HMV partners with Curzon for new cinema concept

By Pete Hayman

Music retailer HMV has unveiled plans to launch a new cinema concept later this year in partnership with film distributor and operator of the Curzon Cinema chain, Curzon Artificial Eye (CAE).

It is expected that the hmvcurzon concept, which will be piloted at the HMV store in Wimbledon, South London, in the autumn, will offer more than 200 seats across three screens situated on the store's unused second floor.

The cinema will feature a café-bar and a merchandise area and will be equipped with the latest digital film technology. A dedicated entrance will enable film-goers to access the cinema outside of the store’s normal trading hours.

HMV hopes to be able to roll-out the hmvcurzon concept to more locations across the country, although expansion plans will depend upon the success of the Wimbledon pilot.

Simon Fox, chief executive of the HMV Group, said: “Millions of film fans visit HMV's high street stores each year, making them an ideal destination for this new cinema experience.

“This exciting partnership with Curzon Artificial Eye complements our recent joint venture for live music, and further demonstrates our commitment to getting our customers closer to the film and entertainment content they love.”

CAE chief executive, Phillip Knatchbull, added that the company will be “interacting and reacting” to its customers' when choosing programming.

The news comes just months after HMV formed a joint venture with live music venue operator MAMA Group.

Work starts on new Leeds dance and arts centre

£12m venue set to house Northern Ballet Theatre and Phoenix Dance Theatre

By Pete Hayman

Work is now underway on a new £12m centre of excellence for dance in Leeds, which will become the new home of the Northern Ballet Theatre and the Phoenix Dance Theatre.

The new six-storey venue, designed by the Strategic Design Alliance, a partnership between Leeds City Council’s (LCC) in-house architectural consultancy and Jacobs Architecture, will also house Leeds Metropolitan University’s new dance degree courses.

The centre is set to host new dance degree courses

Facilities at the centre, which is expected to open in summer 2010, will include seven dance studios, a 230-seat studio theatre, a public viewing gallery and a café, as well as a costume workshop.

LCC has committed £6.7m towards the new centre, including a contribution from Yorkshire Forward, while Arts Council England, Yorkshire, has invested £3.5m. A fundraising campaign to source the remaining £1.5m has also now secured more than £1m.

The building will provide one of the largest dance spaces outside of London, and is being constructed next to the West Yorkshire Playhouse.

New grandstand opens at Epsom

A new 11,000-capacity grandstand has been officially opened at Epsom Downs Racecourse in Surrey by the Duchess of Cornwall, marking the completion of a three-year, £38m revamp scheme.

The Duchess Stand has been designed to cater for both racing and non-racing events throughout the year, and includes the 1,123sq m (12,088sq ft) Oaks Hall, which can be used as an 800-seat conference venue.
NEWS FEATURE

New report outlines legacy plans

Following the announcement of a new £30m pot to help grow grassroots sports in London, Leisure Opportunities investigates how the London mayor Boris Johnson plans to increase participation and create a lasting legacy from the 2012 Olympic Games.

With just over three years to go until the Games start, the mayor has started announcing plans to establish the infrastructure for a lasting legacy, most recently his intention to generate match funding for the £15.5m he allocated to grassroots sports during the Beijing Olympics. Designed to encourage a sustainable increase in sports participation, the ring-fenced £15.5m will be allocated to existing and new programmes across London – on the condition that recipients match the funding so at least £30m will be spent on implementing the plans.

As well as upgrading the capital’s sporting infrastructure, the mayor hopes to combat child obesity by focusing on getting Londoners of all ages involved in some sort of physical activity. According to the plan detailing the initiative, A Sporting Future for London, almost half the capital’s population is classified as ‘inactive’ (less than 30 minutes exercise a week) and one in five youngsters are obese, costing the city’s economy £105m each year according to NHS London.

The mayor also promises to invest in new facilities to fund refurbishments – principally focused on small, community, park or estate-based projects. Mobile swimming pools, outdoor ‘Green Gym’, free-use of tennis courts, boxing academies, street athletics in all 33 of the London boroughs are also proposed in the plan.

It is hoped that anchored by the success of the Olympics must not be judged on deciding on the awards. Johnson is also considering the removal of temporary venues and MPC are given the green light to make use of existing walkways and MPC are given the green light to make use of existing walkways.

A senior government design advisor has warned that the fixtures could leave “huge gaping holes” in London-wide panels assess applications before the awards. Johnson is also considering the removal of temporary venues and MPC are given the green light to make use of existing walkways.

Fears over an Olympic Park ‘wasteland’

By Pete Hayman

The planned media facilities have been likened to sheds by CABE’s Kate Hoey, who will work with the GLA (Greater London Authority) Sports Unit to develop detailed action plans and timescales.

Johnson said: “We have a unique opportunity to set in place a lasting legacy for sport provision across the capital. The success of the Olympics must not be judged on whether by foot or by pedal, people that use the route will be able to enjoy some of London’s best parks and most wonderful waterways. Few capitals of the world can boast such a superb asset for walkers and cyclists.”

Speaking about the proposals for the London 2012 media facilities, Finch said: “Unless there is a fundamental rethink, then people could be forgiven for wondering why sheds have been removed from the Lower Lea Valley in the name of high quality urban regeneration, only to be reinstated on a much larger scale.”

If detailed designs for the IBC and MPC are given the green light – a decision which is expected on 9 June – CABE is urging planners to ensure that it comes with the condition that the architecture is improved.

Julie Greenfield to link London’s Olympic sites

By Pete Hayman

A new 60km (37.3-mile) cycling and walking route, connecting each of the nine London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic venues, has been launched by the Duke of Gloucester.

The route has been devised by The Jubilee Walkway Trust (JWT), which created the original Jubilee Walkway to commemorate the Queen’s Silver Jubilee in 1977, and will make use of existing walkways and cycle paths.

A number of London’s visitor attractions and iconic landmarks are also included as part of the Jubilee Greenfield project.

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£14m disability sports centre opens

New facilities equipped to cater for members with sight loss and non-disabled users

By Caroline Wilkinson

A new £14m sports and complementary therapy centre has been opened at the Royal National College for the Blind in Herford as part of a £23.5m campus redevelopment project. The 5,680sq m (£13.9m) centre, called thePoint4, has been created to improve the education and training for people with sight loss. The new facilities feature an IFI Stage 2-accredited, Cybex-equipped gym for students training to work in the fitness industry as well as a community gym, open to students and members, boasting a total of 75 stations. In addition, there are also two spa rooms, a fitness pool, massage facilities, conference and meeting rooms, and a licensed restaurant. To cater for the visually impaired users, and as part of the college’s aim to become IFI accredited, the facility offers tactile landmarks on the stairwalls, floors and skirting to aid with navigation and tactile entry and wheelchair access. There will also be six information points installed to aid navigation and to help understanding of the equipment for disabled members. Centre manager, Chris Combe, said: “We want to create a model of excellence for working with the blind and partially sighted and other disabilities. For those who aren’t confident in a gym environment, we can exercise with them in our smaller training gym initially and then, when they feel able, they can be fed into the main gym to work along- side the other members.” Monthly memberships start at £19 for disabled users and £49 for full membership.

Queens Park Leisure plans approved

The £3.6m project includes the redevelopment of the original 118-year-old building

By Helen Patnall

St Helens Council has approved designs produced by architects Poulson for a new leisure centre in Merseyside. The £3.6m project will see all but the existing sports hall at Queens Park Leisure Centre demolished in order to make way for a completely new facility on the same site. The new facility will house a five-lane, 25m swimming pool with steam and sauna facilities, two-storey gym, sports courts and a changing village. The existing sports hall, which is relatively modern compared with the Victorian baths, will be refurbished to provide new fitness studios and a multi-purpose function room, as well as a new café overlook- ing the swimming pool. Following public consulta- tions, the 13-month construc- tion project is expected to kick off in June. A private developer also plans to build a 1.8m soccer centre, offering third-genera- tion five-a-side and seven-a- side floodlit synthetic pitches, next to the new facility. The council rejected plans for a full revamp of the 118-year-old building on the grounds that it was not as cost-effective.

Nottingham gets a new outdoor gym for all ages

By Pete Hayman

A new outdoor gym, including a traversing wall, a basketball hoop, a football goal and a dance area, has been unveiled at the Forest Recreation Ground in Nottingham. Suitable for all ages and particularly targeted at young people, the new equipment has been funded by a £95,000 grant from NHS Nottingham City, which has been working in partnership with Nottingham City Council (NCC) on the venture. Dave Trimble, NCC councillor responsible for sports, leisure and parks, said: “With rising obesity levels and inactivity, the outdoor gym will create a safe and inclusive environment for free exercise.” John Wilcox, health promo- tion co-ordinator at the NHS, added: “Outdoor areas, such as parks, are part of our strategy to help people lead more active lives to improve health and wellbeing.”

The council has opted to build a new facility including a 25m pool as well as a new café overlook- ing the swimming pool. Following public consulta- tions, the 13-month construc- tion project is expected to kick off in June. A private developer also plans to build a 1.8m soccer centre, offering third-genera- tion five-a-side and seven-a- side floodlit synthetic pitches, next to the new facility. The council rejected plans for a full revamp of the 118-year-old building on the grounds that it was not as cost-effective.

New outdoor gym for seniors

Herne and Broomfield Parish Council has launched an outdoor gym facility designed specifically for senior citizens at the Cherry Orchard Playing Field in Herne, near Herne Bay, Kent. Seven pieces of gym equipment, including sit-up benches, triple pull-up bars and a pull-down exerciser, have been installed and can be used by anyone over 12 years old. The new equipment, designed by Wickstead, has been sponsored by Awards for All and the Co-op-4-Community Fund.

Green light for Nottingham plans

By Pete Hayman

Plans for a new £9.2m leisure centre in Nottingham have been given the go-ahead by the city’s executive board, following a feasibility study that ruled that the scheme was the most cost-effective option. The decision by Nottingham City Council’s executive board now means that the historic Victoria Leisure Centre at Sneinton Market will be demolished to make way for the new facility, which could be ready to open by June 2012. Detailed designs will now be drawn up to include a six-lane swimming pool with separate children’s pool and fun splash play area, a fitness and health suite incorporating a sauna and gym facilities. The site’s existing clock tower will be retained as part of the proposals, which were one of three options presented to the council by consultants Levitate. Plans to upgrade existing facilities were rejected due to cost and efficiency.

The facility will replace the existing Victoria Leisure Centre and will receive a new health suite incorporating a sauna and gym facilities. The site’s existing clock tower will be retained as part of the proposals, which were one of three options presented to the council by consultants Levitate. Plans to upgrade existing facilities were rejected due to cost and efficiency.

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New community gym opens in Rochdale, Manchester

LinkLife, the trust that delivers leisure and cultural services on behalf of Rochdale Metropolitan Borough Council, has opened a new fitness suite at the Kirkholm Youth & Community Centre in Rochdale, Manchester. The new gym is equipped with a range of CV and strength equipment as well as free weights supplied by Matrix. Funding for the gym was secured from the Sport England Community Investment Fund by Rochdale Borough Wide Sport & Physical Activity Alliance in partner- ship with Rochdale Youth Services, Kirkholt Tenants and Residents Association and Link4Life.
Sheffield United unveils stadium plans

First phase of development proposals set to increase venue’s capacity by 3,200

By Tom Walker

Sheffield United Football Club has submitted plans for the first phase of the redevelopment of its Bramall Lane stadium to Sheffield City Council. Phase one of the scheme will see the extension of the Frasers Property Kop to increase its capacity by more than 3,200 seats – resulting in the overall capacity increasing to 37,000. A planning application for phase two of the development is expected to be submitted in the near future and it is understood that the proposals will include the extension of the Valad Stand and development of new executive boxes and disabled facilities in the car park, ultimately taking the potential capacity to more than 40,000.

£17.6m Scotstoun Stadium to open by end of year

By Luke Tuchscherer

The £17.6m redevelopment of Scotstoun Stadium in Glasgow is expected to be completed this autumn, and the facility will now be host to the city’s only professional rugby team. Facilities at the stadium, which will be used as a training ground for the Glasgow Warriors rugby team, include a grass training pitch, a 3G all-weather training pitch, a strength and conditioning suite, a 100m indoor running track, a physiotherapy suite, and a meeting/video analysis room.

2012 Olympic rowing venue contractor appointed

Morrison Construction has been appointed to build enhanced and canoe sprint facilities for the 2012 Olympics at the Eton College Rowing School at Dorney Lake near Windsor, Berkshire. The UK-based company was selected by the Olympic Delivery Authority (ODA) to upgrade the venue in time for the Games, which currently comprise a 2,000m, eight-lane rowing lake, a return lane and associated competition facilities. A new £50m (164ft) bridge will be installed over a widened entrance to the return lane to improve access, while a cut-through between the competition lane and return lane will be built.

Multi-million pound windfall for Devon

Councillors approve spending plans for the development of new sporting facilities

By Caroline Wilkinson

Devon County Council (DCC) has approved a £10.7m cash boost to improve sports facilities across the county. Part of the funds, generated from the £48m sale of Exeter City Football Club, are earmarked for the first phase of development of a £20m dual-use centre for sporting excellence. The centre will also be used by Teign School, which is currently without its own facilities, and is set to feature a swimming pool, a 12-court sports hall with an adjacent gymnasium centre, an indoor bowling facility, a fitness suite and a climbing zone. Planned outdoor facilities include an athletics track, cricket pitch, BMX Track, velodrome and an artificial turf football and hockey pitch. Councillors have also set aside £2.5m for a new sports centre for Teignmouth Community College and a further £2.7m to help fund a new water sports and activity centre at Haven Banks in Exeter.

Wildcats’ stadium plans unveiled

By Pete Rayman

Yorkcourt Properties has revealed plans for a new 12,000-capacity stadium to safeguard Wakefield Wildcats’ Rugby League Football Club’s Super League status. The new venue will replace the existing Belle Vue ground, which has been the club’s home since 1878 but no longer meets the Super League’s minimum requirements.

Proposals for the new dual-use complex include athletics facilities, a 50m swimming pool, a sports hall with adjoining gym, indoor cricket, five-a-side football, and an expanded bar for spectators.
**In Brief**

**Plans revealed for Govanhill spa centre**
- The historic Govanhill Baths on Calder Street in Glasgow may be transformed into a £12.5m wellbeing centre and spa, following its closure by the council in 2001. Designs by NORD Architecture include refurbishments of the two existing swimming pools and the retention of 12 of the original private baths. A new 120sq m (1,290sq ft) spa area will comprise a sauna and a hamman, as well as a hydrotherapy pool with a lounge. If approved, the Govanhill Wellbeing and Health Centre is expected to open on March 2011.

**Knock Castle revamp reaches second phase**
- Redevelopment work on the Knock Castle hotel and spa in Crieff, Perthshire, has reached the second phase. The £3.5m revamp’s second phase included the creation of a dedicated spa wing, housing treatment rooms as well as a relaxation area. The leisure area containing the swimming pool, spa pool and steamroom were also upgraded. The baronial mansion is owned by Scottish company The Henderson Group.

**Carlton Institute opens new training centres**
- A number of training centres are to open as part of an expansion of the UK-based skills training provider The Carlton Institute. The company, which is under new ownership, is extending the number of training centres across the country from two to seven locations, in order to meet the rising demand. Owner of the Carlton Institute, Suki Kalirai, said: “Demand for fast-track courses that get individuals into work quickly or build their skills is growing.”

**Aromatherapy Associates develops signature line**
- From June 2009, a new range of signature therapies and products will be introduced to spas in many properties around the world within The Mandarin Oriental Hotel Group (MOHG). The Mandarin Oriental Signature Spa Therapies have been created in consultation with specialists in Traditional Chinese Medicine and master aromatherapists. Each signature therapy will consist of a body massage ritual that combines oriental meridian massage with custom-blended essential oils, created specially for MOHG to then be tailored to each guest. The signature product line has been developed by Aromatherapy Associates. Paraben-free, each product has been created according to the Oriental principles of five elements – namely, wood, fire, earth, metal and water. Products, which include a range of candles and travel-size oils, can be purchased at Mandarin Oriental spas.

**ISPA releases new Global Best Practices guide**
- The International Spa Association (ISPA) has released a list of Global Best Practices and conducted a study to help ensure that all member spas provide quality service to their guests. The document is intended to act as a checklist for facilities and was created by a taskforce of spa industry professionals. ISPA president Lynne McNeer said: “Two years ago, we introduced the ISPA Code of Conduct, which helped open the door to developing a Global Best Practices guide. “Consumers are very savvy on what constitutes a spa experience and we are ensuring our members are equipped to meet their needs.”

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**Inaugural Grayshott Studio Spa opens**

The new spa is part of the offerings at the Tudor stately home hotel Fawsley Hall. The spa is situated in the newly-refurbished Coach House, in close proximity to the main hotel. It boasts six treatment rooms, a hair and pedicure studio, thermal rooms and relaxation areas.

**Aromatherapy Associates develops signature line**

By Sarah Todd

The Grayshott Spa brand has been extended with the opening of the first Grayshott Studio Spa at Fawsley Hall in Northamptonshire, UK. The boutique facility features a handpicked selection of treatments, including pre and post pregnancy therapies, massages, facials, wraps and scrubs. All treatments use Guinot, Aromatherapy Associates, Jane Iredale and Jessica products. The spa is situated in the newly-refurbished Coach House, in close proximity to the main hotel and boasts six treatment rooms, a hair and pedicure studio, thermal rooms and relaxation areas.

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Five-star Heathrow hotel plans approved

The mayor of London, Boris Johnson, has approved plans for a new five-star hotel close to Heathrow Airport. The 13-storey hotel, designed by architects Foster + Partners and being developed by Riva Properties, will contain 577 rooms and six pavilions linked by bridges and an entrance lobby with an elevated glass deck offering views down to the restaurant level and swimming pool. Facilities will include a health suite and gym, a business centre, a 120-capacity ballroom, two auditoriums and a large conference room.

Major revamp planned for Royal Court

Council select committee backs plans for the future of historic Liverpool theatre

By Pete Hayman

Plans for the long-term future of the Grade II listed Royal Court Theatre in Liverpool, which include a multi-million pound refurbishment, have gone before the city council’s Regeneration Select Committee.

‘Talks will now be held between Liverpool City Council and trustees of the 1,250-seat venue in a bid to secure a lease agreement after the select committee admitted that it was impressed with a presentation by the Royal Court Trust outlining its vision for the theatre.

Eddie Klein, chair of the committee, said: ‘There is a definite feeling that we want the theatre to be saved. A theatre has stood at that spot for 100 years and it is part of the arts fabric of Liverpool.

‘Clearly there are issues relating to the refurbishment of the building and its lease, but the committee’s all-party view was that everything possible should be done to help the theatre thrive.”

In March, designs drawn up by architects Allford Hall Monaghan Morris (AHMM) were selected for the theatre’s revamp following an international design competition.

New tips law gets the go-ahead

By Pete Hayman

Work is set to get underway on the restoration of a historic music hall in Shrewsbury, Shropshire, after the scheme secured a £1m grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund.

The Shropshire Portal scheme will include the development of a new, sustainable museum and visitor information centre at the 13th century, Grade II* listed Vaughan’s Mansion, which dates back to 1835.

A new museum will be created and the Grade II listed Music Hall and Assembly Rooms, which include Sutherland’s Graham Sutherland Collection, which is currently used as a theatre and concert hall, also includes Shrewsbury’s 18th century prison cells and a 20th century nuclear bunker.

Architects Austin-Smith:Lord have drawn up designs for the scheme, which will be carried out by Grooms Contractors and has received match funding from Shrewsbury and Atcham Borough Council – now part of the new Shropshire Council unitary authority.

Fall in Lottery revenue threatens Scottish arts

Promotion of the arts in Scotland could be threatened by a decline in National Lottery funding. The Department of Culture, Media and Sport has reported a fall in lottery sales from £5.23bn in 1997-98 to just £4.97bn in 2007-8. This has been compounded by £3m of lottery money being redirected each year to the 2012 Olympic Games. A change in UK law has also put an end to arts organisations being able to stockpile lottery money that have been earmarked for projects but not spent.

First UK city of culture set for 2013

British cities will be able to bid to become a national capital of culture by 2013, according to culture secretary Andy Burnham.

It is hoped that the scheme will provide an opportunity to place arts and culture at the heart of urban regeneration across the UK, and has been influenced by the success of Liverpool’s status as Europe’s capital of culture for 2008. Burnham told MPs that a working group, headed by the chair of Liverpool capital of culture Phil Redmond, has already been established to determine how the initiative can be best implemented.

New £3.5m art library for national park

An art library has been set up at the at Ori y Parc Landscape Gallery in St Davids, Wales. The new library was funded entirely by donations from former painting and art theory lecturer Rod Williams. Williams, who is chair of the Friends of the Graham Sutherland Collection, was also involved in the creation of the nearby hospital y Parc Library, which includes Sutherland’s works in its rolling exhibitions.

Hotels facing dire outlook for 2009

More hotels are to struggle this year as people look for cheaper accommodation

By Tom Walker

UK hotels are in for a rough ride in 2009 with nearly 200 per cent more hotel companies becoming insolvent in Q1 2009 than in the same period 2008. According to PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC), the rapid increase in failing hotels is made worse by people becoming more likely to look for alternative accommodation as the recession deepens.

PwC consumer poll, conducted over the Easter holidays, showed a 12 per cent increase in the number of people choosing to stay at holiday parks and camping or caravan sites. Although the results will be welcomed by camping businesses, hotel operators will be further pressured to adjust their prices and strategies as people look for more affordable options.

PwC’s Stephen Broome said: ‘It is likely that many of those who remain in the UK over the summer will opt for self-catering, camping, holiday parks and caravan sites. Although the results will be welcomed by camping businesses, hotel operators will be further pressured to adjust their prices and strategies as people look for more affordable options. PwC’s Stephen Broome said: “It is likely that many of those who remain in the UK over the summer will opt for self-catering, camping, holiday parks and caravan sites.”

By Caroline Wilkinson

The hospitality industry will no longer be able to use non-cash tips to top-up staff pay to minimum wage from October 2009. The government’s decision has been made despite warnings from the British Hospitality Association (BHA) that the new law could result in 45,000 job losses.

The move is intended to create a level playing field for employers and to boost consumer confidence.

BHA is fearful of the effects the costs could have on the industry

By Caroline Wilkinson

Easter blues for UK hotels

A steep decline in leisure and corporate travel during the first quarter of 2009 resulted in a 9 per cent decline in RevPAR at UK hotels – a weaker than expected performance for the usually busy Easter period.

According to advisory firm Deloitte’s latest report, RevPAR across regional UK hotels fell by 10.3 per cent to £41.

The largest drops were at Gatwick and Heathrow Airports, down 23.5 per cent and 21.9 per cent respectively. BAA reported a 10.1 per cent drop in passengers at UK airports in the first quarter with one of the most dramatic falls at Gatwick – down 14.8 per cent.

New arts and music venue launched in Suffolk

Mid Suffolk District Council has unveiled a new arts, theatre and music venue at Wingfield Barns near Eye, Suffolk, after acquiring the site from Arts Council for a nominal £1 last year.

A Grade II listed timber-framed barn, dating back to 1373, is at the heart of the site, which has been restored in order to provide a number of workshops, a studio, artists’ residential accommodation and offices.

It is hoped that the new venue, which is currently used as a theatre and concert hall, also includes Shrewsbury’s 18th century prison cells and a 20th century nuclear bunker.

Architects Austin-Smith:Lord have drawn up designs for the scheme, which will be carried out by Grooms Contractors and has received match funding from Shrewsbury and Atcham Borough Council – now part of the new Shropshire Council unitary authority.

ARTS & CULTURE
IN BRIEF

**UK landscapes in line for HLF funding**

**Six regeneration projects set to benefit from Landscape Partnership initiative**

**By Pete Hayman**

Six rural regeneration and landscape conservation schemes across the UK are in line for a major funding boost after receiving first round passes worth £7.9m from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF). The funding will be made available through the HLF’s Landscape Partnership initiative, which has been in operation for five years and has seen a total of £55m invested in 35 British landscapes, including Dorset’s Jurassic Coast and the Orkney archipelago in Scotland.

Among the six latest areas to benefit from HLF support is the Llyn Peninsula in Gwynedd, North Wales, which has been awarded nearly £1m, while the extension and upgrade of the ‘Archaeological Way’ in the East Midlands has received a first round pass worth nearly £2m.

Elsewhere, £2m has been awarded to the restoration of limestone landscapes in County Durham, £904,500 for the conservation of Lincolnshire’s Coastal Grazing Marshes, and £1.26m has been set aside for improvements to the landscape of Faughan Valley in Northern Ireland.

**£70m upgrade works planned for Liverpool parks**

**By Pete Hayman**

Parks and green spaces across Liverpool are set to undergo extensive refurbishments after the local authority revealed that it plans to invest £70m as part of a 25-year project to restore the city’s heritage parks.

According to the Liverpool Echo, the investment forms part of an £80m budget to be spent by the Liverpool City Council (LCC) on a range of projects over the next few years, and also includes £1m earmarked for improvements to play areas and public spaces across the city.

Croxteth country park as well as Sefton Park and Stanley Park will undergo restoration work as part of LCC’s plans, while Newsham Park in Fairfield, Springfield Park in Knotty Ash and Anfield Cemetery will be upgraded.

Other sectors that are set to benefit from the council’s spending plans include recreation, with more than £7m set aside for the refurbishment of sports centres and leisure facilities throughout the city, while LCC also intends to invest money in the improvement of public libraries and education provision.

LCC finance chief and deputy leader, Flo Clucas, told the newspaper: “This plan shows our vision and commitment to investing in the city and its residents, despite the recession. We are using residents’ money wisely and investing in frontline services.”

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**Dublin parks to join European network**

**Dublin City Council in Ireland has applied to become a part of the European Garden Heritage Network in an effort to promote the city to visitors. If successful, Dublin parks will join 100 other historical green spaces around Europe, which have regional or international significance. The aim of the network is to highlight the contribution these space have on regional identity. Currently there are 16 partners from Germany, England and France working together as part of the network in a bid to improve the way their parks and landscaped gardens are promoted.**

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**£1m scheme for Peak District communities**

**A new £1.253m pilot initiative has been launched by the Peak District National Park Authority (PDNPA) in a bid to support rural communities across a three-year period. Working in partnership with the East Midlands Development Agency and Derby and Derbyshire Economic Partnership, it is hoped that the Live and Work Rural scheme will help develop the PDNPA’s existing community planning programme. The programme will run until 31 March 2012.**
Developing the nation’s health

It’s time to consider more health-orientated schemes

The purchase last year of the Cannons Health and Fitness business by Nuffield is the first major step towards bringing together the medical and fitness industries in the UK. As the government too is seriously addressing the issue of obesity, the property market should also respond and contribute to the cause. The provision of primary health care alongside leisure amenities should be welcomed by a government that is bound to struggle to meet the increasing financial demands of the NHS. Health campuses that accommodate fitness while outsourcing facilities for the NHS should be given development tax incentives to stimulate land owners and developers to build such schemes. There is real scope for owners of tired leisure parks to look to a new generation of health-orientated developments.

As the NHS looks to outsource an increasing amount of its budget to the private sector – an estimated £10bn this year – a golden opportunity presents itself to the property sector. Creative developments that blend a community benefit with a logical commercial use will prove more resilient to economic cycles and fluctuations and will leave developers, better positioned the next time the property market visits the doldrums.

Green light for Leeds Utd scheme

Elland Road stadium to house two new hotels and basement nightclub

By Pete Hayman

Plans for a major new leisure-led development at the Elland Road stadium in Leeds, West Yorkshire, home to Leeds United Football Club (LUFC), have been given the green light by Leeds City Council (LCC).

The council has passed a resolution to award full planning consent for the scheme, which will be linked to the venue’s exciting East Stand but does not involve increasing the stadium’s 40,000-seat capacity.

Designed by London-based architects KSS, the Elland Road scheme includes two new hotels and an arcade extension incorporating retail facilities, a club shop, a restaurant and conference and banqueting space. The project, which is designed to provide increased commercial opportunities for LUFC, as well as forming part of LCC’s wider regeneration of the Elland Road area, also includes a basement nightclub and new offices.

Shaun Harvey, LUFC CEO, said: “The development will play a vital part in the regeneration of the area.”

Public exhibition for £250m Telford scheme

By Pete Hayman

A public exhibition has been held by Telford and Wrekin Council to allow local residents to view proposals for the £250m regeneration of the Southwater area of Telford’s town centre.

The Southwater Core redevelopment proposals, which will form part of the wider regeneration of the Shropshire town, include new leisure facilities, a new public square, restaurants, bars and hotel accommodation.

Plans for the redevelopment of a Grade II-listed former swimming pool in Caversham, Berkshire, have been delayed despite receiving the approval of Reading Borough Council’s (RBC) cabinet.

Ashmit Howk had been selected as the preferred developer for the King’s Meadow Pool scheme at a cabinet meeting on 14 April, only for the council’s Corporate Community and External Affairs Panel to request on 15 April that further work be done on the preferred bid, as well as a rival option from the King’s Meadow Campaign.
A £19m boost for Welsh tourism

The funding will be used to maximise the economic value of heritage sites

By Caroline Wilkinson

The Welsh Assembly Government has earmarked £19m towards the development of heritage tourism in Wales. Largely funded by the government and a £8.5m grant from EU Convergence Funds, the project is intended to maximise the economic value of heritage by increasing the volume, length and value of visits to Wales. The project, which will run until December 2014, has been created to make heritage sites more accessible and enjoyable to visit.

Cadw - the guardian organisation for Welsh heritage sites - plans to work with communities, heritage partners and the tourism sector to create heritage tours, trails and events packages. The organisation intends to expand the visitor experience beyond individual heritage sites, to connect with the local community and surrounding area as well as link in with broader interpretive stories and themes.

Howard James, Cadw's heritage tourism project co-ordinator, said: “In a five-year project like this, there is scope for new partners and service providers to come forward with proposals.

The NIAS aims to ensure young people can access apprenticeships

Apprenticeship scheme unveiled

Government initiative to invest in work-based training

By Caroline Wilkinson

The government has launched a scheme aimed at improving the availability of apprenticeship placements, which forms part of a strategy to increase the amount of apprenticeships being completed to 130,000 per year.

By making it easier for leisure industry employers to source prospective apprentices, the National Apprenticeship Service (NAS) is intended to support the employer and learner and streamline the application process.

Interactive gym equipment supplier ZigZag, part of the PTE group, has launched a new training academy to deliver courses for adults and young people wanting to work with children in the leisure and fitness industry.

The first two courses to launch are the Certificate in Adapting Gym Instruction for Adolescents and ActiveFutures. The former qualification is a one-day course, which has been designed to provide the skills to modify instruction for a teenage market, as well as helping to understand the physiological and psychological issues that affect their ability to exercise.

The ZigZag Academy will replace the company’s ActivKids arm and will run from three regional training centres in Basingstoke, Hampshire, Bolton and Horwich, both in Lancashire.

Swansea Bay tourism breaks £300m barrier

Figures published by the Scarborough Tourism Economic Activity Monitor (STEAM) have revealed that tourism revenue contributed more than £300m to the Swansea Bay region during 2008.

Attractions, including the National Waterfront Museum, the Gower Heritage Centre and the LC Leisure complex, helped to pull in more than 4.1 million tourists, which was reflected in a 5 per cent increase in visitor expenditure compared with the previous year. Developed in Scarborough, North Yorkshire, STEAM is a mathematical model that has been adopted by a number of local authorities to monitor all aspects of tourism activity, including visitor numbers and expenditure.

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Domestic tourists boost London's numbers

Visit London has announced that the number of people visiting London increased by 2 per cent during 2008 compared with the previous year, despite declining numbers of overseas tourists.

New figures published by the capital’s tourism agency, which coincided with the launch of the ‘Only in London’ campaign have revealed that an 11.5 per cent increase in visitors from other parts of the UK have helped to offset a steep fall in tourism from long-haul markets.

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Do 14-19-year-olds really win from the budget?

Funding shortfall poses threat to chancellor's spending commitment for further education

The dust may be settling on the latest budget and reality bites, but I’m left wondering if education really stands to gain anything. This is particularly true of the 14-19 group, who are supposedly at the core of the present government’s drive to push up standards and raise skills.

Alistair Darling announced that there would be £250m this year and £400m in 2010-11 for post-16 education. This, he stated, will create 54,000 extra places in sixth form colleges and further education (FE) colleges, with consequential provisions for the whole of the UK.

But if you’re in an FE institution in England and have been hit by the farcical financial arrangements that the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) made for capital projects, you’ll realise that there is unlikely to be the basic accommodation needs to house the influx of new learners.

Certain colleges are left with campuses that resemble bomb sites rather than bastions of education after the LSC declared that it did not have the money to honour the contracts it had signed with colleges for replacement, or upgrading of buildings.

To add insult to injury, English colleges and sixth forms had been told by the LSC earlier in the month that they would not be funded in line with their predicted rises in student numbers for the next academic year.

Across England, there was a shortfall of up to 3.7 per cent, which translates to around £200m, although Darling believes that, with the funds being made available for the next two years, he can still create the extra places announced.

If you’re an FE lecturer in Wales, you may have been one of the 700 that were threatened with redundancy right up until the day before the budget, when the Wales Assembly backtracked on its proposed cut in teaching staff following efforts by lecturing staff, students and FEform, the association of colleges in Wales, to get the government to change its mind.

Our educators and learners have enough to do without having to battle for the existence of a provision that ministers said was at the forefront of their drive to bring the UK in line with the rest of Europe and make us truly competitive. The promise that the government made that every 16-17-year-old wanting to stay in education could do so seems way off.

Playing a vital role in recovery

Growing tourism is a realistic way to create new jobs now

A part from the projections of economic growth that seem to be based on blind optimism rather than economic principles, one of the more crucial parts of this year’s budget was to do with job creation.

The government has rightly realised that, with the contraction of the financial industry and the inevitable tightening of regulations, it is going to be some considerable time before this sector supports the previous level of jobs or delivers the previous level of revenue to government.

So what is that prospect, the search is on to find the industries that will provide the economic growth the country desperately needs. The government believes the future lies in green technology and hi-tech businesses and is trying to help firms develop in this way. But what is needed is a two-pronged approach to job creation. One part exploits the potential for future job creation and the second part that looks to quickly create jobs in successful existing businesses to replace the jobs being lost now.

This is where tourism could play an important role in the UK’s economic recovery by leveraging off the weakness of the pound and the forthcoming Olympics to provide growth in both the inbound and domestic sectors. The jobs created aren’t as sexy as those in the hi-tech sector but that are more realistic at the moment, especially if you are unemployed and want a job now rather than the promise of one in five years.
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£350m SnOasis development faces planning delay

Deadlock over report wording threatens to hold up plans to build new indoor winter sports complex in Suffolk

By Pete Hayman

Plans to create a multi-million pound indoor winter sports resort on the site of a former quarry at Great Blakenham, near Ipswich, Suffolk, could be delayed by another two years due to a planning technicality.

Developer Onslow Suffolk was finally given the green light for the new £350m SnOasis complex by communities secretary Hazel Blears in November last year, nearly three years after predecessor Ruth Kelly called in the scheme. But the project now faces a further hold up after a clause was omitted from the planning inspectorate's report, which would enable Onslow Suffolk to start work on the complex, while drawing up applications for detailed designs over the course of the development.

As a result, the developer now faces the prospect of having to fulfil all reserved matters before work can begin on site, which it says will take two years to complete at a cost of £15m, unless the condition is waived.

Merlin Entertainments reports continued growth

By Pete Hayman

Merlin Entertainments, owner of Legoland, Alton Towers and The London Dungeon, has reported a 37 per cent increase in profits over the last three years, according to PricewaterhouseCoopers.

Nick Varney, chief executive of Merlin Entertainments, said: "We are very encouraged by these results, and by the fact that a large proportion of our growth in 2008 was driven by like-for-like trading in our existing parks and attractions."