominal relationship to the sea and none to Blackpool's other attractions. Unlike the lido, this was a privately operated facility, but Blackpool Council underwrote the venture with any losses beyond an agreed level (£500,000) being met by the local authority. By 1989/90, the liability on the Sandcastle had risen to more than £1.3 million. On this occasion, the public-private partnership was particularly one-sided, with the financial risk taken by Blackpool Council.

³⁴ Bryan Carter, 'Bubbles burst with a bang', *Morecambe Guardian*, 12 January 1999

³⁵ BBC News, *Eden Project North: Boris Johnson Promises Funding for Project* (2022), <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-lancashire-61269750>> [accessed 2 May 2022].

³⁶ 'Ex-soccer star plans £1m scheme for baths', *West Lancashire Evening Gazette*, 11 October 1978, p. 11.

With continued losses over the next decade, the council took over ownership of the park in 2003.³⁷ Since that date, there has been significant investment in the Sandcastle with the introduction of new slides and tropical theming. The Sandcastle is now the UK's largest indoor waterpark with eighteen slides and attractions and employs up to 130 staff during the height of the summer months.³⁸ It is a prime example of how a unitary local authority like Blackpool successfully learned from past errors and intervened to save a key attraction. In contrast, Lancaster City Council could not do the same for Morecambe. In 2022, following a deal with Merlin Entertainments (one of the world's largest attraction operators), Lynn Williams of Blackpool Council pointed to the local authority's success in managing the Sandcastle, arguing that:

The Sandcastle Waterpark is one of the Council's considerable success stories. Over the years, it has received significant investment to enable it to retain and grow its immense popularity. We have an established relationship with Merlin Entertainments in terms of operating some of our key tourism assets, and we are confident that this will take the Sandcastle Waterpark to the next level.³⁹

This combination of public investment and private expertise has made the venue one of Blackpool's most popular attractions. Overall, public-private partnerships like this have played an essential role in developing and managing tourism infrastructure in Blackpool, allowing the town to benefit from the expertise and resources of private companies while retaining control over key assets.

Although surviving longer than Morecambe and Blackpool's outdoor pools, Fylde Borough Council closed St Annes open-air pool in 1989 due to cost.⁴⁰ The replacement (much smaller) indoor pool, part of the Island Leisure Complex, also ran into financial difficulties and was closed for a year in 2008 due to budget cuts. Following a strong local

³⁷ BHC, LE02, Blackpool Borough Council Minutes 1988, Minute 48, 2 November 1988, p. 965.

³⁸ Finance Director Blackpool Entertainment Company Ltd and Blackpool Operating Company Ltd Information Pack, *Blackpool* (2021) <www.sandcastle-waterpark.co.uk> and <<https://www.wintergardensblackpool.co.uk/media/3889/finance-director-becl-bocl.pdf>> [Accessed 2 May 2022].

³⁹ 'Merlin Entertainments, *Making a Splash: Merlin to Manage the Sandcastle Waterpark* (2022), <<https://www.merlinentertainments.biz/newsroom/news-releases/2022/sandcastle-waterpark/>> [accessed 19 September 2022].

⁴⁰ Lytham St Annes News, *Step Back In Time To 1980. Does Anyone Remember This from Over Forty Years Ago?* (2021), <<https://www.lythamstannes.news/lytham-past/step-back-in-time-to-1980-does-anyone-remember-this-from-over-forty-years-ago/>> [accessed 2 May 2022]. In 1980 the Fylde Borough Council wanted to clean the pool of the algae and dirt, which had built-up, in time for the start of the new season. The pool was filled with seawater fish to eat the Algae. When the pool was almost clean local anglers were invited to empty the pool by catching them with their rods and lines!

campaign, it was reopened with a further investment from Fylde Borough Council of £500,000. It is currently operated on behalf of the community by the YMCA.⁴¹ By 2022, however, Fylde Borough Council sought to regenerate this area as part of the St Annes Masterplan. The Masterplan stated that although The Island site hosts several important attractions, the overall quality of this destination could be much better. Most significantly, the 1980s buildings were inward-looking and failed to optimise sea and lake views, whilst spaces between buildings were dominated by car parking. Among the options to address this was a proposal for a new water park complex on the existing pool site, including a decked area and open-air swimming pool within the boating lake. In contrast to previous developments, the seaside location is embraced, reversing the late twentieth-century trend of Lancashire's resorts of turning their back on the sea.⁴² Whereas the Island development in the 1980s could easily be located anywhere in the country, the beach and dunes at St Annes are central to the plan. Recognising past mistakes, it is now a priority for Fylde Borough Council to fully connect the visitor economy with the seafront and the beach.

This has only been made possible due to significant investment since the 1990s in the Irish Sea's bathing water quality.⁴³ With increased investment in sewage treatment, St Annes Beach had reached Blue Flag status by 2020. For a beach to qualify for the Blue Flag, stringent environmental, safety and accessibility criteria must be met and maintained.⁴⁴ In addition, in 2022, the beach was awarded a Seaside Award judged against a wider set of standards, including safety and environmental management. Keep Britain Tidy, which manages the Blue Flag award, commented that 'the success of St Annes in reaching the high standards demanded is a testament to all those who have worked so hard to protect and improve our blue spaces – from beach managers and volunteers to residents and businesses. The huge commitment needed to maintain marvellous beaches worthy of these awards cannot be underestimated.'⁴⁵ As a result of

⁴¹ Julia Bennett, 'Pool Deal Proves a Real Splash Hit', *Blackpool Gazette*, 22 April 2010.

⁴² St Annes Town Centre Masterplan (2022), <<https://new.fylde.gov.uk/st-annes-town-centre-masterplan/>> [accessed 2 October 2022], p. 23.

⁴³ Environment Agency, *2018 Bathing Water Profile for Morecambe South* (2018), <<http://environment.data.gov.uk>> [accessed August 1, 2020].

⁴⁴ Blue Flag, *Blue Flag* (2020), <<https://www.blueflag.global>> [accessed 12 May 2020].

⁴⁵ Fylde Council, *St Annes Beach to Fly Seaside Award with Pride This Summer* (2023), <<https://new.fylde.gov.uk/st-annes-beach-to-fly-seaside-award-with-pride-this-summer/>> [accessed 10 January 2023].

improvements like these, holidaymakers have begun to return to Lancashire's beaches, although environmental concerns remain. As discussed, deck chairs returned to Blackpool in 2021 after a ten-year absence.⁴⁶ Rental beach huts in St Annes have also proved highly popular since their return in the late 2010s, even with a daily hire rate of over £150. The *Manchester Evening News* described them as like 'gold dust' in the summer of 2021.⁴⁷ With cleaner beaches and seawater, the reputational damage of the 1980s and 1990s has begun to be reversed. However, continuing to address environmental concerns will be essential for regeneration strategies that are linked to coastal locations.

Although each of the three Lancashire resorts faced the problem of declining interest in open-air swimming and increasing concerns over pollution, how their local authorities responded varied widely. In particular, the contrasting fortunes of Blackpool and Morecambe could not be sharper. Although the privately owned/publicly underwritten facility model provided business expertise and security for investors, in Morecambe, it also created a risk-free environment for poor management and proved very costly for local taxpayers. Whereas in Blackpool, private expertise and public ownership have proven much more successful and provided a more secure platform for the resort's recovery as an attractive destination. Clean, safe, and attractive beaches with appropriate swimming facilities are the lynchpins in attracting tourists to seaside resorts. Without them, other ventures and efforts at regeneration are likely to fail. While there has been success in reclaiming these seaside destinations, the journey is far from over. Environmental concerns are likely to become even more prominent in the years ahead. The key lesson is that in order for resorts to adapt to these wider changes community involvement, sustainable practices, and adaptable local government are crucial for success.

⁴⁶ Visit Blackpool, *Blackpool Deckchair Hire* (2022), <<https://www.visitblackpool.com/detail/blackpool-deckchair-hire-1006040/>> [accessed 2 May 2022].

⁴⁷ Manchester Evening News, *Lytham St Annes Beach Huts Are Like Gold Dust This Summer - Here's What You Get* (2022), <<https://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/whats-on/whats-on-news/lytham-st-annes-beach-huts-21245845>> [accessed 11 January 2022].

5.2.2 Piers

The decline in Lancashire's beaches' popularity and the lack of interest in heritage buildings created an existential crisis for piers in these three resorts since 1974. As discussed in chapter four showed that the golden age of pier building occurred before the First World War. However, In the inter-war period, further private investment occurred with new pavilions and theatres constructed on pier walkways. As Chris Foote Ward points out, piers were built to make money, and their success as tourist attractions until the 1970s meant that owners continued to maintain and modernise these structures despite their vulnerability to damage from extreme weather events and fire.⁴⁸ Their success was inherently linked to the desire of tourists to be close to the sea, and the collapse of Lancashire's beach economy at the end of the twentieth century reduced the profitability of seaside piers. In addition, as Walton points out, Victorian seaside pleasure buildings fell out of favour from the 1960s onwards, impacting high-maintenance structures like piers.⁴⁹ Local authority ambivalence to the historic built environment, and a lack of willingness to support the piers financially, which was most evident in Morecambe, meant that there was little chance of intervention during the critical decades of the 1970s and 1980s. Pier closures were increasing around the English coast, and with local authorities elsewhere losing significant sums with council-owned piers, there was little appetite for municipal ownership in a period of financial constraints.⁵⁰ In Blackpool and St Annes, local authorities have become more supportive of their piers since the late 1990s as these structures' heritage value has been more fully appreciated. Although constructing new piers is usually prohibitively expensive, local authorities, such as Blackpool, now prioritise the preservation of surviving piers as essential to reviving tourism across a resort. In addition, the story of each pier reflects

⁴⁸ Chris Foote Wood, *Walking Over the Waves: Quintessential British Seaside Piers* (Dunbeath, Caithness, Scotland: Whittles Pub, 2008), p. v. With wood as the principal construction material fires had always regular problem for piers around the country.

⁴⁹ John K. Walton, *The British Seaside*, p. 115.

⁵⁰ Martin Easdown, *Lancashire's Seaside Piers* (Barnsley, South Yorkshire: Wharnccliffe Books, 2009), p. 77

<<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=612975>> [accessed 6 May 2020]. Southport Pier had been in municipal ownership since 1936, being transferred to Sefton Council in 1974. It consistently lost money during the 1970s and 1980s and was considered for demolition in 1990, when it was saved by one council vote.

broader social and economic trends, including shifts in leisure activities as well as the challenges brought about by climate change.

The success and failure of pleasure piers have become inextricably linked to the fate of the resorts themselves. As Gray puts it, 'Piers in decline became a surrogate measure for the ruination of many seaside resorts and the more general ills of society.'⁵¹ While it is certainly possible for a resort to survive as a holiday destination having lost its pier, the removal of these structures is often a significant indicator of the general health of its tourism market. This loss was especially felt when combined with a more general decay of the built environment in resorts such as Morecambe, which deprives these locations of attractiveness to potential visitors. Although there were short-term cost advantages from closure and demolition, providing alternative attractions (as demonstrated in later multi-million-pound regeneration programmes) has proved more than their maintenance and repair. As seaside heritage and nostalgia have become powerful forces in the twenty-first century, resorts that have maintained their piers have been able to reap the benefit.

Despite the loss of seaside piers since the 1960s, including four in Lancashire, most have survived. A stroll along a pier remains the most popular activity for tourists at the British seaside, with a 2018 survey showing that seventy per cent of visitors participate in this activity.⁵² Gray argues that 'piers will continue to provide a defining characteristic and architectural feature of many British seaside resorts.'⁵³ The high maintenance costs and vulnerability to storms and fire will mean a great deal of effort and expense will be needed to preserve them, and the entertainment they offer will also have to adapt to changing tastes. Unlike piers elsewhere in the country, Lancashire's surviving piers have not been taken into local authority ownership. However, they have benefitted from local authority and other grant support. Whereas there seems little chance of twenty-first century rebuilds for those Victorian piers already lost, Fylde Borough Council are considering a potential extension to St Annes Pier.

⁵¹ Fred Gray, *Architecture of British Seaside Piers* (Ramsbury: The Crowood Press Ltd, 2020), p. 170.

⁵² The Conversation, *Victorian Pleasure Piers Are Unique to Britain, But They Are Under Threat* (2022), <<https://theconversation.com/victorian-pleasure-piers-are-unique-to-britain-but-they-are-under-threat-97553>> [accessed 19 September 2022].

⁵³ Gray, *Architecture of British Seaside Piers*, p. 207.

Morecambe's seafront saw the most dramatic changes of the three resorts under consideration after 1974. The West and Central Piers were lost due to natural forces and neglect. West Pier had lost its pavilion in the 1920s but remained popular as a venue for open-air dancing and roller skating, with an amusement arcade constructed along with the first third of the Pier's length. However, in November 1977, storm damage wrecked a third of the Pier, destroying the central section.⁵⁴ Repair costs were estimated at £500,000, so the Pier was demolished in 1978.⁵⁵ There was little consideration of large-scale public expenditure from Lancaster City Council at a time when the loss-making Winter Gardens and Swimming Stadium had just closed. Instead, local authority support was prioritised for other ventures, such as Marineland, which had also suffered storm damage.⁵⁶ The loss of these major entertainment venues in the mid-late 1970s meant there were fewer reasons to visit Morecambe and added to the accelerated the domino effect of closing attractions during the 1980s.

Morecambe Central Pier also ran into problems from the mid-1970s onwards as major structural issues became evident with expensive repair work required, and by 1986 it was closed for safety reasons. An editorial in the *Lancashire Evening Post* claimed that this was partly due to a lack of modernisation but more fundamentally changing tastes and falling visitor numbers. It argued that the tragedy of the Central Pier's demise was another 'sickening statistic in the resort's sad decline.'⁵⁷ Pier owner Dennis McNulty blamed the local authority for lack of financial support, arguing that 'we cannot compete with subsidised buildings and we have not had any grants at all to help us.'⁵⁸ This lack of cooperation between the local authority and what remained of the resort's private investors was a familiar story in this period of Morecambe's history and stood in contrast to the much better relations in Blackpool and Lytham St Annes in the twenty-first century.

Over the next five years, the Central Pier buildings fell into dereliction, adding another negative aspect to the seafront in Morecambe. Sights like this and others, such

⁵⁴ National Piers Society, *Morecambe West End Pier* (2018), <<https://www.piers.org.uk/pier/morecambe-west-end-pier/>> [accessed 9 August 2018].

⁵⁵ Bingham, p. 293.

⁵⁶ LA, LAU1/1/15, Lancaster District Council Minutes 1977/78, Minute 803, 5 January 1978, p. 402.

⁵⁷ John Morrell, 'A Pier Without Musical Peer', *Lancashire Evening Post*, 8 May 1986, p. 3.

⁵⁸ Andrew Drinkwater, 'Danger Pier Faces the Axe', *Lancashire Evening Post*, 8 May 1986, p. 1.

as the rotting Winter Gardens (closed since 1977), presented a picture of a resort in steep decline. Dennis McAnulty attempted to sell the Pier to new private owners, while Lancaster City Council were unwilling to buy the structure. The local authority then tried but failed to make the owners pay for cosmetic work to be done to a building which had become an eyesore. Despite the sale in 1990 to a local business consortium which laid out plans for its restoration, a fire in early 1991 ended hopes for the restoration of Central Pier. A City Council investigation effectively condemned the Pier, and demolition occurred in 1992.⁵⁹ These two piers, which had given holiday entertainment for generations, had gone. As in other areas of tourism infrastructure, Lancaster City Council lacked a clear policy concerning Morecambe's piers.⁶⁰ In Morecambe, this was manifested in the heated debate between local political groups, with accusations and recriminations more evident than a coherent plan to address the resort's problems. By the early 1990s, having been one of Morecambe's key selling points, except for the view across Morecambe Bay, the seafront was increasingly considered by tourists as a place best avoided. As Jarratt points out, 'Morecambe was not only losing attractions but also credibility'.⁶¹ Failure reinforced failure and created a spiral of decline, which was inadequately addressed by the local authority.

Like Morecambe, Lytham St Annes also had two pleasure piers. As discussed earlier, Lytham Pier was demolished by the local authority in 1960 following the loss of the sandy beach on that part of the coast. In contrast, at the beginning of the 1970s, St Annes Pier appeared to have a secure future. The fate of St Annes Pier was strongly linked to that of the St Annes-on-Sea-Land and Building Company. In 1962, Gabriel Harrison bought the Company, with the pier in the books, for the nominal value of £1. On 7 June 1974, the Company celebrated its centenary with a concert. The venue was still prestigious enough for that concert to be led by Yehudi Menuhin and performed in front of Princess Anne. However, on 20 July of the same year, the pier pavilion was destroyed during a night-time blaze. The entire St Annes Pier was insured for only £300,000 – the maximum risk the underwriters would accept. During a period of high

⁵⁹ National Piers Society, *Morecambe Central Pier* (2018), <<https://www.piers.org.uk/pier/morecambe-central-pier/>> [accessed 9 August 2018].

⁶⁰ Gray, *Architecture of British Seaside Piers*, p. 243.

⁶¹ David Jarratt, 'The Development and Decline of Morecambe in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries: A Resort Caught in the Tide', p. 276.

inflation, a replacement theatre alone would have cost several million pounds. As the *West Lancashire Evening Gazette* reported on 22 July 1974, 'Nobody could afford to build a pier like that today'.⁶² Although this is not precisely true, significant private investors were not interested in covering the shortfall, and the newly formed Fylde Borough Council did not want to take the Pier into municipal ownership. A Save the Pier Action Group was formed to preserve what remained of the Pier. The group criticised the Borough Council and Company for lacking an effective plan. A letter submitted by a local resident to the *Lytham St Annes Express* on 24 April read, 'The council need not think for one moment the residents will take all this lying down. It is now obvious for all to see that the St Annes Land and Building Company do not care what sort of a town they are creating, let alone 'minor' considerations like entertainment for visitors, etc.'⁶³ The relationship between the Building Company and the local authority, which had sustained the resort for its first hundred years, had proven unable to meet the new financial challenges of the late twentieth century.

Although no restoration of previous structures occurred, there was an effort to preserve what remained of St Annes Pier. In 1975, the pier became listed for preservation by the Department of Environment, reflecting a growing concern for the survival of these Victorian structures. St Annes Pier also acquired new owners when Harrison's Amalgamated Investment Company sold the pier for just £30,000 to the Webb family on 6 December 1976.⁶⁴ Unfortunately, St Annes Pier suffered a further fire in 1982, and the Floral Hall was destroyed.⁶⁵ (See Fig 5.2) Again, the private owner did not replace this building, and Fylde Borough Council was unwilling to provide funds, preferring to invest in its own tourist attractions.⁶⁶ On the other hand, it finally prompted the demolition of the seaward end of the pier in 1984. Due to the impact of these fires, the pier now has a length of only 600 ft compared to 914 ft initially. A small amusement arcade replaced the mixture of attractions on the pier formally offered at the landward end. The remaining open deck was closed for many years, but restoration

⁶² John Finch, 'Pier Blaze a Personal Tragedy', *West Lancashire Evening Gazette*, 22 July 1974, p. 7.

⁶³ Amounderness.co.uk, *Lytham & St Annes on the Sea Lancashire - Local History - St. Annes Pier 1975* (2022), <https://amounderness.co.uk/st.annes_pier_1975.html> [accessed 17 May 2022].

⁶⁴ Easdown, p. 97.

⁶⁵ Ibid., pp. 95-7.

⁶⁶ LA, LAU/5/1/1/9, Fylde Borough Council Minutes 1982/83, Report of the Borough Treasurer, Minute 10, 18 January 1983, p. 314

now allows visitors to stroll to the end, where there is a children’s mini-golf area.⁶⁷ While the pier continues to face challenges, there are signs of renewed interest and potential investment in this historic landmark as part of the local authority-led regeneration of St Annes.

Photo of St Annes Pier, 1982, removed for copyright reasons. Copyright holder is Amounderness.co.uk.

Fig 5.2 - St Annes Pier, 1982, with the impact of the two fires clearly visible. The arrows indicate the current length of the pier.⁶⁸

Although the pier remains in private hands, small amounts of public money have become available to support the pier’s operation. In 2010, new lights were installed on the front of St Annes Pier as part of a broader scheme to illuminate the town at night. The £20,000 scheme, jointly funded by the pier’s owners, Fylde Council and the Lancashire and Blackpool Tourist Board, aimed to boost tourism by making the town

⁶⁷ Anthony Wills, ‘Spotlight on...St Annes Pier’, *Piers*, 129, (2018), 24-6.

⁶⁸ Amounderness.co.uk, *Lytham & St. Annes on the Sea Lancashire - Local History - Aerial View 1982* (2022), <https://amounderness.co.uk/aerial_view_1982.html> [accessed 17 May 2022].

centre more attractive at night.⁶⁹ St Annes Pier has made a small profit over the last decade with additional modest attractions and steady investment.⁷⁰ The importance of the Pier was recognised in the Fylde Borough Council's 2022 St Annes Town Centre and Island Masterplan. The Masterplan proposal is to transform the car park, providing a more appropriate setting for the Grade II listed Pier buildings and the surrounding Promenade Gardens and a more attractive environment for visitors arriving at this key family attraction. The potential for the pier to be acquired by the local authority is being investigated by Fylde Council, which would be followed by renovating the pier with an extension to include a new pavilion.⁷¹ Although this is contingent on Fylde Council attracting the necessary funding, should this plan go ahead, it would represent a significant expansion in the role of the local authority.

In contrast to the total (or partial) loss of piers elsewhere in Lancashire, Blackpool's piers have survived to the present day, though with considerable changes. In fact, Blackpool is the only resort in the United Kingdom with three of these structures. Although the entertainment offered on the pier may have changed, these piers have remained profitable for most of the period post-1974. From 1967, Blackpool's piers were owned by Trust House Forte and then from 1983, the First Leisure Corporation.⁷² The willingness of large national companies to hold these structures, and other key attractions from the 1960s to the 1980s, underlines their commercial viability during this time in contrast to other piers on the Lancashire coastline. The two most significant changes on these piers have been the loss of their traditional theatre shows and steamship excursions. With the decline of the summer show, Central and South Piers lost their remaining theatres in the 1980s and 1990s. They were converted by the owners First Leisure into family amusement centres and restaurants.⁷³ As discussed later in the chapter, this was part of a more general decline in the popularity of seaside theatre in Blackpool and elsewhere.

⁶⁹ National Pier Society, *St. Anne's Pier* (2020), <<https://piers.org.uk/pier/st-annes-pier/>> [accessed 1 February 2020].

⁷⁰ HM Government, *St Annes Pier Company Limited Filing History* (2022) <<https://find-and-update.company-information.service.gov.uk/company/01802869/filing-history?page=4>> [accessed 3 May 2022].

⁷¹ Fylde Council, *St Annes Town Centre Masterplan* (2022), <<https://new.fylde.gov.uk/st-annes-town-centre-masterplan/>> [accessed 2 October 2022], p. 45.

⁷² Gray, *Architecture of British Seaside Piers*, p. 183.

⁷³ Robin Duke, 'Future fears for South Pier', *The Stage*, 16 October 1997, p. 5.

Photo of Blackpool South Pier removed for copyright reasons. Copyright holder is Wikimedia Commons.

Fig 5.3 - Blackpool South Pier, June 2009.⁷⁴

Central and South Piers also developed 'white-knuckle' ride amusement parks to compensate for the loss of revenue from more traditional sources such as theatres. As seen in Fig 5.3, South Pier is now primarily a location for so-called 'thrill rides' rather than live entertainment. In the words of Visit Blackpool's marketing, 'It is the most adrenaline-powered of the three piers with an array of thrill rides to tempt you. Whizz around the Crazy Coaster, the UK's fastest spinning wild mouse ride, or feel the adrenaline rush of the SkyCoaster.'⁷⁵ Although this redevelopment has not been well-received by those pier enthusiasts wishing to preserve the heritage of these structures, they have enabled those operating the piers to make a profit. In 1987 Walton argued that 'the pier had been left behind. Its future may belong to the world of the museum, the preservation society, and the professional purveyor of nostalgia.'⁷⁶ In this

⁷⁴ Wikimedia Commons, *File: South Pier, Blackpool - Geograph.Org.Uk - 1385371.Jpg* (2009) <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:South_Pier,_Blackpool_-_geograph.org.uk_-_1385371.jpg> [accessed 23 May 2022].

⁷⁵ Visit Blackpool, *South Pier* (2022), <<https://www.visitblackpool.com/detail/south-pier-5901/>> [accessed 28 November 2022].

⁷⁶ Gray, *Architecture of British Seaside Piers*, p. 172.

judgement, Walton has been shown to have been mistaken. Blackpool Central and South Piers have demonstrated another future where new attractions are added to appeal to a broader group of visitors. It seems unlikely that three piers, appealing purely to nostalgia, would have been commercially viable. North Pier, in contrast, has maintained its theatre combined with the Sunlight Lounge and classic carousel ride. Today the North Pier Theatre (renamed the Joe Longthorne Theatre) survives as one of only five working pier theatres in the United Kingdom and the only example on the west coast of England.⁷⁷ Due to a decline in their popularity, the long-running popular summer season shows of the twentieth century no longer occur in the theatre (or elsewhere in the resort), with short-runs and one-off performances taking their place. In addition, despite the theatre being open, it is still deemed at risk by the Theatres Trust due to the pier's condition and its extreme vulnerability to climate change.

As national companies, such as First Leisure, withdrew from Blackpool, local investment from both the public and private sectors became critical for the survival of Blackpool's piers. Having been in the hands of larger companies for several decades, in 2011, Blackpool's piers were sold by Six Piers Ltd to a Blackpool company, Sedgewick's. This return to locally based ownership has proved to be a success. Having formed the Blackpool Pier Company, Peter Sedgwick vowed to invest in the piers and restore the North Pier's former 'Victorian' look.⁷⁸ The continuing appeal of Blackpool's piers, especially in good weather, was underlined in 2018 as large numbers visited during the May Day Bank Holiday. Sedgwick said it was the busiest weekend he had seen in twenty-five years of operating in the resort. He said, 'All the piers were rammed, and the feedback we had from people was fantastic. It reminded me of the old days when I came here in 1961, and you couldn't move for the volume of people on the Promenade.'⁷⁹ In 2018, the Blackpool Pier Company reported a profit after taxation of £914,649 based on a turnover of £9.7m. This was an increase of over forty per cent on the figure for the previous year, as maximising the use of space on the Central and South Piers for money-

⁷⁷ Tim Wardley, 'Seaside Piers: Blackpool', *Piers*, 142 (2021), 24-31, (p. 29).

⁷⁸ National Piers Society, *Blackpool North Pier* (2020), <<https://piers.org.uk/pier/blackpool-north-pier/>> [accessed 12 October 2020].

⁷⁹ Shelagh Parkinson, 'Blackpool's best weekend "in 25 years"', *Blackpool Gazette*, 9 May 2018.

generating activity had created a successful business model.⁸⁰ Following the COVID pandemic, further confidence was demonstrated in the future of Central Pier, with an announcement that £4m was to be spent by the Pier Company on a new, larger Big Wheel with a planned opening date of 2023.⁸¹ Although this would seem to be positive news, another story in the *Blackpool Gazette* in 2018 underlined the ongoing uncertainty over the long-term future of the piers. Having bid for a £200,000 grant towards structural repairs, having been included on the World Monuments Watch, Sedgewick underlined the problem, ‘at the moment, we just keep going with the repairs until the money runs out.’⁸² Even without the challenge of global warming, all three piers will require significant structural investment over the coming years to survive. Although they remain successful private commercial ventures, a partnership working with Blackpool Council and others will be necessary to ensure their survival. In 2018, the World Monuments Fund made the following judgement, ‘the World Monuments Fund affirmed that it would work together with the Blackpool Council and the private owners of the piers to expand dialogue, explore new models for the rehabilitation of the piers, and celebrate the heritage of the world’s first working-class seaside resort.’⁸³ Including Blackpool’s piers on the Watch List brought attention to the urgent need for investment and preservation of these historic landmarks.

The recent history of Lancashire’s piers illustrates broader issues facing the resorts. Although significantly changed, Blackpool’s piers (especially the Central and South) have adapted to attract new visitors and, after several ownership changes, have demonstrated strong resilience and enduring popularity with visitors. With an effective partnership with Blackpool Council, local ownership has enabled these piers to return a profit and bid for grant aid money. St Annes Pier is also profitable, though on a smaller scale, and has maintained its attractive landward end of the structure with the support of Fylde Borough Council. In contrast, Morecambe’s Piers had neither local authority

⁸⁰ HM Government, *The Blackpool Pier Company Limited Filing History* (2022), <<https://find-and-update.company-information.service.gov.uk/company/09606235/filing-history>> [accessed 3 May 2022].

⁸¹ liveBlackpool, *Blackpool’s New Big Wheel!* (2022), <<https://www.liveblackpool.info/about/seafront/blackpools-new-big-wheel/>> [accessed 20 May 2022].

⁸² Shelagh Parkinson, ‘£400,000 Bid to ‘save’ Blackpool’s under-threat Piers’, *Blackpool Gazette*, 25 May 2018.

⁸³ World Monuments Fund, *Blackpool Piers* (2018), <<https://www.wmf.org/project/blackpool-piers>> [accessed 2 October 2022].

support from Lancaster City Council nor willing private investors. Although located only a few miles apart, the survival of each pier has therefore proved to be contingent on the ability to coordinate private and public investment through effective partnerships. The nature of pier structures means that large sums of money must be spent on maintenance, and with limited public funds, this means generating revenues. To succeed, these piers must attract and retain visitors. Nostalgia and heritage themes can play a role, as shown at Blackpool North Pier and, to a lesser extent St Annes Pier. However, to generate the larger profits needed, other piers such as Blackpool Central and South have been successfully adapted by their owners to meet the demands of new visitors. Unfortunately, neither model was attempted in Morecambe, so the resort's piers failed to survive. The legacy of this loss, along with other attractions discussed in this chapter, has impacted the ability of Lancaster City Council to promote other regeneration schemes. In contrast, Blackpool and Fylde Borough Councils have had local policy initiatives that have mobilised their piers' seaside heritage within their broader economic and social regeneration strategies. This offers vital lessons for other resorts that are currently considering how best to manage and potentially revitalise their piers and other heritage sites.

5.2.3 Pleasure Palaces and Theatres

As shown in chapter four, even when spending a day on the sands and outdoor swimming was at the height of its popularity, a range of indoor entertainment options was vital to the seaside resort's offer. In the later twentieth century, however, changes in popular culture and escalating costs relating to the maintenance of Victorian buildings saw the private sector increasingly reluctant to invest. In addition, as with piers and lidos, these buildings became perceived by their local authorities as dated and costly white elephants. With changing public tastes affecting the demand for more traditional forms of seaside entertainment, local government interventions (or non-interventions) were again a critical factor in their survival and replacement. In addition, where they have survived, they have provided a significant heritage base for regeneration plans. Therefore, like seaside piers, understanding such buildings' recent history and ownership helps illuminate the nature of resort decline and the effectiveness of these regeneration strategies. Central government has been reluctant to provide additional

financial support to coastal resorts. Demolition was also seen as more cost-effective than renovation or renewal. As Gray points out, even Blackpool Tower was until recently ‘unloved by many architectural commentators because it is seen as derivative and old-fashioned, the centrepiece of an unfashionable and working-class resort.’⁸⁴ This was linked to the widespread perception that seaside shows had little cultural value. Ewa Mazierska argues it was seen as ‘entertainment rather than art and lowbrow at that’.⁸⁵ The performances in these venues were seen as having little cultural value, which reduced the potential for investment in the buildings where they were performed. Therefore, while these venues have faced an existential crisis, only in recent decades has there been increased awareness of how vital they are to these resorts. The Theatre Trust noted in 2020, ‘A working theatre plays an important role for its local community, creating identity and an economic driver for creating employment and the night-time economy.’⁸⁶ The loss of these theatres reflected a broader crisis of confidence in the future of these resorts as tourist destinations. During the 1970s and 1980s, traditional seaside summer shows rapidly declined in popularity and accelerated theatre closures. In 1987, *The Stage* announced the ‘death of the summer show’ with Blackpool as the exception rather than the rule. The reviewer commented on the ‘disappointingly small collection of material from which to compile our listings.’⁸⁷ As a result, unlike Blackpool, where theatres remained in the private sector, a 1984 English Tourist Board report noted that ten (out of eighteen) local authorities surveyed ran shows themselves, often as a ‘loss leader’ (as Lancaster City Council had done).⁸⁸ Venues that survived into the twenty-first century were mainly owned or heavily subsidised by local authorities. For example, Blackpool Tower and Winter Gardens came under the control of Blackpool Council in 2010, and even before a multi-million-pound refurbishment project began in 2010, the cost of purchasing the buildings amounted to £38.9 million.⁸⁹ In contrast,

⁸⁴ Fred Gray, *Designing the Seaside: Architecture, Society and Nature* (London: Reaktion, 2009), p. 257.

⁸⁵ Mazierska, p. 1.

⁸⁶ Theatres Trust, *Theatres at Risk* (2020), <<http://www.theatrestrust.org.uk/how-we-help/theatres-at-risk>> [accessed 25 September 2020].

⁸⁷ ‘1987--The Death of The Summer Show’, *The Stage*, 23 July 1987, p. 10.

⁸⁸ Howard L. Hughes and Danielle Allen, ‘Entertainment and Its Significance in the Holiday Experience at UK Seaside Resorts’, *Tourism Recreation Research*, 33.2 (2008), 131–41 (p. 132) <<https://doi.org/10.1080/02508281.2008.11081300>>.

⁸⁹ Place North West, *Blackpool Attractions Saved from Spending Cuts* (2010), <<https://www.placenorthwest.co.uk/blackpool-attractions-saved-from-spending-cuts/>> [accessed 5 June 2021].

although Lancaster City Council and Fylde Borough have invested in smaller venues in their resorts, neither Morecambe nor Lytham St Annes maintained a venue with more than 1,000 seats.⁹⁰ This was part of a general trend across England's resorts. The English Tourist Board (ETB) Working Party on seaside entertainment reported in 1984 that the traditional summer show (large, star-centred, and theatre-based) was disappearing. In nineteen resorts surveyed by the ETB, summer shows across England fell from thirty in 1974 to twenty-one in 1983.⁹¹ In this declining market, smaller resorts such as Morecambe and Lytham St Annes struggled to compete.

The battle to save Morecambe's largest surviving complex, the Winter Gardens, epitomised these challenges. Operating with council subsidies since 1970, although still under private ownership, ticket prices were kept low to encourage audiences to attend. Amongst the most popular live shows at the Winter Gardens was television's *Black and White Minstrels*. Although now widely perceived as racist, this 1974 show attracted over 125,000 people, but with relatively low-ticket prices and high production costs, even this show lost money.⁹² A cheaper television-linked *New Faces* show in 1975 resulted in a record loss of £31,000. The Tourism Development Officer reported to the Council that every effort had been made to keep production costs to a minimum.⁹³ This decision may have made financial sense, but low-production values gave the impression that a 'third-rate' production was being offered. A survey conducted by Lancaster City Council in September 1975 showed a mostly negative or indifferent response to the show. When asked why they had not attended the show, some commented that they had already seen the acts on television or that it was 'rubbish' or 'for pensioners'.⁹⁴ With shows consistently losing money between 1973 and 1976, the theatre's long-term future was questioned, as these losses had to be covered by Lancaster City Council. In 1977, private owners Trust House Forte announced they were not prepared to spend half a million pounds on essential repairs to the building, and the Winter Gardens were closed later

⁹⁰ The current capacity (ground floor only) is 975. Morecambe Winter Gardens, *Venue* (2022), <<https://www.morecambewintergardens.co.uk/venue/>> [accessed 3 June 2022]. The Lowther Pavilion has a capacity of 450 seating or 900 standing.

⁹¹ Hughes and Allen, p. 132.

⁹² LA, LAU 1/1/2, Lancaster District Council Minutes 1974-75, Minutes 832 and 835.

⁹³ LA, LAU 1/1/3, Lancaster District Council Minutes 1975-76, Minute 630, p. 370.

⁹⁴ LA, MBMO/HE/acc6430, Box 27, Lancaster City Council Questionnaires, September 1975.

that year, with the ballroom demolished in 1982.⁹⁵ The ballroom was replaced by an amusement arcade, which has added little to the visual appeal of Morecambe.

Since the closure, the Friends of the Winter Gardens led a campaign which eventually led to the partial reopening of the building, as additional funds were sought for a complete restoration. Although this was unsuccessful, in 2006, the ownership of the Winter Gardens was transferred to a charitable body. With new leadership, significant restoration work has now been undertaken, and in 2023 a £2.7 million grant was awarded for further capital spending.⁹⁶ The consequences for the resort of losing the Winter Gardens have been severe, and it accelerated the decline of other attractions. The Winter Gardens had been a key central multifunctional complex. For example, in addition to losing a venue for live theatre, it also meant that Morecambe had lost its main conference venue, which helped fill up local accommodation, especially out of season. However, combined with the Eden Project Morecambe, a restored Winter Gardens could be central to the rejuvenation of the resort in the 2020s.

In Morecambe, rather than investing in the Winter Gardens or other remaining theatres, Lancaster City Council backed the 900-seat capacity Superdome (later called the Dome), built opposite the Winter Gardens, which operated from 1980 to 2009. Although promoted as a ‘modern’ venue, articles in *The Stage* were critical of the building and the standard of production. For example, a review in 1983 of the Superdome cabaret show being ‘the hottest thing in town’ was, in fact, a criticism of the greenhouse-like roof making conditions uncomfortable for the artists and performers.⁹⁷ The design of the building also meant that it created a ‘greenhouse’ effect with temperatures of up to forty degrees Celsius in the summer. Also, extra heating was required in the winter as when it was built, the Council decided against the architect’s advice and provided a dome with a single instead of double glazing.⁹⁸ Despite repeated complaints, it took until December 1984 for a new £60,000 roof to be fitted to give

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 296.

⁹⁶ Gayle Rouncivell, *Lancaster Guardian*, *Morecambe Winter Gardens gets £2.7m – its biggest cash award in over 100 years* (2023), < <https://www.lancasterguardian.co.uk/news/people/morecambe-winter-gardens-gets-ps27m-its-biggest-cash-award-in-over-100-years-4071080> > [accessed 20 March 2023]

⁹⁷ ‘Summer 83 Stage Morecambe’, *The Stage*, 11 August 2023, p. 74.

⁹⁸ ‘...and Dome raises heat’, *Morecambe Guardian*, 19 June 1981.

adequate temperature control to events in the Dome.⁹⁹ The failure of Lancaster City Council to effectively use public money in the 1980s and 1990s meant that despite this significant expenditure, very little was left to show for it by the early twenty-first century. The entertainment offered at the Dome was also unlikely to attract new visitors to Morecambe. For example, in 1990, the Charlie Williams Laughter Show was condemned for its dated content of racist and sexist jokes.¹⁰⁰

A relaunch was attempted in 1995 after a management buy-out from Lancaster City Council. A new sound and lighting system was installed, and more events were aimed at younger visitors. That year, two of the biggest bands of the 1990s, Blur and Pulp, appeared at the Dome.¹⁰¹ However, the venue continued to make a loss and was finally closed in 2009 – with high running and repair costs cited as reasons.¹⁰² By the 2010s, Morecambe had become a live entertainment backwater, creating a significant gap in the resort's tourism offer. With the closure of the Dome, Morecambe was left with only one significant live entertainment venue as the old Morecambe Promenade railway station had been redeveloped as 'The Platform' in the mid-1990s. It has proved moderately successful, and by 2016/17, the estimated audiences totalled only 30,000 annually from a range of shows primarily aimed at an older audience.¹⁰³ However, only twenty per cent of the audience was from outside Lancaster District. Unlike the Winter Gardens in the 1950s and 1960s, this venue served a primarily local audience rather than providing a tourist attraction for staying visitors.

The future of live entertainment in Morecambe faced a further threat in 2023. Due to a projected local authority budget deficit, Lancaster City Council threatened the Platform's closure at the end of the 2023 summer season. Due to opposition from the public, however, the proposed date for closure has been put back until 2024. This is to allow other funding options for the venue to be explored.¹⁰⁴ Like other tourism-related

⁹⁹ 'Fitting a new lid on Superdome', *Morecambe Guardian*, 14 December 1981.

¹⁰⁰ 'Summer '90 Morecambe', *The Stage*, 16 August 1990, p. 11.

¹⁰¹ 'Re-launch for Dome', *Lancashire Evening Post*, 31 January 1995.

¹⁰² 'The charmed life of the Morecambe Dome', *Morecambe Visitor*, 18 March 2009.

¹⁰³ Lancaster City Council, *Executive Annual Report 2017/18*

(2018), <[https://committeeadmin.lancaster.gov.uk/documents/s68276/Executiveper cent20Annualper cent20Reportper cent20Cliffordper cent202017-18.pdf](https://committeeadmin.lancaster.gov.uk/documents/s68276/Executiveper%20Annualper%20Reportper%20Cliffordper%202017-18.pdf)> [accessed 16 June 2021].

¹⁰⁴ Debbie Butler, *Lancaster Guardian*, *Morecambe Platform Venue Closure U-Turn After Public Piles On Pressure To Keep It Open* (2023), <<https://www.lancasterguardian.co.uk/news/national/morecambe-platform-venue-closure-u-turn-after-public-piles-on-pressure-to-keep-it-open-4018589>> [accessed 8 February 2023]

local government spending cuts made in Morecambe, this appears to be a rational financial decision. However, losing this venue could undermine the broader plans to regenerate the resort. Closing the Platform in 2023 or 2024 would leave the town without even a medium-sized live entertainment venue until work on the Winter Gardens and Eden Project Morecambe is completed.

Lytham St Annes also saw a significant decline in the provision of large-scale indoor entertainment facilities. The Moorish Pavilion Theatre, with 667 seats on St Annes Pier, was destroyed by fire in 1974 and not replaced.¹⁰⁵ In addition, the Ashton Theatre in St Annes only survived to financial support from Lytham St Annes Council.¹⁰⁶ The 600-seater Ashton continued a precarious existence, with loss-making productions subsidised by Fylde Borough Council until the building was destroyed by fire in 1977.¹⁰⁷ Lytham St Annes also saw a further decline in live entertainment venues during the 1980s. Another fire on St Annes Pier in 1982 destroyed the 850-seat capacity Floral Hall on St Annes Pier, effectively ending its role as a major live entertainment centre. Following years of debate and delay over the future of the Ashton Theatre, the Lowther Pavilion became the last theatre left in Fylde Borough. The local authority decided to renovate this building rather than rebuild the Ashton or invest in St Anne's Pier. As a much smaller venue without the restriction of being a listed building, this could be achieved on a modest budget. Although the redeveloped Lowther Pavilion proved to be a popular local resource during the 1980s and 1990s, the small 450-seat capacity has limited its ability to become a significant tourist attraction.¹⁰⁸ Instead, in the last decade, Lytham St Anne's large-scale live entertainment offer has, instead, come from outdoor events such as the Lytham Festival.

In contrast, Blackpool's entertainment scene was considerably healthier in the 1980s than that of Morecambe and Lytham St Annes. Although the Winter Gardens Pavilion Theatre closed, and the ABC Theatre was converted into a cinema, the Grand

¹⁰⁵ Amounderness.co.uk, *Lytham & St. Annes on the Sea Lancashire - Local History - the 1974 Fire* (2022), <https://amounderness.co.uk/the_1974_fire.html> [accessed 5 June 2022].

¹⁰⁶ LA, MBL/5538, Box 28, Lytham St Annes Corporation Minutes 1971/72, Minute 600/1027.

¹⁰⁷ Amounderness.co.uk, *Ashton Gardens* (2021), <https://amounderness.co.uk/ashton_gardens.html> [accessed 15 May 2021].

¹⁰⁸ Lowther Pavilion, *History of the Lowther Pavilion* (2022), <<https://lowtherpavilion.co.uk/about-lowther-pavilion/the-history-of-the-lowther-pavilion/>> [accessed 1 June 2022].

Theatre successfully reopened in 1981.¹⁰⁹ Walton commented as late as 1998 that 'Blackpool's live entertainment theatres have survived in remarkable strength. The revitalised Grand, in particular, seems to be flourishing. Unlike most resorts, the vexed question of whether the Corporation should intervene to subsidise or take over ailing entertainment has hardly been an issue.'¹¹⁰ However, this situation changed dramatically during the following decade, as Blackpool Council intervened to save the Blackpool Opera House.

Blackpool's relative success compared with Morecambe and Lytham St Annes had been based on the ability of its venues to attract high-profile television comedians and performers from the 1950s onwards. However, by the 1990s, tastes had changed, and older comedians had seen their television series cancelled. As the summer review stated, 'At one time a season... was regarded as the icing on the cake of any career. These days though, it can get in the way of television'. There was 'a decided feeling of déjà vu' as theatre producers had to settle for the same shows appearing yearly. As a result, there was little to attract new visitors to the theatre in Blackpool during the 1990s.¹¹¹ By 1996, *The Stage* noted that few of the major 'stars' of the 1990s wanted to commit to long summer seasons and that variety talent shows were out of favour with television companies. As a result, there was no longer 'continuity of TV exposure', and those appearing in Blackpool tended to be the same as in the 1970s and 1980s. By the twenty-first century, as Hayler notes in his survey of 2004, there was a 'scarcity of quality product' which might be guaranteed to sell all available seats at seaside theatres.

During the first decade of the twenty-first century, the decline in summer show attendances accelerated. The threat of closure of its major venues would lead Blackpool Council to take Blackpool's major entertainment venues into public ownership. In particular, the Winter Gardens complex required an almost complete refurbishment. As John Nickson has noted, no one else could invest and borrow on the scale necessary. Without this intervention, it was unlikely that this venue (and probably the Tower) would have remained in operation.¹¹² Even the once highly profitable Blackpool Tower

¹⁰⁹ 'Summer '80, Blackpool', *The Stage*, 14 August 1980, p. 13.

¹¹⁰ John K. Walton, *Blackpool, Town and City Histories* (Keele: Keele Univ. Press, 1998), p. 153.

¹¹¹ Robin Duke, 'Blackpool Keeps Up the Pier Pressure,' *The Stage*, 22 July 1993, p. 44.

¹¹² John Nickson, *Our Common Good: If the State Provides Less, Who Will Provide More?* (London: Biteback Publishing Ltd, 2017), p. 236.

had run into financial difficulties, with its famous ballroom threatened with partial closure in 2009.¹¹³ As revenues declined, its owners were reluctant to commit the sums needed to maintain its Victorian structure. This led to the switch in ownership and management of most of Blackpool's major venues.¹¹⁴ This significant shift occurred due to the growing reluctance of the private sector to invest in the resort and because Blackpool Council's unitary authority status gave it the capacity to do so.

Declining attendances and mounting costs meant that in 2010 the Tower and Winter Gardens were sold to Blackpool Council for less than £40 million.¹¹⁵ In its final full year of operation (2008/09), its private owner, Leisure Parcs, had made an operating loss of over £9 million, which was made more severe by a growing list of outstanding repairs needed at Blackpool's leading entertainment venues, especially at the Winter Gardens. The infrastructure of the Winter Gardens was neglected for over a decade by Leisure Parcs, meaning that any new owners faced a £20 million repair bill (in fact, considerably more has been spent since 2010). This neglect made the once sought-after Blackpool venues unattractive to new private investors.¹¹⁶ In this decade, as investors waited to see if the central government would give Blackpool's casino-based masterplan permission, Leisure Parcs failed to maintain these critical sites adequately. The price paid by the Council (half the 1998 valuation) reflected the cost of the work needed for these venues to continue operation.

Blackpool's major attractions struggled in the following years, with its older venues needing significant investment. A 2007 article published in *The Stage* was headed 'What now for beaten Blackpool?' and focused on the failure of the casino-based regeneration scheme and the decline of the light entertainment in the resort.¹¹⁷ Against this background, Blackpool Council began to acquire 'key leisure' assets in the resort, such as the Winter Gardens and Blackpool Tower, and bring them under public control. This process has proved costly and controversial, but it has undoubtedly saved Blackpool's largest theatre (the Opera House) and Blackpool Tower from closure and an

¹¹³ Lisa Ettridge, 'Blackpool Tower in Closure U-turn', *Blackpool Gazette*, 27 February 2009.

¹¹⁴ BHC, LM891, Blackpool Council, *Destination Blackpool 2015-2017*, 2015.

¹¹⁵ Shelagh Parkinson, 'Vision for Winter Gardens; Future', *Blackpool Gazette*, 19 January 2010.

¹¹⁶ Companies House, *Leisure Parcs Limited - Filing History* (2020), <<https://find-and-update.company-information.service.gov.uk/company/03127502/filing-history>> [accessed 9 October 2020].

¹¹⁷ Alistair Smith, 'What Now for Beaten Blackpool?' *The Stage*, 1 February 2007, p. 1.

uncertain future.¹¹⁸ Since the transfer of these assets, there has been steady investment in the buildings, with a range of new attractions added. By 2016/17, Blackpool Entertainment Company (established by Blackpool Council to operate the venues) reported a profit of £495,521.¹¹⁹ Combined with increased visitor numbers, it appeared that by the end of the 2010s, there were reasons to believe that the decline of the previous decades had been reversed. Investing in existing tourism infrastructure has created a platform for other regeneration plans and maintained a broad enough range of attractions to enable mass tourism to continue. These investments made by Blackpool Council were not just bailouts; they were part of a strategy aimed at revitalising the broader tourism sector. The later profitability of the Blackpool Entertainment Company demonstrates that these investments can have positive financial returns in addition to their cultural and social benefits.

In Lancashire's other resorts, there have also been indications that the decline in live entertainment may have been reversed. In the mid-2000s, in Lytham St Annes, with the Lowther Pavilion building again requiring repair and modernisation works following a drop in theatre attendances, the use of the Pavilion was again a topic of debate. The debate lasted several years, and with the potential for closure looming, the 'Friends of Lowther Pavilion' was formed in 2008 to campaign and raise funds and help save the theatre and ensure its continued survival. In 2012 the Lowther Gardens (Lytham) Trust was expanded to manage the Pavilion's day-to-day running. Since this time, the use of the building has increased enormously, with the theatre hosting shows by a range of entertainers.¹²⁰ In addition, the large outdoor summer Lytham Festival expanded to a ten-day event in 2022, with high-profile UK and international performers appearing. This is now the centrepiece of the resort's wider summer season of live entertainment.¹²¹

¹¹⁸ Vanessa Toulmin, *Winter Gardens, Blackpool: The Most Magnificent Palace of Amusement in the World* (Huddersfield: Boco Publishing Ltd., 2009), p. 137.

¹¹⁹ Companies House, *Blackpool Entertainment Company Limited - Filing History* (2020), <<https://beta.companieshouse.gov.uk/company/09044792/filing-history>> [accessed 29 September 2020].

¹²⁰ Lowther Pavilion, *History of the Lowther Pavilion* (2022), <<https://lowtherpavilion.co.uk/about-lowther-pavilion/the-history-of-the-lowther-pavilion/>> [accessed 1 June 2022].

¹²¹ Blackpool Gazette, *Spectacular Line-up of Big Events Planned in Lytham for Post-Lockdown Summer* (2022), <<https://www.blackpoolgazette.co.uk/whats-on/things-to-do/summer-in-lytham-2022-spectacular-line-up-of-big-events-with-lytham-festival-1940s-weekend-lytham-hall-outdoor-plays-alfie-boe-and-lytham-club-day-3689835>> [accessed 6 June 2022].

As noted, while Morecambe has yet to match this success, the Eden Project Morecambe includes plans for a new arena. Eden International, the company responsible for the Eden Project in Cornwall (visited by one million people per year), has planned the construction of an arena as part of the new nationally-significant visitor facility in Morecambe.¹²² Tim Narey, the Eden Project North/Morecambe project manager, has said plans for a new 6,000-capacity venue, combined with the Winter Gardens theatre's aim to expand to 2,500 capacity, will put Morecambe 'on the map internationally, let alone nationally' for large-scale concerts.¹²³ This underlines that while the nature of live entertainment may have changed since the 1970s, its importance for attracting visitors and promoting a resort has remained the same.

The decline of live entertainment venues across Lancashire's resorts from the 1970s was typical of other English seaside resorts. However, it also differed across Lancashire due to several interrelated factors. Most of Blackpool's live entertainment venues survived, as most of those in Morecambe and Lytham St Annes were lost. This was primarily because before multi-channel television and digital technologies developed in the 1990s, Blackpool could attract the major light entertainment stars of the BBC and ITV when those channels regularly attained audiences in the tens of millions. As *The Stage* noted, during the 1970s and 1980s, a summer season in Blackpool was the 'icing on the cake' for these entertainers. This enabled Blackpool to survive as an entertainment centre longer than other seaside resorts, which could not attract these major TV stars. Live entertainment remains an integral part of the tourism offer in Blackpool and is a key focus for regeneration. However, with a rapidly changing entertainment scene and wider uncertainties, it remains to be seen whether existing and proposed new venues can have the same level of success as in the past. Given the complexities involved, an approach which involves local communities, historians, architects, and policymakers would be the most effective way to address these issues. Sustainable strategies need to be developed that adapt to changing tastes while preserving historical and cultural heritage.

¹²² 'Lancashire backing for Eden of the North', *Impact News Service*, 23 January 2019.

¹²³ Beyond Radio, *Morecambe Has 'Massive Potential' for Superstar Outdoor Live Music Concerts Says Eden Boss* (2022), <<https://www.beyondradio.co.uk/news/featured-stories/morecambe-has-massive-potential-for-live-music-concerts-by-superstars-says-eden-boss/>> [accessed 6 June 2022].

5.2.4 Fairgrounds and Amusement Parks

The success of amusement parks had been an important element in the growth of Blackpool and Morecambe. Although privately owned, especially in Blackpool, they had benefitted from a strong relationship with the local authority. However, by the late twentieth century, seaside amusement parks had entered a period of severe decline in England. Like other seaside attractions, such as theatres and piers, they faced the twin challenges of changing public tastes and under-investment. As the number of tourists staying in coastal resorts fell during the 1970s and 1980s, so did the number visiting their amusement parks. These parks could not thrive in isolation from the resorts where they were located. Eleanor McGrath argues, 'Seaside resorts found themselves with too much infrastructure, designed decades earlier to support visitor levels that were no longer being achieved. Amusement parks were part of that infrastructure.'¹²⁴ As an essential part of the overall appeal of larger seaside resorts, their continued success or failure has also depended upon the successful implementation of local regeneration plans. Pressures on seaside amusement parks were also compounded by competition from new inland theme parks across the UK. The successful introduction of the Vekoma Corkscrew rollercoaster at Alton Towers in 1980 cemented the idea of the theme park in Britain. Blackpool Pleasure Beach became an exception, as the increasingly extreme (and expensive) thrill rides struggled to take hold in UK seaside resorts.¹²⁵ In Lancashire, Morecambe Pleasure Park (re-branded Frontierland in 1987) closed in 2000, and Southport Pleasureland closed in 2006 before re-opening on a much-reduced scale in 2007. Lytham St Annes had never had a significant amusement park so one could not be lost.

As well as this changing tourist market, Jason Wood argues that rising property prices also account for the decline of seaside amusement parks. The period between 1995 and 2007, when property values escalated, saw park closures increase to several a year. Wood claims that this was a causal factor in the accelerating pace of closures, as the value of the land outweighed the profits the owners were generating. Consequently,

¹²⁴ Eleanor McGrath, 'Implications of a new vision for Dreamland', in *The Amusement Park History, Culture and the Heritage of Pleasure*, ed. by Jason Wood (Abingdon-on-Thames: Routledge, 2017), p. 204.

¹²⁵ Jason Wood, *Amusement Park: History, Culture and the Heritage of Pleasure*. (Abingdon-on-Thames: Routledge, 2018), p. 7.

the parks were sold to housing and retail developers.¹²⁶ However, although this trend in land values may explain the closure of parks elsewhere, it does not account for Blackpool Pleasure Beach's continued success and Morecambe's Frontierland's failure in the mid-1990s. Blackpool Pleasure Beach had the support of its local authority in a way that Morecambe Pleasure Park did not. Even though there was limited demand for new retail in Morecambe, Lancaster City Council placed its hope that retail chains might establish new stores in the resort and provide the necessary investment for regeneration.

The relationship between local government and private enterprise was critical in the differing levels of success between Blackpool and Morecambe in this period. Unlike the other major entertainment venues, Blackpool Pleasure Beach and Morecambe Pleasure Park remained in local, private ownership. Geoffrey Thompson, the grandson of the Park's founder W.G. Bean, became Managing Director in 1976. Just as his father, Leonard, had done in the 1930s, Geoffrey Thompson brought a new impetus and an awareness of current trends in tourism and entertainment to the business. As a result, Morecambe's Frontierland redevelopment, which saw significant investment from the Thompson family, seemed to provide a considerable success story despite a general decline in the resort. The early success of Frontierland had little to do with Lancaster City Council, which focused on supporting its own attractions.¹²⁷ In addition, a deteriorating relationship between the local authority and Thompson would lead to the park's closure in 2000.

Morecambe's Pleasure Park had been a minor attraction in the resort, providing fairground rides alongside the Winter Gardens Fairground. Although the Pleasure Park appeared in holiday guides, there was limited direct promotion of the attraction by the local authority, which focussed instead on its own enterprises.¹²⁸ To increase the profile of the Pleasure Park, in 1980, the owners erected a giant Ferris wheel, costing £300,000. However, Lancaster City Council argued it was a new permanent structure erected without the necessary planning permission. As a result, after a series of rows, it was

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

¹²⁷ Lancaster City Council contributed just £7,500 to a joint advertising campaign during the launch year of 1987. See LA, LAU1/1/14, Lancaster District Council Minutes 1986/87, Minute 315, 11 March 1987, p. 139.

¹²⁸ MLLC, I.D. Douglas, J.H. Glaister, and J.W.D. Price, *Morecambe: A Holiday Resort*, Lancaster Curriculum Development, 1975.

removed in 1982.¹²⁹ As Jarratt notes, this conflict between Thompson and Lancaster City Council planners may have cost Morecambe its new landmark.¹³⁰ Lancaster City Council had been responding to complaints from nearby residents that the wheel had been intrusive and spoilt their view. Unfortunately, this lack of collaboration between the owners of the Pleasure Park and the City Council planners set a pattern that would continue for the next two decades. In comparison, the Thompson family was allowed a relatively free hand in Blackpool as enormous new rides were constructed that would dominate the skyline.

Despite this failure and Blackpool Pleasure Beach remaining central to his operations, in 1987, Geoffrey Thompson inaugurated a transformation of the Morecambe Pleasure Park. Although the Ferris Wheel had not been successful, a significant new investment was planned to re-launch the Park. This was re-themed under the management of his architect daughter Fiona. It became Frontierland, celebrating the American Wild West, and this helped annual visitor numbers grow tenfold in twenty years, from a mere 80,000 in 1970 to 800,000 in 1990. Frontierland provided a contrast of growth as Morecambe's overall holiday economy declined sharply.¹³¹ Frontierland continued to thrive in the early 1990s, with reported visitor numbers increasing to 1.3 million by 1993. Using television advertising, Frontierland was Morecambe's best-known and most successful attraction during this period.¹³² This form of promotion was effective, as a visitor survey demonstrated in 1988 when more than fifty per cent of those visitors aware of some form of advertising for the resort had seen it on television. In the same survey, forty-one per cent of visitors named it a reason they visited Morecambe.¹³³ Frontierland was not to everyone's tastes, especially the recreation of an American West, with Professor Peter Fowler of Newcastle University expressing the following forthright view:

¹²⁹ Bingham, p. 304.

¹³⁰ Jarratt, p. 280.

¹³¹ John K Walton, *Riding on Rainbows: Blackpool Pleasure Beach and Its Place in British Popular Culture* (St Albans: Skelter Publ., 2007), p. 108.

¹³² LUL, Lancashire County Council, *A Tourism Strategy for Lancashire*, 1995, p. 56.. Using North West Tourist Board Data, Frontierland was listed as the second most popular tourist attraction in Lancashire, second only to Blackpool Pleasure Beach with 6.75 million visitors in 1993. In contrast, Morecambe's only other listed attraction, Bubbles Leisure Park, had just 67,000 visitors.

¹³³ MLLC, Morecambe – the Renaissance of a Resort, Tourism Report, Lancaster City Council 1988, p. 12.

Personally, I found 'Frontierland' pathetic and – my strongest take-away image – deeply offensive in its casual, inaccurate and ignorant portrayal of Indigenous North American peoples. Perhaps the offence was unintentional, neither knowingly racist nor deliberately demeaning of what in popular perception are, after all, mere 'Indians'. Yet the whole is boorish, an unacceptable and insensitive treatment of complex, deeply historical cultures whose integrity Western Whites are only now coming to appreciate. Furthermore, just beneath the surface of 'Frontierland's' glib tableaux are profound and delicate issues of the present day, and not just in the USA.¹³⁴

Fowler admitted that 'by certain criteria', it was a success, being the top attraction opening since 1985 according to the English Tourist Board.¹³⁵ Geoffrey Thompson relaunched the Morecambe Pleasure Park to combat the threat of the new inland theme parks. This was to counter an increasingly negative view of traditional seaside amusement parks, summed up by Fowler. When commenting on the recent redevelopment of Morecambe's Pleasure Park, he argued that it had given a 'bit of life to what would otherwise be just another of the sad and so often bedraggled fun fairs which litter English seaside resorts.'¹³⁶ When other attractions failed, this represented a significant opportunity for Morecambe as a tourist destination.

Despite the early success of Frontierland, when strategy consultancy Ventures was asked by Lancaster City Council in 1992 to examine Morecambe's central promenade area for potential new visitor attractions, they raised significant concerns about the theme park's future. They argued that Frontierland could not compete with larger theme parks such as Alton Towers or Blackpool Pleasure Beach. Their view was that even if the estimated visitor numbers were correct, the overall profitability was marginal due to running costs.¹³⁷ Like Blackpool Pleasure Beach, the Frontierland would require further investment to maintain these numbers. However, this was not forthcoming, and the final major attraction added to Frontierland came in 1995 when a giant 'space tower' was erected, moved from Blackpool Pleasure Beach. This movement of attractions between the Thompson parks had been a regular feature during their

¹³⁴ Peter Fowler, *The Past in Contemporary Society: Then, Now* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 133.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 134.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

¹³⁷ MLLC, Local Collection, Morecambe Central Promenade Area Study May 1992 Ventures Consultancy Hampshire, p. 38.

period of common ownership.¹³⁸ At the launch of the new tower, owner Geoffrey Thompson made a scathing attack on Lancaster City Council. He stated, 'I'm bitterly disappointed with the lack of support from the council for the Polo (Space) Tower. Once again, we've had to get on with it and pay for everything ourselves. It seems to me that because we've been here for a while, they just think "old moneybags Thompson" will just put his hand in his pocket again.'¹³⁹ This significant intervention indicated the deteriorating relationship between Thompson and the local authority.

Looking to regenerate Morecambe's tourist industry, in 1994, Lancaster City Council funded the relaunch of Happy Mount Park as a new theme park rather than promoting its existing one, Frontierland. Happy Mount Park was Morecambe's largest municipally owned park, and from 1949 until 1996, the Park was the centrepiece of the Morecambe Illuminations.¹⁴⁰ This development was themed on the BBC TV programme Noel's House Party and its pink mascot Mr Blobby. Unlike the Morecambe Pleasure Park relaunch, it was a total failure. Thompson complained that Frontierland had received no similar local authority support. He stated that 'when Noel Edmonds turned up with his Crinkley Bottom idea, he got the red-carpet treatment, and they funded the Blobby thing to the tune of £70,000'.¹⁴¹ Thompson also criticised a lack of support from the Council for a proposed new theatre in the resort. It does indeed seem surprising that Lancaster City Council would seek to launch a rival theme park to Frontierland (the most popular attraction in the resort) without including Thompson in the discussions. Therefore, as Jarratt argues, 'while one is not privy to all of the information relevant to the decision to pull out of Morecambe, it seems that Thompson and the council did not have a good working relationship, and this contributed to problems facing the attraction.'¹⁴² The consequences of this would have several long-term negative implications for the resort.

In contrast, the relationship between Edmonds and Lancaster City Council had initially been much more positive. In August 1993, Edmonds had switched on the Morecambe Illuminations at the height of Mr Blobby Mania and the success of Noel's House Party. Edmond's company, Unique, operated three parks under the Crinkley

¹³⁸ Glen Cooper, 'Curtains for New Tower', *Morecambe Visitor*, 1 March 1995.

¹³⁹ Greg Morgan, 'Blistering Attack on Tourism Chiefs', *Morecambe Citizen*, 17 March 1995, p. 4.

¹⁴⁰ Bingham, p. 173.

¹⁴¹ Greg Morgan, 'Blistering Attack on Tourism Chiefs', *Morecambe Citizen*, 17 March 1995, p. 4.

¹⁴² Jarratt, p. 280.

Bottom name in England between 1994 and 1998. Happy Mount Park in Morecambe was chosen as the second location in 1994 for a park following discussions between Edmonds and Lancaster City Council. Projections showed a break-even attendance figure of around 300,000 paying visitors per year. In the end, 81,377 paying visitors attended the Theme Park, a figure well below expectations despite widespread publicity in the media. However, while all three parks failed, Morecambe's was the shortest-lived. At a full council meeting on 28 November 1994, and after a lengthy debate, councillors voted 36-12 to close the theme park.¹⁴³ As a result, after just five months of operation, from July to November 1994, Lancaster City Council closed the park after losing over £1 million.¹⁴⁴

Lancaster City Council blamed Unique Group Limited and Edmonds for the disaster, claiming that Edmonds had failed to drum up visitors to the park by not making enough public appearances with Mr Blobby. This led to the Council suing Edmonds for negligence and misrepresentation. It was not until 2003 that a report into the scheme from Clive Portman, the District Auditor, clarified the issue. He found that Lancaster City Council had been 'imprudent, irrational and unlawful' in its dealings with Unique and Edmonds.¹⁴⁵ Despite the significant public spending commitments, a final deal with Noel Edmond's Unique Group had been signed only weeks before the park was due to open, with the council negotiating a second contract to make Unique a one-off payment of nearly £1 million in return for all future profits.¹⁴⁶ 'Blobbygate' has had a decades-long effect on local government in Morecambe and Lancaster, with BBC Radio 4 running a short documentary on the issue as recently as January 2022.¹⁴⁷ Local authority leaders genuinely hoped that this project could kick-start the regeneration of Morecambe. However, it proved an expensive, rushed, and ill-conceived project without recognising

¹⁴³ Lancaster City Council, Council Minutes 1994 (1994), <committeedamin.lancaster.gov.uk/Data/Council/19941128/Minutes/Minutes.txt> [accessed 19 February 2019]

¹⁴⁴ Jain Dunn, 'Ratepayers won't pay for Blobby fiasco', *Lancashire Evening Post*, 9 December 1994.

¹⁴⁵ Dominic Moffitt, *Blobbygate: The Story of Morecambe's Crinkley Bottom Theme Park Fiasco* (2022) <<https://www.lancs.live/news/lancashire-news/blobbygate-story-morecambes-crinkley-bottom-19669180>> [accessed 24 July 2022].

¹⁴⁶ Jane Kirby, 'Council Told Never to Repeat Blobby Blunder', Press Association, 15 January 2004.

¹⁴⁷ BBC Radio 4, *The Political Butterfly Effect, Did Mr Blobby Upend Local Politics in Lancashire?* (2022), <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m0012scy>> [accessed 24 July 2022].

the importance of longer-term strategic planning. It also meant a shadow of doubt was cast on future local authority-led regeneration projects in the resort.

'Blobbygate' worsened an increasingly poor relationship between Thompson and Lancaster City Council. As a result, by 1998, he threatened to pull out of Morecambe.¹⁴⁸ His investment was switched to Blackpool and Southport, with no new rides or attractions at Morecambe following the 1995 construction of the Polo Tower. Combined with the negative publicity surrounding the resort, visitor numbers had collapsed at Frontierland, with only 255,000 visitors attending in 1998, compared to 6.6 million at Blackpool Pleasure Beach.¹⁴⁹ To deal with the growing losses at Frontierland, by 1999, the owners were talking about 'right-sizing' the theme park. Rick Zeckman, the group operations director (who also managed Blackpool Pleasure Beach and Pleasureland in Southport), argued that 'It (Frontierland) operated for a number of years under the premise of Morecambe being a substantial seaside destination, but we have seen a decline in tourism, and we are taking steps to right-size the product for the number of people visiting the town.'¹⁵⁰ Poor decision-making accelerated a circle of decline, where fewer visitors led to fewer attractions in Morecambe. The loss of Frontierland in 2000 was the culmination of this trend.

In contrast to the situation in Morecambe, Blackpool Council maintained a positive relationship with the Thompson family despite occasional tensions. The relationship between the public and private sectors became essential due to the growth and popularity of new major inland parks such as Alton Towers and Thorpe Park.¹⁵¹ These provided competition for traditional seaside parks and were usually located close to large population centres and the motorway network. In addition, these new parks were often perceived as more exciting and modern than their traditional seaside counterparts. As Wood argues, Blackpool was the exception, as the increasingly extreme thrill rides struggled to take hold in UK seaside resorts. Instead, they would become

¹⁴⁸ Craig Jackson and Philip Cardy, 'Invest, or we will pull out', *Lancashire Evening Post*, 29 May 1998.

¹⁴⁹ Gale, *1998 Top 10 Amusement/Theme Park Chains Worldwide* (2022), <<https://go.gale.com/ps/i.do?p=ITOF&u=unilanc&id=GALE|A53507458&v=2.1&it=r>> [accessed 4 July 2022].

¹⁵⁰ Sarah Kay, 'The Final Frontier?', *Lancashire Evening Post*, 2 November 1999.

¹⁵¹ Alton Towers had 2.13 million visitors and Thorpe Park had 1.9 million visitors in 2019. Statista, *Amusement and Theme Park Attendance in UK 2020* (2020), <<https://www.statista.com/statistics/632696/attendance-at-theme-and-amusement-parks-in-united-kingdom-uk/>> [accessed 21 July 2022].

intrinsically associated with those inland parks and gardens built upon the Alton Towers model.¹⁵² Blackpool Pleasure Beach continued to invest heavily in new rides and attractions even during the downturn in visitor numbers in the early twenty-first century. It remained a 'national and international phenomenon' in Walton's words.¹⁵³ As noted previously, Blackpool Pleasure Beach had, by the 1970s, become the United Kingdom's leading amusement park.

During this period, Blackpool Pleasure Beach was trying to consolidate for further growth in an increasingly competitive environment as new theme parks proliferated away from the coast in the 1980s. In 1988, when the British bobsleigh team competed in the Winter Olympics, a dazzling new ride, the 'Avalanche', opened and carried over one million passengers during the first year.¹⁵⁴ The ride opened at a perfect time, as the successful Calgary Winter Olympic Games occurred in the same year. The surrounding publicity helped launch the 'Avalanche' and was measurable in the Pleasure Beach's takings: its turnover increased by twenty-seven per cent to £22 million between 1987 and 1988, and attendance reached 6.5 million annually.¹⁵⁵ In addition to investment in infrastructure, new marketing strategies were developed with a joint advertising scheme with First Leisure (the other dominant Blackpool entertainment corporation) and Blackpool Council beginning in 1989, each contributing £200,000 to promote the resort.¹⁵⁶ As a result, despite the recession of the early 1990s, visitor numbers at Blackpool Pleasure Beach continued to rise to 6.7 million by 1993.¹⁵⁷ Despite the cost of new rides, it enabled the Pleasure Beach to compete with new inland theme parks, such as Alton Towers.

Blackpool Pleasure Beach continued to attract between six and seven million visitors a year during the 1990s, with Thompson increasingly concentrating on the most

¹⁵² Wood, p. 7.

¹⁵³ John K Walton, *Riding on Rainbows*, p. 155.

¹⁵⁴ Issuu, *Blackpool Destination Guide 2021* (2021), <https://issuu.com/visitblackpool/docs/blackpool_destination_guide_2021> [accessed 22 January 2021], p.46.

¹⁵⁵ John K Walton, *Riding on Rainbows*, p. 110.

¹⁵⁶ BHC, LE02, Blackpool Borough Council Minutes 1989, Tourism and Leisure Committee, 1 November 1989, p. 604.

¹⁵⁷ John K Walton, *Riding on Rainbows*, p. 112.

successful operation in a competitive market.¹⁵⁸ Developing new ‘thrill’ rides to attract visitors to Frontierland would have been expensive, as demonstrated by the £12 million cost of the ‘Big One’ rollercoaster at Blackpool Pleasure Beach.¹⁵⁹ However, with the numbers staying in Blackpool in steep decline in the late 1990s, Pleasure Beach visitors did begin to fall from 1997, and by 2006, Pleasure Beach made over twenty per cent of its workers redundant.¹⁶⁰ Despite these challenges, Blackpool Pleasure Beach, now under the management of Geoffrey Thompson’s daughter Amanda, again invested £8 million being spent in 2007 on ‘Infusion’, the world’s first rollercoaster suspended entirely over water.¹⁶¹ Although this investment was welcomed, without the wider revival in Blackpool’s fortunes in the 2010s, led by Blackpool Council, the future of the Pleasure Beach would have been highly uncertain.

Instead, with visitor numbers increasing with the success of Blackpool’s other attractions, Pleasure Beach was able to invest in new rides and hotels during the 2010s.¹⁶² As a result, the Pleasure Beach has returned profits even in years when there have been disappointing summer temperatures and higher-than-average rainfall. For example, in 2015/16, the Pleasure Beach enjoyed a second year of profit despite a year of poor weather and a reaction to a high-profile accident at another UK theme park (Alton Towers). Pleasure Beach Holdings made an £800,000 profit on a turnover of £32.3 million. Increased hotel booking numbers offset a slight fall in attendances (five per cent).¹⁶³ To increase the profitability of the Pleasure Beach, its status as a ‘free’ attraction was ended in 2009. Since free entry ended that year, the standard adult admission price has increased from £15 in 2009 to £46 in 2022.¹⁶⁴ Despite a petition that

¹⁵⁸ Visit Britain, *UK Tourism Facts 2000 (2022)* <https://www.visitbritain.org/sites/default/files/vb-corporate/Documents-Library/documents/England-documents/uk_tourism_facts_2000.pdf> [accessed 3 July 2022].

¹⁵⁹ Coaster-Net, *The Big One at Blackpool Pleasure Beach (2022)*, *COASTER-Net* <<https://www.coaster-net.com/the-big-one-at-blackpool-pleasure-beach.htMlLlC>> [accessed 24 July 2022].

¹⁶⁰ John K Walton, *Riding on Rainbows*, p. 115.

¹⁶¹ Issuu, *Blackpool Destination Guide 2021 (2021)*. <https://issuu.com/visitblackpool/docs/blackpool_destination_guide_2021> [accessed 22 January 2021], p.47.

¹⁶² *Ibid.* p.47.

¹⁶³ ‘Blackpool Pleasure Beach Stays in Black Despite Poor Weather’, *Blackpool Gazette*, 5 January 2017, p. 3.

¹⁶⁴ Blackpool Pleasure Beach, *Dated Visit (2022)*, <<https://bookings.blackpoolpleasurebeach.com/wristband/select-date>> [accessed 24 July 2022]. Although early booking discounts are available, this increase is significantly above general price inflation.

gathered 20,000 signatures being handed to the company directors to stop the charge, the change brought Blackpool Pleasure Beach into line with most other UK theme parks.¹⁶⁵ The result has been that although visitor numbers have fallen, spending per person has significantly increased. This has also made comparing visitor numbers pre- and post-2009 problematic, as a pre-2009 visitor might have walked through the Pleasure Beach and spent no money. This could be seen as a negative for the resort as a whole, as Pleasure Beach visitors might be less likely to spend money elsewhere in Blackpool. However, in 2015, Blackpool Council, in partnership with the Pleasure Beach, launched a resort pass which allows visitors access to all of Blackpool's major attractions.¹⁶⁶ As with the earlier joint-advertising campaign, this demonstrates the importance of the strong relationship between local government and private enterprises in the resort. Although there have been conflicts with the owners of other attractions – particularly South Pier since it introduced its funfair – this cooperation has allowed Blackpool's attractions to survive and develop into the twenty-first century. This starkly contrasts with how Morecambe's attractions fell one by one.

By the turn of the twenty-first century, the amusement park era had ended in Morecambe. Most of the Frontierland site, situated on the seafront, has remained derelict until the present day. Although this is in keeping with the general trend of decline across most UK resorts, it was undoubtedly hastened by the lack of collaboration and cooperation between the owners of Frontierland and Lancaster City Council. Instead of building this relationship, the City Council pursued the ill-considered Happy Mount Park project, which left a damaging legacy for the resort. The undoubted legacy of 'Blobbygate' was that confidence in the ability of local government to manage successful tourism projects in Morecambe was seriously undermined. The consequences of failed relationships and investments have continued to ripple for years, affecting jobs, local economies, and public sentiment in the resort. In Morecambe, it meant there was no prospect of a significant permanent themed attraction being established at the resort until the Eden Project North (Morecambe) Proposal was announced in 2018. In Blackpool, local ownership cooperating with the local authority, significant regular

¹⁶⁵ Julia Bennett, 'Petition presented to Blackpool Pleasure Beach', *Blackpool Gazette*, 13 February 2009, p. 2.

¹⁶⁶ Visit Blackpool, *FAQS* (2022), <<https://www.visitblackpool.com/resort-pass/faqs/>> [accessed 24 July 2022]. NB. The resort pass was suspended by Blackpool Council during the Covid-19 pandemic.

investment in new attractions and a willingness to adapt its business model have enabled the survival of the seaside amusement park. As a result, the Pleasure Beach remains a vital part of Blackpool's tourism offer into the third decade of the twenty-first century. The lesson from this successful relationship is that collaboration and understanding between private enterprises and local government is vital in developing successful tourist attractions.

5.2.5 Accommodation since 1974

With fewer attractions and staying visitors, Blackpool, Morecambe and Lytham St Annes had a surplus of holiday accommodation by the 1980s. The restructuring of tourist accommodation has subsequently been one of the most acute problems for Lancashire's resort authorities. As with the other areas of tourism infrastructure discussed, changing public expectations and under-investment in buildings were the most significant issues. Changing holiday patterns related to a shift from rail to road transport had been evident since the early 1960s, with an increase in day visitors and short breaks at the expense of longer stay holidays. By the early 1980s, overnight visitors had fallen from twenty-seven million in 1978 to twenty-three million in 1981 (a fifteen per cent fall).¹⁶⁷ Although day visitors increased in some resorts, such as Blackpool, the average spend per visitor fell, and the requirement for bed spaces declined.¹⁶⁸ With falling revenues, many seaside hotels were not modernised sufficiently to meet the expectations of late twentieth-century visitors. As Walton noted in *The Blackpool Landlady*, by 1978, there was an alienation from the restrictions of the boarding-house system among a new generation of holidaymakers. At that time, there were still hotels with only two bathrooms (including WCs) for forty visitors, and at least one establishment had no bathroom facilities.¹⁶⁹ Pat Mancini, the owner of the 110-bedroom Queens Hotel on Blackpool

¹⁶⁷ English Tourist Board, *Tourism Fact Sheets: North West 1981*, (London: English Tourist Board, 1981).

¹⁶⁸ For example, a 2013 survey of Morecambe visitors found that an average day visitor spent £33 per compared to £107 per day for a staying visitor (the average cost of accommodation was £57, and the average spend on other goods and services was £50 per day). Morecambe Bay Wildlife Network, *Morecambe Visitor Survey – Visitor Attitudes and Aspirations around Morecambe Bay* (Lancaster: Morecambe Bay Wildlife Network, 2013), p. 3.

¹⁶⁹ John K Walton, *The Blackpool Landlady: A Social History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1978) p. 76.

Promenade, who had owned a range of establishments since the 1960s, made this point writing thirty years later:

It has changed so much over the years. In our early days, we were catering for people who lived in a pretty basic two-up, two-down terraced house with no central heating and the toilet down the yard, just like the one I was brought up in, so even a small boarding house seemed glamorous to them. Even if there were fourteen bedrooms and only four toilets, it still seemed like a step up in the world. In some places, we had family rooms with up to eight people sharing one sink, and no one ever complained. But there has been a drastic improvement in people's living conditions. At home, they have their bathrooms en suite and their central heating and all the mod cons of today, so even though hotels have raised their standards enormously, it is hard to provide the same sort of contrast.¹⁷⁰

Over several decades, the seaside hotel became something to be mocked, epitomised by the 1970s BBC TV series *Fawlty Towers* with its Torquay location.¹⁷¹ Only a minority of owners could afford the necessary investment to meet rising expectations, and falling visitor numbers led to increased business failures. This cycle of decline became a typical pattern across Lancashire's and English resorts. However, the scale and pace of decline and the response to these changes varied across resorts. As seen in the previous sections, the challenges seaside resorts have faced can be compounded by a weak response from local government. Despite the evidence of a growing problem, local authorities only undertook significant intervention when the situation reached a crisis point in the late 1990s. The lack of action came despite early warnings of decline since the 1970s. In her study of Scarborough in the late 1970s, Chloe Stallibrass pointed to the importance of the local authority regarding investment decisions in the holiday accommodation industry and the overriding importance of the physical environment. Stallibrass also called for civic pride of nineteenth-century proportions and a desire to make resorts special and beautiful places.¹⁷² However, this pride was largely absent following local government restructuring in 1974. Clegg and Essex argue that by the end of the twentieth century, 'British resorts had become complacent to visitors' needs,

¹⁷⁰ Pat Mancini, *Queen of Blackpool* (Clifton-upon-Teme: Polperro Heritage Press, 2008), p. 109.

¹⁷¹ BBC Two, *Fawlty Towers, Series 2, Communication Problems* (2022), <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p00f4gpl>> [accessed 22 August 2022].

¹⁷² Chloe Stallibrass, 'Seaside Resorts and the Holiday Accommodation Industry: A Case Study of Scarborough', *Progress in Planning*, 13.2 (1980), 103–74 (pp. 157–8).

manifest in poor standards of accommodation, lack of investment in attractions and a lack of strategic thinking by both the public and private sector.¹⁷³

Although Morecambe had a smaller range of accommodation than Blackpool, the reduction in staying visitor numbers occurred in Morecambe much more rapidly from the 1970s, with no offset from increased day visitors. With little demand for former holiday accommodation and national housing shortages, by the turn of the century, many former holiday properties had become HMOs, creating zones of marked social deprivation. In Lytham St Annes, private developers were willing to acquire holiday accommodation for conversion to rest homes or private residences. For much of the period since 1974, local authorities in Lancashire were highly reactive to these trends, and the closure of key attractions probably accelerated them. During the twenty-first century, however, these authorities recognised the importance of a sufficient quantity and quality of holiday accommodation as an essential component of resort regeneration.

Although visitor numbers and accommodation provision declined rapidly in Morecambe and later in Blackpool, the loss of hotels and other holiday accommodation was less evident in Lytham St Annes. The most significant loss occurred in 1976 as St Anne's largest hotel, the Majestic (formerly the Imperial Hydro), was closed and demolished to be replaced by luxury retirement flats. Over the next two decades, other large hotels on the promenade, such as the Grove, the Selwyn, and the Melrose, were similarly converted.¹⁷⁴ Despite these losses, the Council produced holiday guides for Lytham St Annes in this period, indicating that the number of holiday establishments advertised in the resort did not fall at the same rate as in Blackpool and Morecambe. This stability may have been due to the well-organised hotel-owners association, which could, at least partly, resist the trend of hotel conversion. In addition, several larger hotels, such as the Grand Hotel (owned by the Webb family), remained in long-term local ownership. However, there was a decline in the provision of smaller establishments in Lytham St Annes during this period as owners converted them into retirement homes or private residences. In the 1985 Holiday Brochure, forty-four hotels and guest houses

¹⁷³ Andrew Clegg and Stephen Essex, 'Restructuring in Tourism: The Accommodation Sector in a Major British Coastal Resort.', *International Journal of Tourism Research*, 2.2, (2010), 77-95 (p. 78).

¹⁷⁴ Amounderness.co.uk, *Lytham & St. Annes on the Sea Lancashire, Local History, Hotels* (2022), <<https://amounderness.co.uk/hotels.htm>> [accessed 16 August 2022].

were listed; by 2000, this number was thirty-eight. However, the number of self-catering flats advertised fell from sixty-four to twenty-three during the same period.¹⁷⁵ A lack of high-speed rail and delays to the proposed M55 link road did not prevent Lytham St Annes from being an attractive location for new development.¹⁷⁶ In contrast to Morecambe and Blackpool, Lytham St Annes' former holiday accommodation was quickly demolished or converted for more profitable uses. Although fewer rooms were available for tourists, Lytham St Annes avoided the severe social problems that developed in Morecambe and Blackpool. In addition, the number of 'boutique-style' hotels has increased in the last decade. For example, in 2020, the Lytham Ly Hotel (previously the Ashton Park Hotel) saw an investment of £4 million to create thirty-five five-star apartment-style rooms.¹⁷⁷ Fylde Borough Council has been keen to encourage the development of this type of quality accommodation as it is crucial in attracting and retaining tourists and promoting the resort's brand image.

By 2009, although there had been a further decline in bed spaces in serviced accommodation, significant growth of holiday and caravan park accommodation (which had increased by over five thousand bed spaces since 1993) had increased the overall number of bed spaces to over eleven thousand. These figures were produced for a Fylde Coast Accommodation Study commissioned by Blackpool, Fylde, and Wyre Councils. This report noted that, unlike in Blackpool, staying visitors had increased in the Fylde, with no excess of provision. Instead, the report argued that the existing provision should be protected from conversion to residential use through planning and site licensing powers.¹⁷⁸ Just as oversupply is a problem in some resorts, ensuring sufficient quality holiday accommodation is crucial as staying visitors who stay in holiday accommodation typically spend more than day visitors.

Of Lancashire's resorts, Morecambe and Heysham experienced the most rapid collapse of staying visitors from the 1970s. Between 1973 and 1987, surveys showed that around half of Morecambe's bed spaces were lost, with a loss of attractions and

¹⁷⁵ StAL, Local Collection, Lytham St Annes Holiday Brochures 1985-2000 (various).

¹⁷⁶ Mark Menzies MP, *M55 Link Road (The Moss Road)* (2020), <<https://www.markmenzies.org.uk/campaigns/m55-link-road-moss-road>> [accessed 1 May 2020].

¹⁷⁷ 'New Mode of Hotel to bring 10 jobs to Lytham', *Lytham St Annes Express*, 28 November 2018.

¹⁷⁸ Humberts Leisure, *Visitor Accommodation Study - Fylde Coast Sub Region* (2009), <<https://www.blackpool.gov.uk/Residents/Planning-environment-and-community/Documents/HLL-Fylde-Coast-Accommodation-Study---Revised-Final-Report.pdf>> [accessed 8 January 2022].

continued negative publicity. By 1987, Morecambe and Heysham had sufficient bed spaces to accommodate only 20,000 visitors, compared to 150,000 in Blackpool. Lancaster City Council’s 1987 survey evidenced a significant reduction in the resort’s serviced and self-catering accommodation since 1973. These losses were concentrated in small guest houses and hotels in the West End and, to a lesser extent, in the Central area (see Table 5.1).

	Serviced			Self-Catering		
	1973	1987	Change%	1973	1987	Change%
Establishments	640	267	-58	310	180	-42
Rooms/Units	5560	3146	-43	1140	680	-40
Bed spaces	12340	7115	-42	4280	2635	-38

Table 5.1: Change in serviced and self-catering accommodation, Morecambe Heysham 1973 and 1987.¹⁷⁹

Lancaster City Council holiday accommodation guides from 1974 onwards showed a steady decline in the numbers of places advertising. The number of advertisers fell from a peak of 415 in 1968, following a steady increase in the 1960s.¹⁸⁰ By 1991 the number had dropped to 173, and by 2002 only 43 were advertising in the Morecambe area.¹⁸¹ Although the guide did not cover all available accommodation, it indicated a significant contraction. It also meant that when special events were held in the town, there would now be a shortage of bed spaces for the visitors. This became evident in the 2010s with the launch of the annual Vintage by the Sea Festival, where forty-eight per cent of the audience was from outside Lancaster District, resulting in accommodation shortages.¹⁸² These guides have strengths and limitations in providing a comprehensive and representative picture of the holiday accommodation available in Morecambe and Heysham. The 1973 guide asserted that the Corporation takes care of

¹⁷⁹ MLC, ‘Morecambe – The Renaissance of a Resort’ Tourism Report, p. 18.

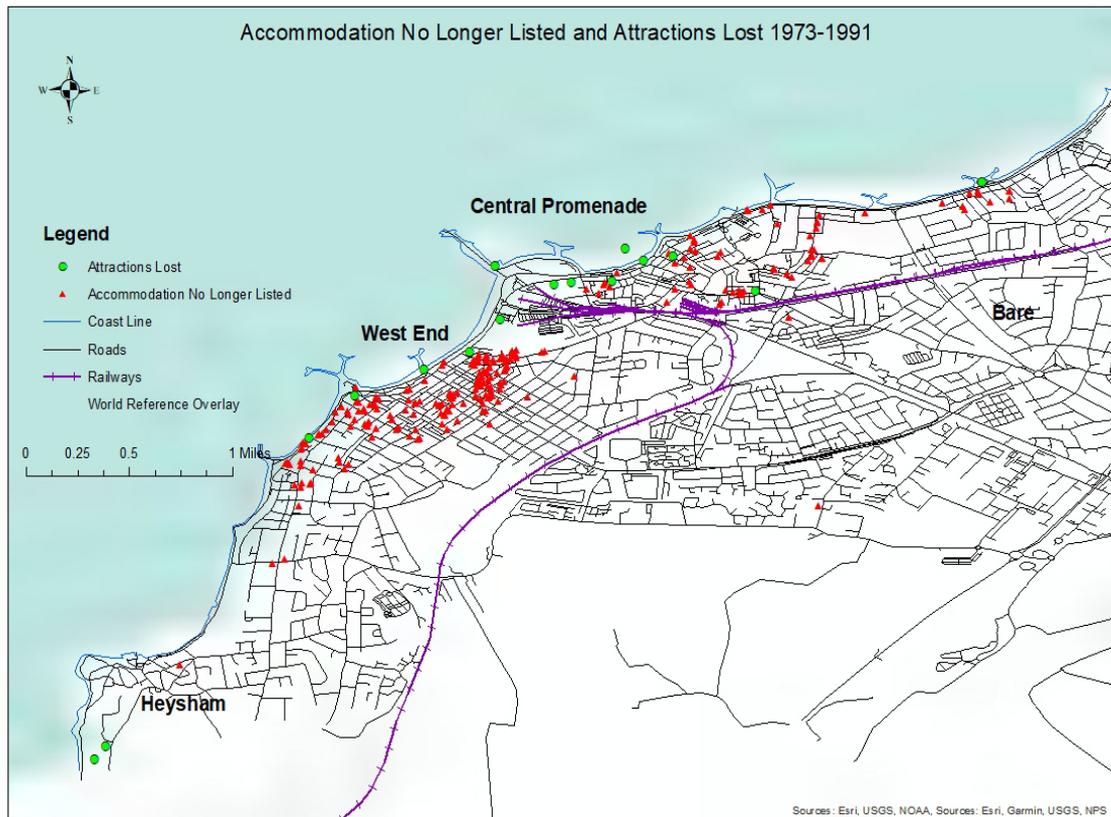
¹⁸⁰ Paul Michael Nelson, ‘A Paradox of Prosperity?’: Morecambe in the Post-War Era (unpublished master’s dissertation, Lancaster University, 2004), p. 63.

¹⁸¹ MLLC, Holiday Guides, Morecambe Holiday Accommodation Guides 1991 and 2002.

¹⁸² Councillor Darren Clifford, *Lancaster City Council, Executive Annual Report 2017/18* (2018), <[https://committeeadmin.lancaster.gov.uk/documents/s68276/Executiveper cent20Annualper cent20Reportper cent20Cliffordper cent202017-18.pdf](https://committeeadmin.lancaster.gov.uk/documents/s68276/Executiveper%20Annualper%20Reportper%20Cliffordper%202017-18.pdf)> [accessed 18 August 2022].

selecting advertisements, indicating that some accommodation was not included.¹⁸³ The census returns for 1971 give the total number of hotels and boarding houses in Morecambe and Heysham as 215, significantly lower than the 403 listed in the guide that year.¹⁸⁴ These numbers show the volatility of the market and the difficulty of accurately measuring change over time.

Map. 5.1 – Morecambe Accommodation and Attractions lost 1973-1991.¹⁸⁵



Map 5.1 shows the loss of attractions and accommodation in Morecambe and Heysham between the early 1970s and 1990s, as listed in the local authority holiday guide. This emphasises that holiday accommodation in the West End, located away from the promenade, had been hardest hit by the closure and conversion. With the fall in attractions and changing market trends, fewer families were visiting the resort, indicating that many of those continuing to stay in Morecambe were older visitors. These appear to have preferred the quieter east Morecambe coastal hotels over those

¹⁸³ MLLC, *Holiday Guides, Morecambe and Heysham 1973*, p. 141.

¹⁸⁴ Nelson, p. 65.

¹⁸⁵ Authors own map, based on MLC, *Morecambe Holiday Guides from 1973 and 1991*.

in the traditionally family-orientated West End. This trend underlined the findings of Lancaster City Council in 1988, which stated that Morecambe was no longer a family resort and that occupancy figures for holiday accommodation (only around fifty-six per cent on average) did not noticeably improve during school holidays.¹⁸⁶ As properties (especially those in the West End) previously occupied by holidaymakers were converted into flats for those reliant on state benefits, this has had a domino effect as these streets were no longer attractive to many visitors.

As well as losing smaller establishments, Morecambe's larger hotels also struggled for custom. The most iconic hotel in the Morecambe was the Art Deco Midland, rebuilt in the 1930s. With an increasingly 'cheap and cheerful' approach, epitomised by 1990s owner Les Whittingham, it gradually fell into a state of disrepair, and The Midland was forced to close its doors in 1999. During his ownership period, Whittingham frequently clashed with Lancaster City Council, as his ideas for 'improving' the hotel paid little regard to the Midland's listed status.¹⁸⁷ By 2006 the Manchester-based property developer Urban Splash finally commenced restoring and refurbishing the building. The Midland reopened its doors in 2008 with Urban Splash and Lancaster City Council, hoping this would generate further redevelopment. However, as noted in chapter three, these plans were never implemented.¹⁸⁸ The withdrawal of Urban Splash from Morecambe was another example of the local authority's failure to build long-term partnerships with the private sector.

As elsewhere in Lancashire, some hotels were converted into care homes. In 1987 Social Services divisional director Tom Donnelly blamed access to public funds for spreading private homes in coastal resorts like Morecambe. He said, 'What we are seeing is an explosion of this type of home which I think is predictable and carries mixed blessings with it.'¹⁸⁹ Other properties were occupied by those claiming state benefits. By 1994 a clampdown by Lancaster City Council was deemed necessary as social security claimants had replaced holidaymakers in more than ten per cent of the two hundred hotels in the resort. Planning permission would be needed in the future from building

¹⁸⁶ MLLC, *Morecambe – The Renaissance of a Resort*, p. 20.

¹⁸⁷ Barry Guise and Pam Brook, *The Midland Hotel: Morecambe's White Hope*, 2nd ed (Lancaster: Palatine Books, 2008), p. 173.

¹⁸⁸ Jarratt, p. 281.

¹⁸⁹ Jo Biddle, 'Dismay at Hotel's Alternative Plan', *Morecambe Guardian*, 21 August 1986.

owners to stop the growth of the 'dole on sea' tenant.¹⁹⁰ Thus a spiral of decline set in. An over-supply of cheap accommodation meant that the urban North no longer sent its holidaymakers but its long-term unemployed to the 'Costa del Dole'.¹⁹¹ Despite various regeneration attempts to address these problems since the 1990s, the West End of Morecambe continues to have significant socio-economic deprivation, which cannot be uncoupled from tourism promotion. As Jarratt argues, these social problems impact the visitor experience, media coverage and place image.¹⁹² As well as the impact on residents of Morecambe, this social deprivation has made the resort less attractive to tourists, as visitors perceive these areas as unsafe, unclean, and run-down.

Although the Morecambe Hotel and Caterers Association and Lancaster City Council attempted to maintain standards in holiday accommodation, Morecambe's offer did not keep up with changing public expectations. The 1980 Morecambe accommodation guide endorsed a minimum standard of only one toilet per fifteen guests, and by the 1992 guide, this standard only improved slightly to one toilet per ten guests!¹⁹³ In 1987 Lancaster City Council Director of Publicity and Amenities Tom Flanagan reported that 'Morecambe has not kept up with the times.'¹⁹⁴ Despite that warning, over a decade later, in 2002, another Lancaster City Council report stated that Morecambe still had a solid base of accommodation, albeit of variable quality. It noted that there were just two 3* hotels in the resort, which had around fifty bedrooms. Like Blackpool, low-budget bed and breakfast hotels now dominated Morecambe. However, as Walton points out that although there was still a market for the cheapest possible accommodation, this pushed the resort further downmarket.¹⁹⁵ However, unlike Blackpool, the resort lacked medium and large higher-quality hotel provision to cater to increasing tourist demands for improved service.¹⁹⁶ Finally, staying tourists needed attractions to visit, and by the end of the 1990s, unlike Blackpool, in Morecambe, very

¹⁹⁰ Colin Dyer, "'Dole on Sea' Clampdown', *Morecambe Citizen*, 17 March 1994.

¹⁹¹ David Jarratt and Sean Gammon, "'We Had the Most Wonderful Times": Seaside Nostalgia at a British Resort', *Tourism Recreation Research*, 41.2 (2016), 123–33 (p. 124).

¹⁹² The Telegraph, *Decline of the British Seaside Resort as Coastal Communities Plagued by Heroin* (2018), <<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/04/04/decline-british-seaside-resort-coastal-communities-plagued-heroin/>> [accessed 10 January 2023].

¹⁹³ MLLC, *Holiday Guides, There's More to Morecambe Bay, Holiday Guide 1992*.

¹⁹⁴ 'Hoteliers Face Grim Future', *Morecambe Guardian*, 1 May 1987.

¹⁹⁵ John K. Walton, *The Blackpool Landlady*, p. 198.

¹⁹⁶ Lancaster City Council, *Tourism Strategy Report* (Lancaster: Lancaster City Council, 1992).

few remained. Although it seems unlikely that the staying visitor numbers of the 1950s will return, a significant expansion of other types of accommodation will be needed if the Eden Project Morecambe is to be a success.

The impact of a decline in staying visits was also felt acutely in Blackpool from the 1980s onwards. Notably, the number of families staying in the resort for a week or more declined rapidly. Among other reasons, growing concerns over pollution in the Irish Sea meant fewer families wished to stay in Blackpool. To underline the problem, the Labour opposition on Blackpool Council proposed the following motion in July 1985:

(That this Council), recognising the significance of the analyses taken from the sea off Blackpool's beaches over the last year, requests its Officers to circularise hotels and guesthouses in the town with information, to be made available to holidaymakers, concerning the quality of the sea water and the presence of any pollution, in order these holidaymakers might be in a position to decide whether or not to incur any risks that may be involved in bathing.¹⁹⁷

The large Conservative majority on the local authority defeated the motion, as was probably expected. However, it highlighted the severe reputational damage that was being done to the resort and the broader tourist economy.

Some businesses adapted to changes in the holiday market, and in the area centred around Dickson Road and Queen Street, Blackpool guest houses benefitted from appealing to gay tourists. As Mazierska notes, Blackpool has a reputation for being a safe area for the LGBT+ community and has been dubbed the 'gay capital of the north UK'.¹⁹⁸ However, this growing market only partially offset the falling number of other staying visitors. Therefore, the loss of holiday accommodation and its consequences became a key concern for Blackpool Council during the 1980s and 1990s. The quality of the remaining establishments was also an issue, with many of the hotels and guest houses needing modernisation. This led to increased dissatisfaction from those visiting the resort. In 1998, the Director of Community and Tourism Services reported that despite falling visitor numbers, complaints about holiday accommodation had risen by over ten per cent.¹⁹⁹ By 2002 study by the Council found that the main concentrations of holiday accommodation were contracting into an area covered by the promenade

¹⁹⁷ BHC, LP51, Blackpool Borough Council Minutes 1985, 17 July 1985, Minute 28, p. 429.

¹⁹⁸ Mazierska, p. 14.

¹⁹⁹ BHC, LP51, Blackpool Borough Council Minutes 1998, 18 March 1998, Minute 13, p. 186.

and adjacent streets. Further away from the promenade was a significant level of residential flat and bedsit (HMO) use.²⁰⁰ As Karen Averby has noted, the decline in many seaside resorts had consequences for larger hotels which went down market by lowering prices and standards to attract customers: ‘the cost of staying at such establishments may have been affordable to many ... but luxurious accommodation it was not.’²⁰¹ This combination of down-market hotels and HMOs undermined other hotel businesses and increasingly deterred visitors from staying in Blackpool. Holiday accommodation is essential to Blackpool’s tourism offer and is vital to the resort’s visitor economy. However, over the years, tourism has changed. Whilst there has been an upturn in resort visitor numbers in recent years, Blackpool still has too many holiday accommodation bed spaces, with businesses operating at marginal levels. This has resulted in holiday accommodation businesses seeking alternative uses.²⁰² This has meant a conversion into housing for those areas away from the central area and promenade. Blackpool Council has also increased direct investment in the hotel infrastructure of the resort to improve the quality of rooms on offer. Another solution from Blackpool Council has involved clearing entire streets of former guest houses and building new residential estates. This can be seen in Figs. 5.3 and 5.4.²⁰³

²⁰⁰ BHC, LM891, Blackpool Council, Philip Leather, University of Birmingham, *Accommodating Change*, 2002, p. 49.

²⁰¹ Karen Averby, *Seaside Hotel* (Stroud: Amberley Publishing, 2018), p. 52.

²⁰² Blackpool Council, *Supplementary Planning Guidance with Regards to Holiday Accommodation in Blackpool* (2021) <<https://www.blackpool.gov.uk/Residents/Planning-environment-and-community/Planning/Planning-policy/Blackpool-local-plan/Supplementary-planning-documents-and-guidance/Holiday-accommodation.aspx>> [accessed 8 December 2021].

²⁰³ Lancashire Live, *Huge Blackpool Housing Development to Restart After Administration Woe* (2022), <<https://www.lancashire.live/news/lancashire-news/huge-blackpool-housing-development-restart-23869038>> [accessed 22 August 2022].

Photo of Tyldesley Road Blackpool, May 2009, removed for copyright reasons. Copyright holder is Google Maps.

Fig. 5.4 - Tyldesley Road, Blackpool, May 2009.²⁰⁴

Photo of Tyldesley Road Blackpool, January 2021, removed for copyright reasons. Copyright holder is Google Maps.

Fig. 5.5 - Tyldesley Road, Blackpool, January 2021, same location.²⁰⁵

²⁰⁴ Google Maps, *Tyldesley Road, Blackpool, 2009* (2009) <https://google.com/maps/@53.8084738,-3.0542488,3a,75y,57.24h,77.27t/data=!3m7!1e1!3m5!1sWK-vVgjfw5nlWpHm_uJyjA!2e0!5s20090501T000000!7i13312!8i6656?entry=ttu> [accessed 14 March 2023]

²⁰⁵ Google Maps, *Tyldesley Road, Blackpool, 2023* (2023), <<https://www.google.com/maps/@53.8084719,-3.0542344,3a,75y,57.24h,77.27t/data=!3m7!1e1!3m5!1sXNLvUmBejcp518wyh63ZNw!2e0!5s20230301T000000!7i16384!8i8192?entry=ttu>> [accessed 14 March 2023]

Blackpool Council has also supported the construction of a new range of higher-quality hotels in the resort. For example, the Talbot Gateway regeneration scheme, which has seen the restoration of a tramway link to Blackpool North Station, also includes a 4* 144-bedroom hotel and Marco Pierre White restaurant.²⁰⁶ This follows the success of the 130-room Hampton-by-Hilton Hotel (which opened in 2019), which has played a vital role in supporting the regeneration of South Shore. The demand for such hotels has been demonstrated by proposals to expand the Hampton-by-Hilton Hotel to 204 rooms by 2023. The extension will support the Blackpool Conference Centre and the new Winter Gardens exhibition centre extension, which opened in 2022.²⁰⁷ Although many of Blackpool's hotels still need to meet these higher standards, these developments (and others) indicate that the Council's strategy for raising the quality of tourist accommodation in the resort is beginning to make an impact. Before the COVID-19 Pandemic, Blackpool visitor numbers had risen to 18.1 million in 2017, with the number of staying visitors also increasing.²⁰⁸ Although comparisons with earlier figures are problematic, this would indicate that after the late 1990s and early 2000s slump, the resort's popularity has recovered to at least the level of the early 1990s.

Responding to the changing demands for holiday accommodation has proved to be one of the most significant challenges for Lancashire's seaside resorts. To date, it is a challenge that has only been partially met. The number of staying visitors at seaside resorts declined nationally from the 1970s. In Lancashire, Morecambe and Blackpool, properties linked to the holiday trade fell into dereliction or were converted to HMO use. It is an issue that can only be addressed by dealing with the wider issues of resort regeneration. From the 1970s to the 1990s, local government inaction combined with a lack of strategic thinking and cooperation meant that by the turn of the twenty-first century, the accommodation crisis had become a severe problem for both Morecambe and Blackpool. With a large stock of derelict, semi-derelict and poorly maintained

²⁰⁶ Lancashire Live, *Blackpool Holiday Inn and Marco Pierre White Restaurant 'on Track' for 2022 Opening* (2022), <<https://www.lancashire.live/news/lancashire-news/blackpool-holiday-inn-marco-pierre-20837267>> [accessed 22 August 2022].

²⁰⁷ Lancashire Business View, *Blackpool's Successful Hampton by Hilton Hotel Begins Extension Project* (2021), <<https://www.lancashirebusinessview.co.uk/latest-news-and-features/blackpools-successful-hampton-by-hilton-hotel-begins-extension-project>> [accessed 22 August 2022].

²⁰⁸ Marketing Lancashire, *STEAM Tourism Economic Impacts 2017 In Review* (2018), <<https://www.marketinglancashire.com/app/uploads/2018/10/Lancashire-STEAM-figures-2017.pdf>> [accessed 13 July 2022].

buildings, underlying issues of social deprivation were made worse and became visible to visitors. Advertising campaigns could hide these problems, and only slowly have these issues been addressed. In Lytham St Annes, the conversion to residential and retirement homes masked some of these trends but has left the resort with an accommodation shortage when larger events occur. Local authorities, especially Blackpool, have begun to address these issues with more coordinated action and strategic planning, especially in the last ten to fifteen years. However, improving the quantity of high-quality holiday accommodation will only be achieved if resorts are seen as attractive locations with a wide range of tourist amenities. In summary, the decline of Morecambe and Blackpool's holiday accommodation sector is explained by many complex factors. Addressing them will require both significant new investment and a multi-agency approach that deals not just with the superficial symptoms of decay but also with the long-standing systemic issues of social deprivation. National and local government, businesses, and local communities will need to collaborate closely for sustainable regeneration of these parts of each resort.

5.3 Conclusions

By the early 2000s, Blackpool, Morecambe and Lytham St Annes had all seen a significant reduction in the range of tourist attractions and amenities available to visitors. The effects of local government reorganisation and the lack of adequate investment (both public and private) in tourism were evident in all three resorts. In addition, Blackpool, Lancaster City and Fylde Borough Councils also faced increasing financial constraints as the powers of local government and their economic autonomy were steadily reduced from the mid-1970s onwards. Remaining attractions often suffered from under-investment, and early regeneration plans usually involved clearing historic sites, with retail-led regeneration given priority. Despite evidence to support Walton's argument that these resorts had demonstrated remarkable resilience, by the late 1990s, there appeared to be few signs of a renaissance in Lancashire's resorts. Stories of pollution in the Irish Sea and other negative media coverage meant Lancashire's beaches became unattractive to visitors. It also encouraged local authorities to pursue projects without connection to their seaside location or past. The open-air pools were demolished, and many seaside theatres had closed across Lancashire. As the number of staying visitors

fell, each resort was left with a surplus of hotels and boarding houses, which no longer met the expectations of tourists.

Despite these challenges, the scale of these problems and responses to them from local authorities varied dramatically. Lancaster City Council, especially from the 1970s to the 1990s, has been the least successful of the three local authorities in managing its tourist infrastructure. The authority made a series of questionable decisions concerning Morecambe's attractions throughout this period, culminating in the Blobbygate disaster. Although there have been subsequent achievements, the legacy of decline during this period has not been overcome, with the site of the former Swimming Stadium and Frontierland having remained undeveloped for two decades. As discussed in previous chapters, due to a high turnover of local councillors and political infighting, Lancaster City Council has struggled to implement a long-term vision for the resort. In addition, Lancaster City Council struggled to develop successful long-term partnerships with private investors, as investing in Morecambe seemed unlikely to generate the returns they wanted.

Although Lytham St Annes, under the stewardship of Fylde Borough Council, also saw the loss of key attractions between the 1970s and 1990s, these did not bring into question its future as a tourist destination. A mixture of smaller-scale entertainment options, supported by local government investment and higher-quality hotels, has provided an effective platform for expansion in the last two decades. In Blackpool, which lost more than half its visitors between the 1980s and early 2000s, a proactive unitary local authority has taken most of the main tourist attractions under its control. As a result, key attractions were saved, and long-term partnerships with the private sector were formed. With this, public sector support and private marketing increased visitor numbers have been achieved. As a result, in 2019, visitor numbers in Blackpool had doubled from the levels seen a decade earlier. The key lesson, acknowledged in the current regeneration plans of all three resorts, is that reconnecting with their coastal locations and investing in historic infrastructure can and should be used to promote economic renewal and enhance local civic pride in these seaside towns. The interplay of historical factors, economic conditions, and administrative decisions in the post-war era have had far-reaching impacts on these resorts, but as the example of Blackpool shows, thoughtful investment and management can lead to a resurgence.

Chapter 6 Conclusions

This thesis has explored the role of local government in shaping the development and regeneration of Lancashire's major seaside resorts – Blackpool, Morecambe and Heysham, and Lytham St Annes. With the growth of international competition and changing expectations of domestic tourism, the traditional English seaside town was presented in the UK media and in academic literature as in terminal decline by the late twentieth century. However, as I have demonstrated, this declinist view is far too simplistic. While some English seaside resorts have seen a collapse of their tourist industry, others have shown a remarkable resilience. In explaining this variety, the role of local government in developing effective tourism strategies has been underestimated by many scholars. Although local decision making was not the only factor, the responses of resort authorities to a shifting tourism landscape have influenced, both positively and negatively the resilience of these towns' tourism product. Facing changing political priorities and market demands, the local authorities representing these resorts responded in markedly different ways and levels of success. This thesis concludes that in Lancashire's major resorts, while Blackpool and Lytham St Annes benefitted from broadly effective local government since 1974, Morecambe has suffered from an inconsistent approach from its local authority. As a result, although the three resorts are geographically close and have had the same external pressures, the impact on the tourism industry in each town has been markedly different.

As a result, these research findings contribute to an understanding of the inter-relationship between English resort development and the role of local government. Therefore, the results presented in this thesis are consequently of academic and policy relevance. By exploring the impact of decision-making in Lancashire's resorts, this thesis offers insights into the problems of adapting to societal changes and develops an approach that may be tested elsewhere. I have also filled a gap in the historiography by addressing the recent history of seaside resorts through their relationship to developments in local government. This research increases understanding of Lancashire seaside towns by showing how external forces and internal responses produced place-specific outcomes. These findings can inform regeneration strategies, especially in areas of high socio-economic deprivation. This thesis contributes to academic and policy

discussions, suggesting that understanding local governance offers insights into resort development and provides valuable lessons for regeneration strategies. I also argue for a return to some aspects of pre-1974 governance structures, including a focus on local priorities and public-private partnerships.

To assess the recent history of seaside resorts since 1974, it is necessary to understand the pre-1974 interrelationship with the English system of local government and its origins. Although early English seaside resorts were primarily developed by private individuals and landowners, from the 1870s onwards, they were increasingly under the direction of the local authorities. Especially between the 1920s and the 1970s, these authorities provided the support and leadership necessary to develop tourism in these resorts. This was primarily because pre-1974 local government boundaries were connected to the historic counties, towns, and communities of the areas they represented. The creation of county and municipal boroughs from 1894 enabled even relatively small towns such as Morecambe to enjoy a considerable level of local self-government. Although not the only factor explaining their growth, this local autonomy was conducive to developing these three resorts as tourist destinations. Therefore, although located in close proximity to each other, Lancashire's holiday resorts developed distinctive tourist identities shaped by these authorities. This supports the conclusions of Anthony Leonard that the physical environment, as shaped by the local authorities, also transformed the socio-economic and cultural ecology of their resorts.¹ This thesis shows that variations in local authority interventions significantly influenced seaside resorts' early development and later regeneration.

This study enhances understanding of resort decline and regeneration and the internal dynamics of changes in several ways. Instead of simply studying each resort's changing qualities, this research has analysed the nature and quality of local government management of the tourist industry in each resort. In Morecambe and Heysham, Lytham St Annes and especially Blackpool, local authorities were established that embraced an approach retrospectively termed 'municipal conservatism' by scholars such as Walton and Urry. These local authorities organised resources for over half a century to promote

¹ Anthony Leonard, 'Seaside Town Regeneration and the Interconnections between the Physical Environment, Key Agencies and Middle-Life Migration' (unpublished Ph.D., University of Brighton, 2014), p. 116 <<https://research.brighton.ac.uk/en/studentTheses/8fea9227-41f9-4905-8aa2-d1b6d67a0457>> [accessed 7 May 2020].

their resort and civic life. As shown in chapter two, each resort benefitted by having its own local authority, representing an area where the tourist economy dominated within a system of local government that enabled them to promote it. Business interests and those of the authority were deemed inter-changeable through direct pressure or shared values.² This approach ensured that local priorities were followed with the support of both the public and private sectors. With the significant local financial and political autonomy granted to county and municipal boroughs before 1974, they were managers of social and economic change in their communities.³ Although this approach cannot be exactly replicated in the twenty-first century, its most positive aspects should be embraced, namely civic pride and local decision-making. A more integrated and informed approach to maintaining the unique identities of these resorts is needed, while also adapting to changing tourism patterns.

Until 1974, local government units in Lancashire had broadly, if imperfectly, reflected the towns and communities they represented. In this respect, Cochrane was correct in speaking about the success of the pre-74 system. In addition, as Leach and Davis have shown, those involved in local government were generally sure about its role and purpose before the reorganisation. The experience of Lancashire's resorts shows that this has not always been true in recent decades. Local government now appears to be locked into a system of permanent reorganisation, undermining the ability of those involved to plan for the future effectively. The older decentralised system gave local authorities greater financial independence, allowing them to pursue local priorities. This was particularly beneficial to those communities which relied on millions of holidaymakers visiting the Lancashire coast. All of this helped to increase tourism numbers within a framework of decentralised policymaking. Local government spending on publicity and transport had produced a multiplier effect, promoting private investment in these resorts. A powerful sense of civic purpose also underpinned this spending. In Blackpool, Morecambe and Heysham and, to a lesser extent Lytham St Annes, the needs of the tourism industry had taken a very high priority regarding local

² John K. Walton, *The British Seaside: Holidays and Resorts in the Twentieth Century*, Studies in Popular Culture, (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 2006), p. 170; John Urry and Jonas Larsen, *The Tourist Gaze 3.0*, Theory, Culture & Society, 3. ed. (London: Sage, 2011), p. 46.

³ Allan Cochrane, *Whatever Happened to Local Government?* (Buckingham [England]: Open Univ. Press, 1993), p. 16.

government spending. However, the uncertainty in local government, which Leach and Davies wrote about in the mid-1990s, has grown over the last twenty-five years. As later decision-making became more centralised and remote, this could no longer be guaranteed, with significant negative consequences for the future of these resorts.⁴ In contrast, the bidding processes to secure the funding needed for major regeneration projects are centralised and politicised. While individual schemes may proceed, this overly centralised state has become a substantial block to seaside regeneration.

With the increased centralisation and privatisation of services, the way in which local government managed tourism changed dramatically after 1974. As chapter three shows, the scale of impact was different across the three resorts. However, the extensive reorganisation of 1974 proved to be a critical negative turning point in the history of Lancashire's seaside resorts. This reorganisation significantly affected the capacity of local authorities to renew and adapt their ageing tourism infrastructure to meet its demands. Seaside resorts found themselves during the 1970s in competition not only with the Mediterranean destinations but also with emerging domestic locations, which could supply superior holiday accommodation. The image of English seaside resorts was probably at its lowest during the 1980s and 1990s. Lancashire's resorts, in particular, were widely portrayed in the media as outdated and polluted. Unfortunately, whereas the local government in the early twentieth century had direct control over critical areas such as sewerage, by the 1980s, they could only lobby the privatised water companies. As Hassan's research demonstrated, by the late twentieth century, society had become more exercised by environmental issues with negative consequences for Morecambe, Blackpool and Lytham St Annes.⁵ Although progress has been made over the last thirty years in tackling pollution, recent sewage leaks into the Irish Sea show that the issue is far from resolved. Local government leaders in Lancashire's resorts know that attempts to regenerate seaside resorts will be severely undermined without clean seas and safe beaches. This is true in all three resorts, but especially in Morecambe, where much of its earlier tourist infrastructure has been lost. As Jarratt argues, the natural appeal of Morecambe Bay and a connection to the sea and

⁴ Steve Leach and Howard Davis, *Enabling or Disabling Local Government: Choices for the Future*, Public Policy and Management (Buckingham [England]; Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1996), pp. 10–11.

⁵ John Hassan, *Seaside, Health and the Environment in England and Wales Since 1800*. (Aldershot: Routledge, 2016), p. 14.

nature will be integral to the rejuvenation of the resort.⁶ The success or failure of projects like the Eden Project Morecambe will depend on addressing these environmental concerns.

Although the old municipal system was not always effective in policy implantation, the public better understood it, due to its longevity and stronger links to localities, than the post-1974 structures. Although the post-1974 reorganisations may have achieved economies of scale and administrative efficiencies, it has been at the expense of local, place-based policymaking. As a result, the tourist industry in Blackpool, Morecambe, and Lytham St Annes have suffered to differing degrees. With the creation of a unitary authority in 1998, Blackpool Council regained some of the powers it had lost in 1974. Although without the independence of action of the old county borough, it has enabled increased support for Blackpool tourism during a difficult period. A comparison of the experiences of Fylde Borough Council in Lytham St Annes and Lancaster City Council in Morecambe shows that despite increasing centralisation, their policy decisions still had a crucial impact on tourism in each resort. The experience of these Lancashire seaside towns mirrors that found in the South West coastal resorts by Sheela Agarwal, where effective local government has been vital in establishing the necessary partnerships to promote regeneration.⁷ This has been key to the success of Blackpool, where successful regeneration strategies have been aided by local governance, which has encouraged institutional flexibility and cross-institutional cooperation. Agarwal highlights that a lack of collaboration and trust within and between the public and private sectors limits the capacity of resorts to respond to outside forces.⁸ Lancaster City Council have fallen into the latter category, at least until recently, with negative consequences for Morecambe. Therefore, the successes and failures of Lancashire's coastal towns validate her argument that local authorities play a critical coordinating role in resort restructuring.

⁶ David Jarratt, 'The Development and Decline of Morecambe in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries: A Resort Caught in the Tide', *Journal of Tourism History*, 11.3 (2019), 263–83 (p. 267).

⁷ Sheela Agarwal, 'Institutional Change and Resort Capacity: The Case of Southwest English Coastal Resorts', in *Managing Coastal Tourism Resorts: A Global Perspective*, ed. by Sheela Agarwal and Gareth Shaw, (Clevedon: Channel View Publications, 2007), 56-72 (58).

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

In the context of these seaside resorts, successful place-based decision making has taken into account the unique characteristics and challenges facing these coastal communities. In resorts, such as Blackpool, which rely heavily on tourism for their economic vitality, this means tailoring tourism strategies and infrastructure development to the specific attractions and resources of the resort. Decision making must also embrace a resort's coastal location and face up to wider environmental challenges such as sustainable beach management practices. Furthermore, this place-based decision making also recognises the importance of preserving and promoting seaside heritage, while encouraging participation from the local community. By applying strategies based on the location and strengths their resorts, local authorities and other stakeholders can create more sustainable and thriving destinations that capitalise on their unique attributes while addressing specific challenges.

In developing a tailored tourism policy, the role of the Lancashire County Council has grown in importance. Before 1974, there was no coordinated tourism strategy across Lancashire. As a result, Lancashire County Council's impact on the development of Lancashire's resorts was minimal. The role of local government in tourism before 1974 was almost exclusively felt at the county or municipal borough level. Marshall overstated the effectiveness of Lancashire County Council, but its limited contribution to seaside tourism was favourable.⁹ Transport was the one crucial policy area where Lancashire County Council impacted tourism by providing new linking roads, especially as visitors transferred from the railways to cars, during the post-Second World era. Despite arguments over some details in this area, Lancashire's authorities worked together to resolve the growing transport problems in the County. In the 1960s, Lancashire councillors united to lobby the central government for new motorway links and against the cuts imposed following the Beeching Report. However, the impact of this lobbying was minimal, with council officers were usually left to guess the future plans of British Rail. This failure was a clear sign of the weakening influence of local government on decision-making in Westminster. As rail connections to the coast were withdrawn, replacement road links were delayed, sometimes by decades, to the detriment of resorts such as Morecambe and Heysham. Outside of cooperation on

⁹ J.D, Marshall, *The History of Lancashire County Council, 1889 to 1974*, ed. by J. D. Marshall (London: Robertson, 1977), pp. 363–87.

issues such as transport and a few other limited interventions, the idea of a Lancashire-wide tourism policy enjoyed little support. Councillors representing Morecambe and Lytham St Annes on Lancashire County Council were keen to keep spending and rates low and to prevent any expansion of the role of the County Council and competition with non-coastal locations. As the future of local government was debated in the 1960s, coastal councillors largely supported the retention of the two-tier system. Despite the relative success of the old local government system, its continuation was not supported nationally by either the Labour or Conservative parties, which both saw as outdated and inefficient.

With a more centralised approach to tourism policy in Lancashire after 1974, Lancashire County Council developed a range of tourism strategies. The impact of these strategies is, however, questionable. Problems identified in the early 1980s are still highlighted in reports commissioned by the authority.¹⁰ These included a lack of a clear identity for Lancashire, limited tourist attractions (outside Blackpool) and a lack of quality accommodation. Recent successful bids as part of the Conservative Government's 'Levelling Up' agenda may begin to address this, but it is too early to tell.¹¹ While local authorities may win support for initiatives like the Eden Project Morecambe, the range of policy options available has diminished due to direct local authority support reductions. Although the individual schemes may have local engagement and support, the current bidding process for regeneration funding is highly centralised and politicised. In addition, until recently, priority was given by the central government to inner-city regeneration programmes and tourism development away from traditional resorts. The growing complexities of local government, competing demands for resources and the disruptive churn of policies to support coastal resorts have undermined regeneration efforts. Because of this, it is evident that although parts of Lancashire are attractive to tourists, the County Council has been unable to achieve many of its goals. As Bristow et al. have argued, a different approach is required to deliver urban (and implicitly coastal)

¹⁰ Marketing Lancashire with Blue Sail, *Lancashire Visitor Economy Strategy, 2015-2020* (2015), <<https://new.fylde.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Draft-Lancashire-Visitor-Economy-Strategy-2015-2020-1.pdf>> [accessed June 10, 2022].

¹¹ Gov.UK, *What Is Levelling Up?*, (2023) <<https://levellingup.campaign.gov.uk/what-is-levelling-up/>> [accessed 11 June 2023].

renewal.¹² For regeneration to be successful, local government will need much greater financial autonomy by central government. This will enable more effective partnership working, and support community engagement. The key to success will lie in the ability of local authorities, in collaboration with private and enterprises, and the communities they serve, to adapt their resorts to the twenty-first century tourism market while still preserving the unique characteristics that make each resort special.

Historically and more recently, the benefits of local autonomy are most evident in Blackpool. Before 1974, Blackpool Council adopted the most interventionist approach, using public money to promote the resort and build tourism infrastructure. Blackpool's record of providing municipal services and amenities stands out compared to other major resorts. Collaborating with the local entrepreneurs, Blackpool's local representatives announced ambitious schemes to grow visitor numbers and generate revenues that both allowed investment in other amenities and, at the same time, kept local taxes low. Although significant tourist attractions, such as Blackpool Tower and the Pleasure Beach, were in private ownership, this ownership was local and often represented on the Council itself. By the 1930s, as Cross suggests, it was impossible to separate the Corporation from the town.¹³ Although the stability of this system and the dominance of the Conservative Party at the centre would lead to accusations of corruption in the 1950s, election results show that Blackpool's people broadly supported it. Although still attracting millions of visitors, many of Blackpool's key assets were acquired by national corporations in the 1960s. In addition, Blackpool's Council after 1974 had been demoted to the second tier but crucially maintained the primary responsibility for tourism within existing geographical boundaries.

As a result, the fundamental health of Blackpool's tourist economy remained strong during the 1970s and 1980s, although problems were emerging. Although now a second-tier authority, Blackpool Council continued to commit significant sums of money to promote tourism in this period. This level of public support contrasted with that offered to Morecambe and Lytham St Annes. This period confirms Walton's thesis of

¹² Matthew Bristow and others, '*Creative Repurposing' and Levelling Up: History, Heritage and Urban Renewal*' (2023) <<https://www.historyandpolicy.org/policy-papers/papers/creative-repurposing-and-levelling-up-history-heritage-and-urban-renewal>> [accessed 28 February 2023].

¹³ Gary S. Cross, *Worktowners at Blackpool: Mass-Observation and Popular Leisure in the 1930s*, ed. by Gary S. Cross (London ; New York: Routledge, 1990), p. 235.

resort resilience, but this was due to the commitment and expertise of its own, albeit second-tier, local authority.¹⁴ The relative success of Blackpool in the 1970s and 1980s was underpinned by appropriate action by local government. In partnership with Blackpool Council, there was considerable investment in resort facilities by national operators such as First Leisure and, locally, the Blackpool Pleasure Beach. This enabled the resort to market a product that could meet the demands of the changing holiday market. Also, as other resorts, such as Morecambe, lost tourist attractions, those wishing to visit the Lancashire seaside were drawn to Blackpool, which maintained a wide variety of entertainment options.

When Blackpool's tourist industry did suffer a significant decline in visitor numbers (both staying and day visitors) during the 1990s, Blackpool Council was also more effectively able to deal with this than neighbouring authorities, having gained unitary authority status. By the turn of the century, Blackpool was losing visitors due to a range of factors, and it had developed severe reputational problems with potential new tourists. As a result, private investors began to withdraw from the resort, as they had in Morecambe during the 1970s. However, unitary status and effective political leadership enabled the acquisition of major tourist attractions. Without this public-sector involvement, these would have fallen into dereliction, as they did in Morecambe. Blackpool's new autonomy also allowed the authority to maintain its public transportation system, unlike elsewhere in Lancashire. Public investment in attractions, accommodation and retail has enabled the resort to continue to provide a level of tourism infrastructure absent elsewhere in Lancashire. Blackpool's large-scale regeneration plans have also recognised the importance of maintaining the historic built environment and conducting adequate market research. The Blackpool model has involved the public ownership of a significant part of the town centre and a range of partnerships with the private sector. Due to changes in local government structures and shifts in the tourist market, the Blackpool model takes a different approach than one the old Blackpool Corporation followed before 1974. However, as John Nickson wrote in 2017, it echoes the spirit of municipal enterprise of the earlier period. Although the earlier local government system has gone, the way to follow their example is 'for all

¹⁴ Walton, *The British Seaside*, p. 198.

forces devoted to the common good to come together and work in partnership'.¹⁵ Blackpool continues to face significant socio-economic problems, but visitor numbers have recovered due to the local authority's proactive approach. With its willingness and capacity to intervene, Blackpool Council has rejected the declinist view adopted elsewhere, which could have led to a terminal loss of tourist attractions and visitors.

Although it developed later than Blackpool, local government also played an essential role in establishing Morecambe as a significant seaside resort. Municipal Borough status for Morecambe in 1902 and an influx of new councillors in 1919 were critical stepping stones in the resort's early history. Following the establishment of Morecambe and Heysham Municipal Borough in 1928, the resort firmly established itself as a significant tourist destination and adopted approaches comparable to the municipal conservatism of Blackpool. As in Blackpool, the Conservative Party dominated with councillors and council officers usually serving extended periods in office, providing considerable stability. Also, in Morecambe, the growing ambition of the local authority promoted rapid resort growth during the inter-war period. Public and private spending in Morecambe during the 1930s helped nearly double visitor numbers and promoted civic pride in the resort. Morecambe's growth did not occur due to the accidental arrangement of market forces but through planned local government intervention. This contradicts Bingham's deterministic assessment that Morecambe's place as a tourist resort was determined by external factors beyond the control of its people.¹⁶ The benefits of this investment were felt in the following decades as visitor numbers remained buoyant until the 1960s.

Other resorts experiencing the same pressures as Morecambe's tourist industry did not suffer the same rate or scale of decline. Morecambe and Heysham Council began to take action to address the changing tourist market, commissioning ground-breaking research from Lancaster University and giving increased public support to its tourist attractions. However, as the resort increasingly needed financial support from the local authority, it was replaced in 1974 by Lancaster City Council. Critically, this reorganisation made Morecambe's interests and tourism a lower priority for its local authority than

¹⁵ John Nickson, *Our Common Good: If the State Provides Less, Who Will Provide More?* (London: Biteback Publishing Ltd, 2017), p. 255.

¹⁶ Roger Bingham, *Lost Resort? The Flow and Ebb of Morecambe* (Milnthorpe: Cicerone Press, 1990), pp. 310–11.

they had previously been. Over several decades, as a result, critical tourist infrastructure was lost, and the earlier sense of civic pride and ambition was replaced with a bitter political climate steeped in recrimination and blame.

As a result of this shift, Morecambe has seen the most significant decline in tourist numbers since 1974 of the three resorts and the weakest response from the local government. The creation of Lancaster City Council challenged the autonomy and identity of Morecambe. It also led to a crisis of confidence in the resort, which still needs to be resolved. Unlike Blackpool Council, which could commit its tourism resources entirely to promoting and developing a single destination, Morecambe's identity became submerged within 'the formula of 'City, Coast and Countryside'. As Constantine and Warde argue, the challenges facing Morecambe and Heysham would have been trying for even the most determined local authority.¹⁷ However, when Morecambe and Heysham Municipal Borough was abolished in 1974, it was replaced by a council that could not display that determination. Political infighting and frequent changes of administration undermined the ability of the resort to attract public and private investment. An important example was the divisive issue of improving Morecambe's road links, which took several decades to resolve. The concerns of Lancaster residents made it difficult for the authority to lobby for a relief road that would have been popular in Morecambe. In the meantime, inadequate transport connections strangled the resort's visitor economy, especially as rail services were withdrawn. In addition, many of the newly elected representatives of Lancaster City Council had little knowledge of the tourism and proved ill-equipped to administer the resort effectively. Despite the warnings of Stuart Riley in the 1970s, adequate market research was only conducted sporadically over the next thirty years, often leading to ill-informed decision-making.¹⁸ Since the late 1980s, reports and regeneration plans have been produced, highlighting problems but failing to deliver long-term solutions. External funding has helped regenerate parts of the resort since the 1990s. However, compared to Blackpool, public money has been limited in recent years, and few private investors have been willing to put their faith in Morecambe.

¹⁷ Stephen Constantine and Alan Warde, 'Challenge and Change in a New Century', in *A History of Lancaster*, ed. by Andrew White, 2nd edn. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2001), pp. 267-8.

¹⁸ Stuart Riley, *The Marketing of Tourism and Other Services* (Lancaster: University of Lancaster, 1974).

In contrast to Blackpool and Morecambe, local government had only a limited role in the early growth of Lytham and St Annes. The original development of Lytham was shaped by notable local landowners, the Clifton family and then St Annes by the St Annes Land and Building Company. This early history of the resort has been the focus of most published research about the resort, such as the work of Peter Shakeshaft.¹⁹ However, as the resort grew in the early twentieth century, the role of local government became more significant. St Annes Urban District Council and its successor, Lytham St Annes Municipal Borough Council, undertook significant spending on several projects, such as the 'Roman Baths', Ashton Gardens and the Marine Park. Lytham St Annes Council took a more cautious approach to public spending than Blackpool or Morecambe's local authorities, demonstrating greater fiscal (rather than municipal) conservatism. Notably, two of the attractions mentioned above were primarily funded through the generosity of Lord Ashton. As Blackpool and Morecambe grew rapidly to the north, encouraging an increasingly working-class visitor base, Lytham St Annes planners attempted to maintain the refined middle-class tone established in the nineteenth century. Lytham St Annes Council policy was generally to support development that made the resort distinctive from Blackpool rather than to compete. This was achieved through investment in elegant public gardens, and excluding attractions that would encourage working-class visitors. As a result, Lytham St Annes Council was less exposed to large-scale commitments than other seaside authorities before 1974. The affluence of the resort and the less critical role of its local government partially explain its resilience compared to other Lancashire resorts. Lytham St Annes also lost some of its local autonomy in 1974 with the creation of Fylde Borough Council, but it did not lose its identity in the same way as Morecambe. Lytham St Annes' population meant it would dominate the new authority.

Like Morecambe and Heysham, Lytham St Annes lost its municipal borough status in 1974. Although not immune to the changing holiday patterns of the late twentieth century and despite losing some key tourist attractions, Fylde Borough Council has managed changes more effectively than Lancaster City Council. The authority has generally sought to limit its commitments compared to Lancaster City and

¹⁹ Peter Shakeshaft, *St Anne's on the Sea: A History* (Lancaster: Carnegie, 2008), pp. 287–89.

Blackpool Councils. On the other hand, Fylde Borough Council has supported smaller-scale projects while leaving the private sector to take the lead in most instances. As a smaller second-tier authority than Lancaster, this has been presented as the only practical and financially responsible route. In addition, Lytham St Annes housing stock has not required large-scale local authority intervention from Fylde Borough Council, and the resort continues to benefit from an affluent resident population and an aspirational middle-class image. Decision-making improved during the 1990s as Fylde Borough Council has been helped by increased access to tourism data and market research. As elsewhere, in recent years, pressure on local authority resources has limited spending by Fylde Borough Council on tourism. Despite this, the tourist industry in Lytham St Annes has demonstrated a high level of resilience to the effects of austerity, demonstrating the underlying strength of the resort. Fylde Council has also shown that a smaller, more focused local authority can achieve greater results than a larger one, which must consider a wider area. Fylde Borough Council has invested money to regenerate public spaces in Lytham St Annes, such as Fairhaven Lake. As a result, the private sector has been more willing to invest in the resort.

The impact of local government on the tourist industry can be best understood in the range of entertainment and tourist amenities explored in chapters four and five. Initially, most attractions were inspired by local entrepreneurs and funded through private investment. During the twentieth century, local authorities increasingly worked with these private businesses and organisations to promote and support seaside amenities. In addition, local government also provided marketing and promotional support and offered incentives for companies to invest in new attractions. During the first half of the twentieth century, direct public investment became increasingly important as the role of local government developed in Blackpool, Morecambe, and Lytham St Annes. To enable further growth, resort authorities provided critical financial support to develop the necessary infrastructure to support mass tourism. This was not separate from business leaders who provided investment in these resorts, as these individuals were fully engaged in these resorts' municipal life. Across the range of tourist amenities provided in Lancashire's resorts, the relationship between private enterprise and the local authority helped establish the resort's identity. Then from the 1920s, the local government framework and its ties to local business networks provided further

impetus to their growth and success. Even when the private sector instigated the development, this was an economic partnership between local entrepreneurs and their representatives at the municipal level. This relationship was strongest in the mid-twentieth century, after which it began to erode. However, the legacy of this period and the decisions made then have had lasting consequences for Lancashire's resorts.

From the 1970s, the three resorts saw a reduction in the range of tourist attractions and amenities available, as shown in chapter five. However, the scale, timing and response to this reduction by local authorities varied. Although suggested as necessary in the TALC model, the removal of older attractions and heritage buildings has been to the long-term detriment of all three resorts. As Jarratt argues, the resort experience is framed and conditioned not just by the seas but also by the built environment. This means that the remaining seaside heritage should be preserved, and new developments should be distinctive and linked to their location.²⁰ Local authorities have begun to adopt this approach in contrast to the piecemeal redevelopment, which was typical in the 1970s and 1980s. Older attractions were often demolished as local authorities did little to preserve the distinctive seaside architecture that helped establish their unique identities. Retail-led regeneration in the three resorts did not deliver the economic and social benefits hoped for by local authorities, primarily because it did not take advantage of their coastal location. In addition, the failure to appreciate the value of a seaside location and its connected architecture was compounded by a general antipathy in the media towards English seaside resorts. Hassan highlighted how stories about the pollution of the Irish Sea meant that Lancashire's beaches became unattractive to visitors.²¹ However, this was not the only impact of this negative publicity, significantly this pollution also encouraged local authorities to pursue regeneration schemes without connection to their seaside location.

The clearest example of this shift is the decline in the beach economy and open-air swimming in Blackpool, Morecambe, and Lytham St Annes at the end of the twentieth century. The development of Lancashire's open-air pools before the Second

²⁰ David Jarratt, "The Importance of Built Heritage in the English Seaside Experience", in *Routledge Handbook of the Tourist Experience*, ed. by Richard Sharpley, (London: Routledge, 2021), 481-97 (497).

²¹ Hassan, pp.256-7.

World War was a key example of a municipally conservative approach. These iconic buildings symbolised the achievements of municipal enterprise and promoted a sense of civic pride. These pools represented a statement of intent for each resort and were constructed at great expense, despite the economic difficulties of the inter-war period. The ability of local authorities to invest on such a scale owed much to the decentralised nature of decision-making. Despite the significant revenues generated until the 1970s, they were provided at a net cost to the local taxpayer. However, due to the additional visitors they attracted, which, in turn, supported other businesses in the resort, they were considered an essential part of the tourism offer. The declining popularity of open-air swimming and beauty competitions undermined local government support for these pools. The withdrawal of local political and financial backing, hastened by reorganisation, was the critical factor in their demise.

With a loss of local support, the post-1974 authorities decided to replace their swimming facilities. The confidence that is evident in the promotional literature of the 1930s had been lost, with new pools in Blackpool, Morecambe, and St Annes isolating people from their seaside location. In Morecambe, despite initial attempts to save money, the replacement facilities still made a loss. Despite involving private sector management in the 1990s, the relaunched pool was demolished after a financial crisis in 1999. Only with the confirmation of the new Eden Project Morecambe in 2023 will this prime location on the promenade at Morecambe finally be regenerated. Blackpool Council also replaced their open-air pool with the Sandcastle, a 'tropical' waterpark in a wholly enclosed location. In contrast to Bubbles, when this facility faced a similar crisis in the early 2000s, the Sandcastle was taken into public ownership and became an early example of the emerging Blackpool model. Here, the local authority had learned from previous errors and intervened successfully to save a key attraction. As open-air swimming has increased in popularity and with a revival in the use of Lancashire's beaches, Fylde Borough Council's St Annes Masterplan includes the possibility of a new open-air pool as part of a new complex that will embrace its seaside location.

The relationship between seaside piers and the beach is complementary. Piers offer visitors a unique perspective of the sea and coastline, offering various activities like amusement rides, arcade games, and live performances. Designed to take advantage of their coastal location, Lancashire's piers were initially constructed and

owned by the private sector, unlike the open-air pools. There was, however, a symbiotic relationship between them and municipally managed amenities along the seafront. Other than in Lytham, these piers continued to be thriving centres for leisure, entertainment, and commerce until the 1960s. When replacement buildings were necessary due to fire and storm damage, private investors were willing to spend large sums on their maintenance and development, encouraged by local authority spending elsewhere. In Blackpool, rather than being challenged by changes in entertainment consumption, pier businesses developed new commercial enterprises, such as amusement arcades, to maintain profitability. Piers continued to complement the attraction of the sea and sands until concerns about coastal pollution on the Lancashire coast became widespread. As a result, by the 1970s, new investment in piers was limited and original Victorian architectural features were lost or replaced by cost-saving functional modern buildings. While justifiable on short-term financial grounds, in the longer term, the heritage value of the piers was reduced. More widely, preserving the historic built environment played a limited role in local policymaking in these resorts until the end of the century, when much had already been lost.

Only in recent decades, when Morecambe's piers had already gone, did a fuller appreciation emerge of the role that they could play in regeneration develop amongst local policymakers. As Light and Chapman argue, in the second half of the twentieth century, the distinctive architectural heritage of English seaside resorts was overlooked or dismissed as not something to be taken seriously.²² It is undoubtedly true that until recently, in Lancashire, seaside architecture was rarely considered in terms of heritage. The impact of this earlier decision-making is now being felt, as tourists increasingly value the distinctive sense of place found at the English seaside. Furthermore, local authorities are promoting the seaside holiday's heritage as an asset that can be mobilised within regeneration strategies. For example, in Blackpool, as national companies withdrew from the resort, local investment from both the public and private sectors became critical for the survival of its three piers. As a result, Blackpool's piers have adapted to attract new visitors and have demonstrated strong resilience and enduring popularity with holidaymakers.

²² Duncan Light and Anya Chapman, 'The Neglected Heritage of the English Seaside Holiday': *Coastal Studies & Society*, 2022, p. 41.

The history of seaside piers and theatre is firmly connected. Most seaside piers and theatres were constructed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as part of a broader trend of seaside resorts becoming destinations for live entertainment. Theatre was a popular form of entertainment during this time, so most of Lancashire's seaside piers included theatres as a central feature. More generally, across Blackpool, Morecambe and Lytham St Annes, the entertainment provided by theatres became a fundamental part of the attraction of Lancashire's resorts. Again, the role of the local authority in their history has also been significant. There was a strong link between Blackpool's largest live entertainment venues and the local authority. The Blackpool Tower Company exemplifies the connections between Blackpool Council and the local business community. However, by the end of the 1960s, this close relationship was eroded as national corporations owned most of Blackpool's principal venues. The negative consequences of this would not be fully apparent until the 1990s. This was because entertainment centres in Blackpool continued to enjoy considerable success by adapting to the challenges of the television age. In contrast, traditional live entertainment venues such as the Ashton Theatre in Lytham St Annes and Morecambe's Winter Gardens were in severe financial difficulties by the early 1970s. As a result, their municipal bodies provided essential subsidies so summer productions could continue. As both were reorganised in 1974, the future of these subsidies was, in turn, put into doubt as both Fylde Borough and especially Lancaster City Council had wider priorities to consider.

The loss of theatres in Morecambe, Lytham St Annes and Blackpool also reflected a broader crisis of confidence in the future of these resorts as tourist destinations. Whereas Blackpool's venues showed greater resilience until the 1990s, theatres in smaller resorts such as Morecambe and Lytham St Annes struggled to compete in a declining market. The saga of Morecambe's Winter Gardens and replacement venues also provided another example of the failure of Lancaster City Council to use public money between the 1970s and 1990s effectively. As a result, by the 2010s, Morecambe had only a limited live entertainment offer. This confirms the conclusions of Hughes and Allen that resort decline occurs when entertainment provision deteriorates.²³ In

²³ Howard L. Hughes and Danielle Allen, 'Entertainment and Its Significance in the Holiday Experience at UK Seaside Resorts', *Tourism Recreation Research*, 33.2 (2008), 131–41.

contrast, despite St Annes losing its main indoor venues in the 1970s, outdoor festivals have established Lytham as a location able to attract internationally significant acts. Blackpool's relative success compared with Morecambe and Lytham St Annes was based on the ability of its venues to attract high-profile television comedians and performers between the 1950s and the 1990s. As the summer season fell out of favour with these entertainers, private investors withdrew from the resort. Without the intervention of Blackpool Council, most of the resort's remaining larger venues would have closed. By taking ownership of and investing in Blackpool's Winter Gardens and Tower, the local authority created a platform for other regeneration plans and secured the resort's future as a major tourist destination.

Seaside amusement parks also developed alongside other attractions in the early twentieth century and were typically located on or near the beach to offer a variety of rides. While these parks were created across the UK, Blackpool has been exceptional among seaside resorts with the development and continued success of Blackpool Pleasure Beach. No similar development occurred in Lytham St Annes, and Morecambe Pleasure Park developed much more slowly and on a smaller scale than the Pleasure Beach. Although the Pleasure Beach was a private enterprise, its growth and development can also be linked to the municipal conservatism of the first half of the twentieth century. Blackpool Corporation welcomed the removal of the older unlicensed beach traders and the arrival of increasingly sophisticated electrical rides. Following a land deal agreed upon between the two parties, Blackpool Council, during the 1920s and 1930s, matched private investment within Blackpool Pleasure Beach with public investment in a municipal promenade extension. A similar partnership approach was evident when Leonard Thompson took ownership of Morecambe's Figure Eight Park at the end of the 1930s. Although this facilitated the Park's modernisation, Blackpool Pleasure Beach was prioritised and enjoyed the lion's share of investment in the following decades. For this reason, Morecambe and Heysham Council committed public resources to its own rival attractions. This was not considered necessary by Blackpool Council, as the Pleasure Beach continued to expand with new innovations and attractions. This meant that with reorganisation in the early 1970s, the level of local government commitment to attractions across the resorts was markedly different.

As with the traditional summer show, seaside amusement parks were in financial trouble by the late twentieth century. While Wood has provided a general explanation for why this happened across English resorts, related to rising land and property prices, this does not explain the fortunes of Lancashire's seaside amusement parks.²⁴ As with other attractions, the fortunes of Blackpool and Morecambe's parks were more closely related to local factors, especially the relationship between local government and their owners. The nature of the ownership of these parks and their relationship with their local authorities determined their fates. Blackpool Pleasure Beach maintained the support of the local authority in a way that Morecambe Pleasure Park/Frontierland did not. A gradually deteriorating relationship between Lancaster City Council and the owners of Frontierland led to the 'Blobbygate' disaster and Frontierland's closure at the end of the 1990s. The impact of 'Blobbygate' was the culmination of a series of short-term, reactive decisions by Lancaster City Council that undermined the long-term future of Morecambe as a tourist destination. More than the external pressures outlined by Bingham, this explains the collapse of the resort's tourism market. As indicated in the District Auditors' report, it undermined the credibility of both authority and resort. As well as being a failure in its own right, 'Blobbygate' also hastened the loss of other tourist attractions, such as Frontierland and Illuminations. In contrast, under local ownership and in partnership with Blackpool Council, Blackpool Pleasure Beach continued to invest heavily in new attractions, demonstrating the importance of the strong relationship between local government and private enterprises in the resort. In addition, Blackpool Pleasure Beach and the Council have offered special packages that include admission to multiple attractions, benefitting the wider resort.

There is a strong relationship between these aspects of seaside entertainment and the holiday accommodation provided in each resort. The two are interconnected because seaside entertainment is usually close to holiday accommodation, so tourists can easily access these activities and attractions. In addition to those involved in the entertainment industry, local policymaking was also influenced by the proprietors of holiday accommodation. In an era of growth, this primarily involved supporting attractions, amenities and events that would bring tourists to the resort and regulating

²⁴ Jason Wood, *Amusement Park: History, Culture and the Heritage of Pleasure*. (Abingdon-on-Thames, Routledge, 2018), p. 5.

holiday accommodation. Through the lobbying of their associations or election to the local authority, hotel owners constituted a powerful voice in Blackpool, Morecambe, and Lytham St Annes. Although officials representing local authorities were keen to point out that they were not responsible for the practices of those running establishments in their resort, pressure could be applied to those failing to provide an adequate service. The primary sanction was exclusion from the municipally produced holiday guide, which, in the pre-digital age, was the most common way for tourists to research and book accommodation. The approval of an association by meeting specific minimum standards could also be a requirement for entry into holiday guides. It is clear that because of this regulation, some establishments where visitors were staying did not appear in the guides, making it difficult to quantify the precise capacity of each resort in any given year. In addition, despite efforts to improve the standard of accommodation after the Second World War, the levels of investment fell well short of what was required to meet rising expectations. The impact of this was felt at both ends of the tourist market. Cheaper boarding house accommodation failed to meet rising tourist expectations, and grand hotels were deemed too large and expensive to be modernised. With fewer staying visitors from the 1960s onwards, each resort authority faced the challenge of unwanted surplus holiday accommodation. Rising business failures began to weaken the voice of the hotel industry within local government.

With fewer tourist attractions and changing transport and holiday patterns, the number of staying visitors continued to fall throughout the last decades of the twentieth century. In the 1970s, Stallibrass had shown the importance of local authority decisions in the holiday accommodation industry and the physical environment of a resort.²⁵ With the decline of staying visits in English resorts since then, this role has become more, rather than less necessary. However, as Clegg and Essex demonstrated by the end of the twentieth century, poor standards in holiday accommodation were typical.²⁶ Tackling this legacy of underinvestment an essential part of resort regeneration. Although, local authorities were slow to meet this challenge, action is now being taken. Blackpool and Morecambe were left with a large surplus of hotels and boarding houses, most of which

²⁵ Chloe Stallibrass, 'Seaside Resorts and the Holiday Accommodation Industry: A Case Study of Scarborough', *Progress in Planning*, 13.2 (1980), 103–74 (pp. 109–10).

²⁶ Andrew Clegg and Stephen Essex, 'Restructuring in Tourism: The Accommodation Sector in a Major British Coastal Resort', *The International Journal of Tourism Research*, 2.2 (2000), 77.

no longer met the expectations of tourists. Although Morecambe had a smaller range of holiday accommodation than Blackpool, the reduction in staying visitor numbers came earlier and was more dramatic. In both resorts, with little demand for former holiday accommodation, holiday properties became HMOs, creating zones of marked deprivation. Although these trends also affected Lytham St Annes, the more buoyant property market meant that former hotels and guesthouses were quickly repurposed as retirement homes and flats. Local authorities can address these issues with more coordinated action and strategic planning. Responding to the changing demands for holiday accommodation while meeting the needs of socially excluded residents is one of the most critical challenges for both Blackpool and Morecambe's local authorities. The need for an active and effective local government has increased and is essential in successfully implementing resort regeneration and renewal.

Based upon the experience of Lancashire's major seaside resorts, local authorities should consider the following multi-layered strategy for regeneration:

- The preservation and modernisation of key historical assets. As shown in Blackpool, local authorities can invest in preservation while also modernising to meet current standards and visitor expectations.
- Effective public-private partnerships. These are crucial for securing the necessary investment for regeneration projects. This collaboration will also ensure a sustainable approach to development.
- Community engagement is also essential. Involving local communities in decision-making and implementation can foster a sense of ownership and civic pride.
- Local authorities should also consider hosting festivals and live entertainment events that highlight the region's cultural offer. As shown in both Morecambe and Lytham St Annes, these not only promote tourism but also support local artists and businesses.
- All of this must be underpinned by adequate investment in public infrastructure. For regeneration projects to succeed, they must be accompanied with improvements in public transport, pedestrian pathways and other amenities to enhance the visitor experience.

- Finally, developments must be environmentally sustainable and embrace their coastal location, not only as a selling point for visitors but also to serve the local community in the long term.

Each of these components contributes to the overall regeneration of a resort. A successful strategy should incorporate these elements and be tailored to the specific needs and characteristics of the resort.

Analysing the role of local government within these Lancashire resorts is critical in understanding their past and planning their future. Through exploring this regional history of Lancashire's resorts, English local government, and the dynamics and development of seaside resorts, lessons from previous failures can be learned to support regeneration plans in the future. Rather than the product of purely exogenous forces, the actions of local authorities explain the success and failure of these resorts as tourist destinations to a significant degree. Although there is not a single magic bullet to the challenges facing Lancashire's seaside resorts, there should be an increased emphasis on reconnecting with their coastal locations and celebrating historic infrastructure. As a result, new attractions, such as the Eden Project Morecambe, can promote economic renewal and enhance local civic pride in these seaside towns. Across Lancashire, where visitor numbers are recovering, an approach that embraces a resort's heritage and coastal location is required. As in Blackpool, a declinist view should be rejected, and local government should work effectively in partnership with other agencies and the private sector. English seaside towns are now the focus of significant cultural regeneration activity, but as in the past, success will depend to a significant degree on effective local governance. Lancashire's seaside resorts have a rich history and unique attractions that, if properly managed, can attract new generations of visitors. The role of local government will be key in navigating this balance between the past and the future.

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