

City Management Newsletter

Northgate reschedules to survive the Credit Crunch

ING Real Estate and Chester City Council confirmed that the £460m Northgate Development will be put on hold to ensure it does not suffer as a result of continued economic uncertainty but have reaffirmed their commitment to delivering the £460m regeneration project.

The largest development project in Chester, work on Northgate Development is now expected to start in 2012. However, ING Real Estate will continue its discussions with potential investment partners to secure a preferred developer towards the end of 2008.

During the interim period, Chester City Council is working in partnership with Chester Renaissance and other agencies to explore ways to continue to improve the City Centre and invest in the existing site. This will include additional cultural events which will be held at different venues across the city.

Cllr Stuart Parker, executive member for development at Chester City Council said: "The credit crunch continues to affect schemes across the UK and it makes sense to postpone the development until the market begins to recover. The scheme remains very much alive and both the City Council and ING Real Estate are dedicated to delivering a new and vibrant quarter for Chester through the Northgate Development."

The decision to delay will enable the partners to undertake a full review of the project to ensure that it will meet the needs of the City once the market recovers.

Chester fights back

Obviously we are delighted with the support that the City Council has shown us by extending Free after 3 until the end of March next year when their tenure ends. We are also pleased they have shown further support for BrookSt traders by including St Anne's car park in the participating sites. With footfall figures in December now back to the national average of around 4.5-5% down year on year from their highs of -12-14% of earlier in the year I think we can safely say that fighting back with our many programmes of entertainment and festivals in conjunction with our parking assistance has really made a difference.

However, now is not the time to rest; now is the time to forge on. I fear the economy is in danger of talking itself deeper in to recession and we at City Management believe that now is the time to be aggressive with our marketing and be confident that we can make the most of the opportunities that will appear rather than become a shrinking violet.

Recent interest rate cuts have put about £200 a month extra in the average mortgage payers pay packet and with petrol now down from its highs of £1.10 a litre to just over 90p the average motorist is spending £10 a week less to fill the car up putting an extra £30 back in to their pockets. That's about £230 per household more available to spend - with the prospect of more rate cuts to follow.

So I would argue now is not the time to pull back from the market place, now is the time to be out there. People have had enough of this belt tightening. Remember we all knew a year ago that recession was here and retail is the first area hit. Logically we will be the first out of recession also. So let's be ready.

Our Christmas campaign is going very well. 80,000 A4 full colour magazines advertising Chester hit our target market in recent weeks, 5,000 people attended the lights switch on, we have a festival or event every Thursday night from here until Christmas, Fashion shows in Eastgate St in December (have you booked yours yet?), 400 advertisements on radio and much much more, with over 60 shops taking part in our Window Dressing competition the city will really look wonderful.

So, come on everyone, let's get Chester really buzzing with solid sales and a real fizz to our service. We will be launching our big programme for 2009 shortly and we will do our bit to keep moving the city forward. I hope we can count on your support to do even more in 2009.

Happy Christmas to all and good trading.



David Pickering
Chairman,
Chester City Management

Chester Renaissance Appoints Chief Executive

Rita Waters has taken up her role as Chief Executive of Chester Renaissance. Rita joins us from the Liverpool Business Improvement District, where she was also Chief Executive. Rita will work closely with the public and private sector in Chester to secure effective partnerships, funding and participation in projects that will bring increased pride in the city and ensure the city is a wonderful place to live or visit and an outstanding setting for businesses.



Chester Renaissance Project Update

In spite of the credit crunch major developers are continuing to invest in Chester and are committed to completion. Although Chester has been affected by the economic downturn in particular the housing and office market other developments are continuing. Here is an update to keep you informed about these developments which are contributing to Chester Renaissance.

Liberty HQ

HQ development overlooking the racecourse progresses well and most of the apartments are sold. The development will include the Abode Hotel and is due to open Nov 09.

Delamere Street

Delamere Street mixed used development continues with expected completion in 2010.

Northgate Development

ING Real Estate, have reaffirmed their commitment to delivering the £460m regeneration project. The largest development project in Chester, work is now expected to start in 2012, with an interim package of works currently being developed.

Amphitheatre Park

Chester City Council is preparing an improvement programme for the Amphitheatre Park area to encourage better use and improve the visitor experience (the amphitheatre park includes Grosvenor Park, Amphitheatre, St Johns and the Roman Gardens). Decisions on priorities will be taken in early 2009 with a view to start works shortly afterwards.

Although the Parks for People bid for Grosvenor Park was not successful there is some funding available to improve the park and officers are in discussions with the Friends of Grosvenor Park to prioritise work for 2009.

Chester City Council continues to discuss the long term future of the Amphitheatre with English Heritage. In the mean time both organisations are keen to improve the interpretation of the site for all visitors.

Cycle Chester

A joint team of Chester City and Cheshire County staff are developing a program for the next two years. The three main areas of activity will be

- Improving infrastructure
- Encouraging participation and training
- Marketing and promotion of cycling and walking

Funding so far includes £1.25 million from Sustrans, £2.4 million from Cycling England and £1.2 million from the North West Development agency.

Chester City Walls

The final phase of works to stabilise the collapsed section of city walls is now complete. The work will included installation of props and anchors to support the internal face of the wall and stop any further risk of immediate collapse. As part of this work, scaffolding has been erected to allow access onto the site for workmen who will eventually reconstruct the walls next year.

Earlier this month work started on laser scanning and radar survey of the collapsed section of the City Walls. This will help us to better understand the reasons for the wall collapse and predict any weak spots. This information will be used to develop proposals for the dismantling and reconstruction of the wall.

Works to restore the wall are expected to start in spring 2009. Engineers are investigating the possibility of installing a visitor walkway around the collapsed length of wall.

A submission to English Heritage is being made to contribute to the cost of removing vegetation on the City Walls. A decision is likely to be made before the end of March.

Town Hall Refurbishments

Good progress has been made on the external works to the town hall and include the renewal of roof coverings, eroding stonework, loose balustrades and rotten window frames. Some additional work has been identified, but

these have been included in the external repairs contract.

The repair works is likely to take four weeks longer than originally planned due to the inclement weather in the summer. Works are due to end on the 10 April with removal of the scaffolding starting at the end of March.

Internal works will start in April and will include decoration and installation of a new lift and is due to be completed in September 2009.

Queen Hotel

Opening of the £15 million King's suites a magnificent 87 bedroom extension to the luxury Queen Hotel at the station (October 2008).


Performing Arts

Chester City Council is currently looking into a number of important measures which will improve its general appearance, assist businesses operating within the area and address the absence of the Performing Arts Centre.

The Council is also currently considering the provision of an interim performing arts venue, pending the development of a new centre within the Northgate scheme. The venue, which may either be within existing facilities or a new, modern temporary multi-purpose arena, will also be delivered in-line with an enhanced performing arts programme.

The Council is committed to the Northgate Development and we understand the importance of ensuring that the site retains its economic vitality. The proposed interim measures will aim to make the site more aesthetically appealing but will also provide the City with an alternative performing arts space – which we recognise is important to both the local community and in attracting visitors to Chester.

The proposed measures also include improvements to various car parks, the Market Hall and bus station, general greening of the area, new Public Art and potential public realm improvements to the Town Hall Square and St Werburgh Street area.



Multi-Agency enforcement days hailed a great success

Enforcement officers from Chester City Council's community safety wardens teamed up with police community support officers, fire officers and environmental health regulators recently to tackle environmental issues in the city centre.

A total of 19 fixed penalty notices were issued for littering, with each offender ordered to pay a £50 fine or risk prosecution. Most of those caught were smokers discarding their cigarette butts, many still not realising that this constituted littering.

As well as fining the litter louts, smokers were given 'stubbis' – small foil-lined pouches used to dispose of butts where bins are unavailable.

More than 80 businesses were visited about issues to do with storing waste and the amount of litter caused by patrons in around their premises. As well as creating an eyesore, unsecured waste in wheelie bins can be a target for arsonists, provide bedding material for rough sleepers and food for vermin.

Community Fire Protection Manager for West Cheshire at Cheshire Fire & Rescue Service, Steve Gibbins said: "This is an excellent example of how partnership

working can really make our community safer."

Officers also spoke to bus drivers requesting engines be turned off when stationary. Smokers in bus shelters and on the Rows were also reminded that these are no-smoking areas.

Environment portfolio holder for Chester City Council, Councillor Jill Houlbrook and Councillor Pat Lott, Chairman of the environment scrutiny committee accompanied officers during the patrols.

Councillor Houlbrook said: "The more we spread the message that we will not tolerate the dropping of litter of any sort, the sooner we can all enjoy an improved environment.

"To drive home this message further enforcement are days planned for the coming months. The teams worked very hard and I would like to record my thanks for the dedication shown by everyone involved."

Anti Begging Initiative Launched in Chester

An anti-begging initiative has been launched in Chester. Look out for posters and leaflets raising awareness of the campaign which aims to reduce the number of people giving money directly to beggars, and get the message across that money given is likely to be used for buying drugs and alcohol.

The agencies organisations, involved in the campaign such as Chester Aid to the Homeless and Chester Community Safety Partnership are working together to reduce the number of street beggars and the associated anti-social behaviour on our city streets.

The city council understands that many people want to help people who beg for money, but wants to encourage the giving of money to established organisations that can really help and support vulnerable individuals.

Posters supporting the campaign will be put up in car parks and the city's bus station shelters. Campaign beer mats will be distributed by Chester's Pub Watch members in many of the city's pubs and bars to back up the message.

Chester Aid to the Homeless said "Donating to CATH allows us to help homeless people help themselves."

If people would like to offer donations you can contact Ashley Morgan on 01244 314834.

Local Retailers take part in plastic bag free day

Local retailers, university students and recycling officers are celebrating following the success of Chester's first Plastic Bag Free Day.

Local businesses back the Carry-a-Bag campaign by providing customers with free Bags-for-Life, supplied by Recycle for Cheshire, instead of handing out plastic bags. Customers were delighted to receive a reusable bag with their purchases. Feedback also showed that many people had made a special effort to take their own bags for their shopping, avoiding the need to gather numerous carrier bags.

Dave Gore of 'Sail and Ski' on Pepper Street said: 'We found the day to be very worthwhile and the response from our customers' was really positive.'

The following shops took part in Plastic Bag Free Day:

- The Body Shop
- Next (Children's wear)
- Sail and Ski
- Baby Acorns
- Edinburgh Woollen Mill
- Chester Cathedral
- Publishers Book Clearance
- Thomas William
- The Cheese Shop
- Chester Wickes
- Scatchards of Chester

**Please don't
give to beggars**

Do you really know where your money goes?

**You can help by giving
to local charities.**



Chester Bucking the Trend

The Association of Town Centre Management reports that the annual change in footfall in Regional cities for October 07 to Oct 08 show a 7.1% decline, for September 07 to September 08 a 12.6% decline. Figures reported to Chester City Management show that footfall declined on average by between 4 to 5% in October, a figure less than the regional cities average.

The latest British Retail Consortium - KPMG Retail Sales Monitor showed total sales in November dropped 0.4% year on year. Sales also fell 2.6% on a like for like basis, the sixth consecutive month of decline. Food and drink was the only sector to see sales rise in November compared with a year ago.

The big retailers are introducing longer opening hours, one-day mega sales, cheaper prices and early VAT reduced prices in an aggressive attempt to attract the consumer's Christmas spend, halt the overall national decline in spending and give the retailer some Christmas cheer. According to a report from Deloitte, the average UK consumer is planning to spend on average 7% less than last year, including spend on socialising (the first drop for five years). Many customers are planning to trade down to cheaper brands and margins are bound to be affected across the board.

National sales figures for October as reported by the British Retailing Consortium show that not only did like for like sales fall by 2.2% annually in October, but total sales fell for the first time in over three years.

The Deloitte study points out that one possible strategy is to target those people who seem determined to spend money, notably 16-24 year olds: 49% of young people in this age range were planning to have a good time at Christmas as many within this category do not have the pressures on their income such as mortgage payments and fuel bills, so they will spending this Christmas.

Chester Against Business Crime helping reduce crime and fear of crime

Chester Against Business Crime (CABC), a City Management Initiative is now in its third year and is a major contributory factor in the reduction of crime and the fear of crime in the City Centre.

It works closely with the Police and the City Council Community Safety Wardens to drive down crime and anti-social behaviour in Chester. There are now over 170 businesses as members including retail shops, offices, pubs and clubs. They all benefit from a two way radio linking them directly to the CCTV control room that has 109 cameras located around the City, this link is also carried by police officers and PCSO's. Its main role is to gather and exchange information on those that wish to commit theft and anti social behaviour within the City. This information is shared with other members and similar schemes in the North West.

Some businesses, particularly in the retail sector are concerned about travelling criminals from surrounding cities and towns, CABC works with other

schemes regionally to share information and combat this particular problem.

CABC allows the businesses in Chester to be directly involved in the ASBO process, information and intelligence submitted by them is often used to back up information gathered by the police in order to gain ASBO's on those individuals determined to cause anti-social behaviour on our streets. CABC has also set up an exclusion scheme. This means that those that are caught for shop theft in Chester or causing anti-social behaviour are served by a notice from the police banning them from entering all member premises. This has been a very effective crime prevention tool. For those wishing to part of this successful scheme please contact Bob Lelliott, Business Crime Manager on 01244 403615 for further information.

Dates for the Diary:

Small & Independent Traders Meeting

Every last Tuesday in the month at Bishop Lloyd's Palace, Watergate Row

5.45pm Tuesday 26th January

5.45pm Tuesday 24th February

Chester Against Business Crime

Members Meeting at Chester Cathedral

10.30am every Wednesday

Sealand Road Area Retailers Meeting

Held every last Thursday of the month at Tesco

10am Thursday 29th January

10am Thursday 26th February

Useful Contacts

Chester Customer Contact Centre

Litter, graffiti, fly tipping, pigeons and community safety issues

T: 01244 402477

E: customer.contact@chester.gov.uk

Chester Against Business Crime

T: 01244 403615

E: r.elliott@chester.gov.uk

Chester City Management

T: 402047

www.chesterccm.org

E: roz.munslow@chester.gov.uk

Police

T: 0845 458 6384

Chester City Council Building Design & Conservation - *Help and advice for signage, repairs and conservation issues.*

T: 01244 402327

Chester City Council Community Safety Wardens

T: 01244 402477

E: customer.contact@chester.gov.uk

Chester City Council Licensing Team

T: 01244 402138

E: licensing@chester.gov.uk

The New Year will see Pay on Exit introduced in Chester's Market Car Park.

From 5th January customers entering from Princess Street will use Pay on Exit. However, 2 levels will remain pay and display so Charisma passes can still used, and for this entry to the car park must be directly from St Martins Way. *Remember*, Free After Three will also be in operation in the whole car park until end of March 2009 at Market car park along with Gorse Stacks and St Anne's car parks.