

LEISURE management

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WEIRDEST
RESTAURANTS

DON CAMILLERI

On what's next for Center Parcs

DRAGONS' DEN'S

JAMES CAAN

Shaking up the health
and fitness market

CARDIFF

CITY OF SPORT

THE BURNING QUESTION:

Are farm attractions
safe for children?



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TOUGH CHOICES

We face new challenges in this election year, with £178bn (or thereabouts) to be recouped on public services and no easy way of achieving these savings. The Chancellor, Alistair Darling, is on record saying the cuts will be the toughest we've faced for 20 years if Labour wins the next general election, but that they won't be implemented until the economy has recovered from the recession.

Research by Ipsos MORI shows 75 per cent of people optimistically believe this money can all be saved in efficiencies "without damaging the services the public receives". However, 50 per cent also believe that "there is a real need to cut spending on public services in order to pay off the very high national debt we now have". Reconciling these contradictory expectations will be a challenge to both politicians and the deliverers of services at grassroots level.

With only two real choices to make in terms of how we balance the books – increasing taxes or cutting expenditure – with or without efficiencies, the likely outcome will be a mixture of the two and it will take the upcoming election to establish the policies that will dictate priorities.

The public has such high expectations of government in every sphere of life that the hard reality of cuts could prove extremely unpalatable. Ipsos MORI was so intrigued when Anne Widdicombe claimed "we now expect more of government than we do of God", that researchers

Once the recession is behind us and the economy starts to grow, the job of sorting out public borrowing will begin, with £178bn to repay. What impact do you think this will have on local government leisure services? We welcome your views and feedback. Write to us at LM@leisuremedia.com

tested the claim in a survey of the general public and found that 52 per cent agreed with her.

It's difficult to predict what changes we'll be facing as an industry, but we know Labour would scrap 120 quangos and save £500m a year on consultancy fees. The quango overhaul will be achieved in part by mergers and the DCMS says up to a third of non-museum organisations will go, 10 bodies will be streamlined and 30 publicly-funded skills quangos could be closed.

The Conservatives will decentralise services to allow more local decision-making, while 'innovative examples' of cost-cutting which have been set by Conservative-controlled councils will be followed. Every item of public expenditure over £25,000 will be published online to "create a culture of accountability" and an Office of Financial Management will be created to provide "leadership in financial performance management across government".

People's satisfaction with their council directly correlates with value for money, with six councils which appear in the Ipsos MORI top 10 for value appearing in the top 10 satisfaction listing, but while the Local Government Association believes "local government is the most efficient part of the public sector", a survey of residents from 353 local authorities found less than half think they get value for money.

So councils will be aiming to spend less without it showing and the creativity, drive and commercial nous of leisure services teams – so long among the top performers in local government – could be used as a best practice template for other council departments to follow.



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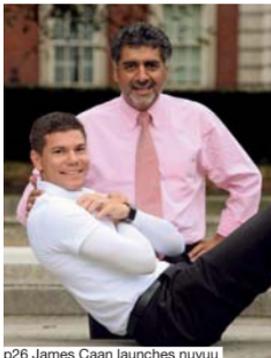
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buyers' guide:

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World Leisure

TDIC unveils new Qasr Al Sarab resort

The Tourism Development and Investment Company (TDIC) has launched the new Qasr Al Sarab holiday resort in the Rub' al Khali (Empty Quarter) desert in the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

Located within one of the largest sand deserts in the world, the new resort boasts 154 guest rooms, 42 villas, an Anantara spa and a swimming pool complex, as well as 10 royal villas and a fitness centre.

The Anantara spa features five desert-view treatment rooms, a Moroccan-style Hammam, double heated marble beds, spa pools, steamrooms and an ice cave, as well as a Vichy treatment room and a whirlpool bath. A range of face and body treatments, offered at the spa, have been based on traditional Arabian rituals using ingredients indigenous to the region – including dates, sand, honey and olives.



The rooms offer views of the desert beyond

Construction work on the Qasr Al Sarab Resort by Anantara got underway in September 2006 and was built by Abu Dhabi-based company Al Jaber

Engineering and Contracting to incorporate eco-friendly measures, such as efficient water consumption and recycling and sustainable lighting.

Fourth MAC club opens in Turkey

The MAC Bebekoy club, owned by the Turkey-based Mars Entertainment Group (MEG), has opened in Istanbul.

Located in the upmarket Etiler/Bebek neighbourhood, with views across the Bosphorus, the 4,000sq m club is the most luxurious in the MAC (Mars Athletic Club) chain. Annual membership of the club costs US\$2,400 (£1,450).

Facilities include a gym equipped by Life Fitness, Nautilus, Technogym, Hoist, Free Motion and Gravity. A broad range of group exercise classes span everything from group cycling, through Oriental dance and Latin street dance, to Hip Hop



Membership costs around US\$2,400 a year

Theatre and children's sessions. These are complemented by martial arts classes and fitness/swimming programmes delivered in the club's swimming pool.

US\$10m revamp planned for Ali Centre

The Muhammad Ali Centre in Louisville, Kentucky, US, has launched a US\$10m fundraising campaign.

The centre, in Muhammad Ali's hometown, is attempting to raise money to complete its permanent visitor experience, to create the Muhammad Ali Archives and Research Centre and to expand its event space.

The existing visitor experience will also see its fourth-floor exhibits completed. These focus on "finding personal greatness within".

These exhibits were not completed when the museum first opened in 2005 due to a lack of funding.

Charlie Chaplin museum to open in Switzerland

A museum dedicated to the life of screen legend Charlie Chaplin is to open in his former home at Vevey on the shores of Lake Geneva in Switzerland.

L'Espace Musee Charlie Chaplin, in the planning for more than 10 years after neighbours initially opposed the idea, will showcase the actor's screen career and include footage from classic films such as *The Immigrant*, *City Lights* and *The Great Dictator*. It will also cover Chaplin's life in London music hall and feature artefacts including the piano at which he composed

film scores and multimedia exhibits exploring the history of film making. A wine cellar beneath the house will be used to create a Chaplin-era Victorian London streetscape.

The estate, where Chaplin made his home in 1952 after being banned from returning to the US because of his alleged political leanings, consists of an area of about 14 hectares and comprises the house, a farm, ancient buildings, woodland, terraces, gardens and pathways.

L'Espace Musee Charlie Chaplin is due to open to the public by the end of 2012.



Chaplin's life will be celebrated

Raffles Makkah Palace to open in Mecca

Raffles Hotels and Resorts is set to manage a new luxury hotel in the holy Islamic city of Mecca in Saudi Arabia.

Located in the Abraj Al Bait Complex, the 198-bedroom Raffles Makkah Palace will include a café, an ice-creamery, a chocolate parlour and the Levantine Restaurant. An outdoor dining terrace will overlook the holiest site in Islam – the Masjid al-Haram (Grand Mosque).

Health and fitness facilities will include his- and hers-only fitness centres, a beauty parlour and a grooming salon, and access to an adjoining retail mall and Raffles Amrita Spa.

Set to open in April 2010, the property is the company's second hotel in the Middle East, following the launch of Raffles Dubai in 2007. Chris Cahill, CEO of Fairmont Raffles Hotels International, said: "Raffles



The new hotel complex will tower above the sacred Masjid al-Haram site

Hotels & Resorts are pleased to have been entrusted with the most prestigious development in Mecca, a city of such significant importance within the global Muslim community.

The Middle East is also a region of strategic priority for Raffles Hotels & Resorts and we are delighted to be able to grow our presence here."

Brand extension for Indian wellness group

Indian wellness company Sansha Exports has revealed further details about the roll-out of its Sansha spa brand, with more than 30 spas due to open within Indian hotels over the next year.

Four new Sansha spas are set to open imminently in the area of Rajasthan as well as two Seven Seas spas – one in Rajasthan and one in Orissa.

The group currently has 20 spas across India under the Sansha hotel spa and Seven Seas day spa brands.

The latest Sansha spa opened in September 2009 at Fateh Garh, a Heritage Renaissance Resort, located on the edge



The group will open 30 spas in India

of the city of Udaipur in India. Operated under a franchise agreement, the 2,500sq ft (232sq m) spa offers a lounge experience inspired by Indian royal traditions.

£12m Filipino Mind Museum breaks ground

Work has started on the 1bn Philippines pesos (£12.7m, US\$21.2m, E14.2m) Mind Museum, located in Taguig City, Metro Manila.

The museum is the brainchild of Bonifacio Art Foundation, and was designed by Filipino architects Lor Calma & Partners.

It will boast 175 interactive exhibits over 3,560sq m of indoor exhibition space. The two-storey building will feature five galleries: The Story of the Universe; The Story of the Earth; The Story of Life; The Story of the Atom; and the Story of Technology. The Mind Museum is scheduled to open in 2011.

Fitness First opens 91st Australian club

Fitness First has opened the doors of its 91st Australian club in the Sydney suburb of Five Dock, New South Wales.

The 2,826sq m facility is spread over two levels, with a fully-equipped gym and a number of group exercise studios, including a group cycling studio and a weights and resistance studio.

There is also a 20m swimming pool and a spa area with aromatherapy steam room, sauna and relaxation zone.

The club also offers a "Playzone" for kids, as well as running Fitness First's

FFIT programme. This encompasses two initiatives for high school aged students: high school classes can access the club for free as part of their physical education curriculum, and students aged 14 to 18 can use club facilities during the school holidays to keep active.

"Our aim is to make Australia a fitter place by providing the latest in equipment, expert advice and guidance and by creating a welcoming, friendly atmosphere," says Andy Mallinson, Fitness First's marketing director.



Fitness First operates clubs in 19 countries

Sport

UK sports clubs 'defying recession'

Community sports clubs across the UK are withstanding the recession after reporting an increase in membership levels, according to new research by the Central Council of Physical Recreation (CCPR).

An independent study of 3,000 clubs – commissioned by the CCPR every other year in order to gauge the state of grass-roots sports – found that 34 per cent had seen an increase in the number of adult memberships and 40 per cent had seen an increase in junior memberships.

A total of 73 sports were represented in the Survey of Sports Clubs 2009, with sailing, motor sports and junior football among the sports to report the largest growth since 2007. However, golf was the only sport to see a reduction.

It is hoped that the results from the CCPR study demonstrate the positive



Junior football is one of the growing sports

effect of the government's attempts to increase the number of people participating in sport ahead of the London 2012 Olympics through additional investment.

CCPR chief executive Tim Lamb said: "Hopefully, what we're beginning to see is the fruit of policies designed to deliver a legacy from the Olympic Games."

£400m Lord's proposals unveiled

Plans have been unveiled for a major £400m redevelopment of Lord's Cricket Ground in St John's Wood, London, which are designed to reaffirm the venue's reputation as the home of cricket.

The development proposals have been drawn up by Swiss architects Herzog and de Meuron – the firm behind the Beijing National Stadium, China, which was used for the 2008 Olympic Games.

According to The Times newspaper, the vision for Lord's project will see the venue's seating capacity increase from 24,493 to 36,990, and a new underground facility will be built to house a cricket academy



Lord's will undergo a massive revamp

boasting 16 long lanes and 10 pitches to simulate overseas playing conditions.

The proposed underground part of the scheme would also feature a sports injury clinic, a gym and a swimming pool.



The countdown to 2012 is on

London 2012 'still on time, still on budget'

New figures from the government and the Olympic Delivery Authority (ODA) have shown that the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games will be delivered on time and on budget.

The London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games Quarterly Economic Report has seen a £7m increase in the cost of the ODA's construction programme, which equates to an increase of less than 0.1 per cent. However, nothing from the £1.27bn contingency funding has been required to cover the increase due to savings achieved elsewhere as part of ongoing construction of the 2012 venues at the Olympic Park site.

Changes in the anticipated final cost of the London Games include savings made on site and the potential need to improve local sports facilities.

Moynihan: 2012 legacy plans 'not there yet'

Lord Moynihan, chair of the British Olympic Association (BOA), has called for a change in direction to ensure a lasting sporting legacy from the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

Speaking at the National Sports Development Seminar in Sheffield in November, Moynihan said plans to increase participation at all levels of sport needed re-evaluation so that the opportunity of tapping into the interest created by the Games is not lost. He said current plans were a "long way" from ensur-

ing that participation levels in sport will increase post-2012. He also warned of "the Wimbledon factor" with short term interest generated during the Games not being sustained post-2012.

"What we need is a change in policy and to make sure we engage national governing bodies, local authorities and sports clubs to ensure that a legacy is delivered successfully," he added.

"At the moment the structure of our sporting system is too top heavy, cumbersome and bureaucratic."



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* Source: UK Cabinet Office/ Department of Health Planning. Assumptions for the current A(H1N1) influenza Pandemic.

Commercial

G Casino launches in Coventry

More than 1,200 guests attended a special event at the Ricoh Arena in Coventry in October to mark the opening of Grosvenor Casinos' ninth G Casino in the UK. The Ricoh Arena casino has benefited from a £1m reconfiguration since it was acquired by Grosvenor Casinos in a £650,000 deal from Isle of Capri in April 2009.

Opened on 29 October 2010, the 44,000sq ft (4,088sq m) casino will form part of Rank's plans to expand the G Casino brand to 20 sites by the end of 2012. At the time of going to press a further G Casino was scheduled to open in Sheffield before the end of December.

The G Casino at the Ricoh Arena features a restaurant – operated by West Midlands-based Mahir's Experience, a sports lounge, a bar and one of the largest poker rooms in the UK, as well as 20 gam-



The G Casino at the Ricoh Arena includes one of the largest poker rooms in Europe

ing tables, 20 gaming machines and 50 electronic roulette tables.

Paul Davies, general manager of G Casino Coventry, said: "We believe that G

Casino will offer the people of Coventry a great night out with a difference.

"Our gaming offer will appeal to many different types of customer."

First hmvcurzor cinema opens

Music retailer HMV and cinema operator Curzor have opened a cinema at a HMV store in Wimbledon, London – the first in a planned nationwide network of store-based cinemas across the UK.

Branded as hmvcurzor, the cinema will operate as a joint venture between the two companies and is situated on the store's unused second floor.

The venue has three screens with a combined total of 263 seats and also features a fully licensed café-bar and a merchandise area. HMV hopes to be able to roll out the hmvcurzor concept to more locations across the country, although



Curzor operates six sites in London

expansion plans will depend on the success of the Wimbledon venture.

The Wimbledon is Curzor's sixth. The other five are located in Mayfair, Soho, Bloomsbury, Chelsea and Richmond.

Jongleurs clubs to be rebranded after sale

The license and naming rights for the famous Jongleurs comedy club chain will revert to the chain's founder, Maria Kempinska, as of 2 January 2010.

Intertain, the newly founded company that acquired and saved 60 Regent Inns sites from administration in November – including 10 Jongleurs clubs – will be able to use the Jongleurs name until control of the brand reverts to Kempinska. The UK-based entrepreneur founded the brand in 1983 after setting up the first club in a space above a Regent Inns pub.

A statement from Intertain said: "On 20 October 2009, Intertain Limited acquired 10 live entertainment venues as part of a package of 60 trading assets, from the joint administrators of Regent Inns.

"Intertain has now entered into a brand licensing agreement with Jongleurs Comedy Limited to continue to run these 10 venues as Jongleurs Comedy Clubs until 2 January 2010."

After then, it isn't known whether Intertain will rebrand the clubs or come to a new arrangement with Kempinska.



The scheme will cost more than £70m

Odeon and UCI to roll out digital theatres

Odeon & UCI Cinemas Group (OUCG) is to install digital projectors to the remainder of its sites, after securing distribution deals with three leading Hollywood studios.

OUCG, Europe's largest cinema chain, which operates the Odeon, UCI and Cinesa brands, already has 187 digital screens within its portfolio.

The fitting of the remaining cinemas with digital theatres will cost more than £70m to complete, and will be funded over time by a combination of contributions from the three studios as well as the earnings derived from the improved programming offer.

The three studios which will be part-funding the new projectors are Twentieth Century Fox, Paramount Pictures and Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures international.

Health & Fitness

LA Fitness to spend £30m on revamps

Private equity-owned gym chain LA Fitness has earmarked £30m for a comprehensive refurbishment programme of its 83-strong portfolio of health clubs in the UK.

The investment and the new strategy is being driven by chief executive Martin Long, who said he wants to reposition the entire LA Fitness brand.

Long said: "Gyms were originally built to rent out space containing gym equipment – members signed a 12 month contract in January and often didn't come back.

"That suited operators then, but gym membership is stuck at just 12 per cent penetration – and has been for the last few years. If the industry is to break through that it must up its game."

To tackle retention issues, Long has introduced a new customer relationship management initiative which aims to ensure



The GB Syncho team helps LA celebrate its London refurbishment

that staff develop a relationship with members throughout the course of their contract. Each new or lapsed member is treated to a tailored 'Kickstart' programme

to identify fitness targets and a personalised training routine to help them achieve their goals. Members also receive a call, text or email to get them back into the gym.

£720,000 revamp for Fife gyms

Seven gyms within council-owned leisure centres in Fife are to be refurbished.

Fife Sports and Leisure Trust and Fife Council are investing £720,000 to upgrade seven fitness suites.

The centres to receive upgrades are the Cowdenbeath Leisure Centre; Cupar Sports Centre; Bowhill Swimming Pool; Levenmouth Swimming Pool and Sports Centre; Dalgety Bay Sports and Leisure Centre; The Beacon Leisure Centre; and East Sands Leisure Centre.

The refurbishment schedule is running over a three-month period, with all gyms being completed by the end of January.



An artist's impression of the gym plans

The council will provide £360,000 for refurbishment and redecoration, while the leisure trust will supply the same amount for Technogym equipment.

David Lloyd completes revamps

Fitness club operator David Lloyd Leisure (DLL) has completed a redevelopment programme that upgraded facilities at 14 of its UK sites.

The final four clubs to receive facelifts were Woking, Chigwell, Hatfield and Cambridge.

At Cambridge, the largest site to undergo a revamp, DLL invested £200,000 in 100 new pieces of CV equipment supplied by Life Fitness.

Paul Batty, DLL's head of procurement, said: "We continue with our strategic investment into our gyms areas.

"This has included significant investment in our gym equipment."

Parkwood axes sunbeds from leisure centres

Health club operator and management contractor Parkwood leisure has become the latest operator to remove all sunbeds from all of its sites.

According to Andrew Holt, managing director, the decision to remove all tanning equipment by 1 January 2010 was made after the group reviewed research conducted by the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC).

Holt said: "Having considered the latest research in this area, we now feel that removing the sunbeds is in the best inter-

ests of our customers. Health and safety is our number one priority and always will be. Our local authority clients have given their unanimous support for this initiative."

Lorraine Langdon, a member at Cardiff International Pool, which is operated by Parkwood, said that she was relieved to see the sunbeds removed.

"I am pleased to see that the sunbeds are being removed. I think they are detrimental to our health and it is good to see that customers and members' health is being taken into consideration."



Parkwood is removing all sunbeds

Attractions

Historic Margate coaster saved

The future of Britain's oldest surviving rollercoaster, a scenic railway ride in Margate, has been safeguarded after the Dreamland Trust was handed a £3.7m grant.

Funding has been made available for the preservation of the Grade II-listed ride by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) as part of the Sea Change scheme, which aims to invigorate English seaside towns.

The grant will be used to restore the rollercoaster, which was built in 1920, as well as helping to fund the creation of the world's first amusement park exclusively comprising historic rides.

Plans for the £12m attraction have been drawn up by the Dreamland Trust, which will include the restoration of the Grade II-listed Dreamland Cinema and the installation of an exhibition space to



The ride was built in 1920

outline the project. Nick Laister, chair of the Dreamland Trust, said: "This proposal has the ability to create an outstanding, 21st-century attraction at Margate."

Mivan wins two new museum projects

Interiors and theming company Mivan has secured two major museum fit-out projects – the new £4.4m Glasgow Riverside Museum contract and a £1.6m project at the Museum of the Order of St John in Clerkenwell, London.

Mivan will supply and install a range of exhibition systems at the Glasgow museum, including street scenes and displays throughout the new building.

The group will work with Culture and Sport Glasgow and the city council to realise the designs of Event Communications, both of whom worked with Mivan on the Kelvingrove Museum in 2006.



Mivan's work includes street scenes

The museum – designed by Zaha Hadid – is being built at a cost of £74m, with £18.1m of funding coming from the Heritage Lottery Fund.

Liverpool's Open Eye Gallery to relocate

Plans to relocate the Open Eye photography gallery in Liverpool to Mann Island on the city's waterfront have received a £400,000 funding boost from the Northwest Regional Development Agency.

This follows a recent £100,000 National Lottery grant from Arts Council England, North West.

Currently located in the Ropewalks area of the city, the gallery is the only specialist public photography gallery in the North West.

The new gallery will be part of the £135m mixed-use scheme being developed by Countryside Properties and Neptune Developments to the south of Pier Head. The gallery is being designed by RCKa architects and will be double the size of the current site.

Thorpe Park to add another SAW attraction

Merlin Entertainments will add a second SAW-themed attraction to its Thorpe Park theme park next year.

Saw Alive, a year round live action horror maze, follows SAW – The Ride, which launched in March 2009.

Based on Lionsgate's and Twisted Pictures' popular horror film franchise, the SAW Alive zone will be marketed as the "world's most extreme horror attraction".

The maze will feature six separate scenes from the six SAW films that have been released to date. The attraction will also incorporate a photo opportunity to capture terrified guests' reactions as they're subjected to the horror of the maze.

Jewish museum reopening delayed until March

The Jewish Museum London will reopen to the public on Wednesday 17 March 2010, four months later than originally planned.

The museum, located in Camden Town, has undergone a £10m redevelopment which has resulted in the museum trebling in space in order to accommodate its collections, which are currently housed at two separate sites in Camden and Finchley.

The revamp, funded partly by a £4.3m grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund, has divided the museum into five galleries, with four permanent ones and one earmarked

for temporary and touring exhibitions.

The Welcome gallery will include a multimedia installation, highlighting the background of Jewish people living in Britain today, and a mikveh (a ritual bath) dating to the medieval period.

The other new galleries are the History Gallery, which includes an interactive exhibition exploring the history of British Jews; the Religion Gallery, which explores Jewish ethics and values; a special exhibitions gallery for travelling exhibits; and the Holocaust Education Gallery.



The museum will open in March 2010

Public Sector

Council unveils Wakefield plans

Plans for a new multi-million pound swimming pool and fitness complex in the centre of Wakefield, West Yorkshire, have been unveiled by the local authority.

The scheme, which is expected to cost at least £10m and will be situated on the site of the former Sun Lane baths, is currently the subject of a consultation.

Wakefield Council's proposals include an eight-lane, 25m swimming pool, a 13m by 7m learner pool – both boasting moveable floors to allow more members of the local community access to the facility.

A 130-station fitness suite, a multi-use activity studio and a health suite with spa bath, steamroom and sauna are also earmarked as part of the project, as well as a 200-capacity spectator viewing area.

Denise Jeffery, deputy leader at Wakefield Council, said of the plans:



Plans include a 25m swimming pool

"Last year we made a promise to people that we would work towards building a fantastic new pool in the city – and we are now moving forward in earnest."

Fulham 'urban beach' designs unveiled

Plans for a new 'urban beach' on the banks of the River Thames in Fulham, London, have been unveiled by the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham (LBHF).

The local authority is hoping to recreate a seaside atmosphere that used to attract Edwardian families from across London to Margate Sands as part of an £8m scheme to regenerate Bishop's Park.

Sand from Margate and other Kent beaches was used to create the urban beach, which first opened in 1903 but fell into disrepair during the Second World War before being closed in 1949.



The beach will be located at Bishop's Park

However, the beach is now set to reopen under new plans put forward by LBHF, which will also lead to the restoration of the adjacent Fulham Palace grounds and Bishop's Park's ornamental lakes.

Doncaster centres urged to adopt trust model

Two leisure centres in Doncaster, South Yorkshire, are at risk of closure unless the local authority transfer the operation of local facilities to the trust that currently runs the Dome venue.

A report to Doncaster Council's overview and scrutiny management committee has called on councillors to back plans for an expanded Dome Trust to take over the management of all swimming pools and leisure centres across Doncaster.

In July 2008, consultants Neil Allen Associates conducted a study to examine options for the management of leisure facilities in Doncaster, which identified an expanded trust model as the preferred way forward rather than the current 'in-house' model.

Scottish alcohol law faces opposition

New legislation aimed at reducing the £2.25bn cost of alcohol misuse across Scotland has been unveiled by the Scottish government. The legislation includes the introduction of a minimum price per unit.

However, the minimum pricing proposals have come under fire from the Scottish Labour, Liberal Democrat and Conservative parties over concerns that the measures could violate European laws and will not do enough to tackle alcohol abuse.

Scottish health secretary Nicola Sturgeon said of the legislation: "It is simply inexcusable that opponents have chosen not even to listen to the evidence around minimum pricing during the Bill process."



Ebbsfleet - High Quality facilities for High Speed Station

The formal opening by Dame Kelly Holmes of Ebbsfleet International, a key station on the High Speed line, signified the completion of the £6billion High Speed project which enables travel of up to 140 miles per hour into the heart of London.

Stylish Equinox cubicles with streamline, polished pilasters were supplied by the UK's leading washroom provider, Armitage Venesta for installation within the contemporary glass and steel construction designed by consortium, Rail Link Engineering.

Armitage Venesta's pre-plumbed system, IPS Evo/ve, with its factory fitted sanitary ware, was used to provide easy clean surfaces that promote hygiene and provide easy access for ongoing maintenance.

For more information on Armitage Venesta's washroom systems and IPS Evo/ve ©, call 01474 353 333 or visit www.armitage-venesta.co.uk

armitage venesta
Washroom Systems

Property

€430m leisure complex planned for Dundalk

An application for a €430m (£387.4m) snow complex in Dundalk, Ireland, is to be submitted to Louth County Council.

The Altitude project – proposed by local firm Innovative Leisure Systems and UK-based Briton Engineering – will include a ski slope and nursery slopes; a 100-bedroom family hostel; a 110,000sq ft indoor concert arena; an 80,000sq ft leisure zone, which includes a cinema and bowling alley; and a 40,000sq ft surf and water leisure dome, as well as restaurants.

Later phases will include additional hotel accommodation and a casino.

Sam Curran, one of the two directors of Innovative Leisure Systems, said: "We've finetuned our plans over the last 30 months and are satisfied that the mix of different elements we are proposing will provide a compelling attraction."



The scheme has been designed by Leonard Design Architects

"While the current climate is not ideal, we foresee economic recovery during the seven-year timescale, which will not rely exclusively on the domestic market."

Curran also said that the project was not reliant on funding from the Irish banking sector or public funding. The scheme is expected to be completed by 2016.

Camberwell Baths revamp plans

London-based architects Watkins Gray International's plans for the regeneration of the historic Camberwell Baths in London have been given the green light by the local authority.

The London Borough of Southwark has approved planning consent for the first phase of a £3m scheme to overhaul the Grade II-listed baths, which will include repairs to the pool and sports hall and major upgrade works.

Facilities at the refurbished 4,000sq m (43,056sq ft) complex will include a café, a crèche, a office space and youth areas including a youth music centre.



The baths are Grade II-listed

The plans also include retaining Camberwell Baths' original frontage, although one entrance will close to create a single main entrance.



An artist's impression of the plans

Government rejects Everton stadium plans

Everton Football Club (EFC) and Tesco have been left "bitterly disappointed" at a decision to reject plans for the transformation of Kirkby, Liverpool, which would have included a new 50,000-seat stadium.

Communities secretary John Denham has blocked the scheme, following a public inquiry held between November 2008 and February 2009 in the wake of Knowsley Council's decision to approve planning permission.

In addition to the new stadium, proposals for the Destination Kirkby scheme also included improvements to the town centre.

EFC chief executive officer Robert Elstone said: "Obviously, we are all bitterly disappointed with the decision as we felt that we had compiled and presented a most compelling case."

Hastings Pier deal collapses over cost of repairs

The future of a historic pier in Hastings, East Sussex, remains uncertain after the owners of the Grand Pier in Weston-super-Mare, Somerset, pulled out of a deal to acquire the attraction.

Kerry and Michelle Michael of Grand Pier Limited, which is currently carrying out a major redevelopment of Weston-super-Mare's Grand Pier, decided not to go ahead with the purchase due to the cost of restoring Hastings Pier.

According to Grand Pier Limited's engineers, it would cost more than £24m to

repair the pier in Hastings and a similar amount to provide the attraction with the necessary new visitor facilities.

Kerry Michael said: "It would appear that the pier is deteriorating much faster than we initially thought and in the opinion of our structural engineers, it is in danger of imminent collapse."

"The restoration of the pier would be a vast undertaking."

"We would have to be definite about its viability before we did anything, and I'm afraid that doesn't look likely."

Parks & Countryside

Work starts on £3.8m Bury woodland scheme

A new 71-hectare (175-acre) community woodland is set to be created in Bury, Greater Manchester, as part of a £3.8m regeneration scheme incorporating the town's Waterdale and Drinkwater parks.

The Forestry Commission has started work on a former industrial site between Prestwich and Clifton to improve the local environment and create a number of new recreational facilities, including 12km (7.5 miles) of leisure trails.

Work on multi-purpose waymarked trails, which will be used by walkers, horse riders and cyclists, will be next, while future plans also include wetland wildlife habitats and fishing ponds.

A new mountain bike track, the illumination of a viaduct running through the site and the introduction of information signs are also being planned.



The newly created woodland will be available for a number of leisure pursuits

Funding for the new woodland, which will form part of a major community woodland across Salford, Manchester and Bury, is being raised by the Forestry

Commission and the North West Regional Development Agency through the Newlands initiative – a £59m NWDA-funded land regeneration scheme.

South Downs handed National Park status

Environment secretary Hilary Benn has confirmed that the South Downs – stretching from East Sussex to Hampshire – has become the ninth English national park.

The 632sq mile (1,637sq km) South Downs National Park will cover land between Beachy Head, East Sussex in the east and St Catherine's Hill in Winchester, Hampshire, incorporating two areas of outstanding natural beauty.

A new national park authority for the South Downs, responsible for the conservation of the wildlife and landscape within the park, is set to be created by April 2010 and become fully operational within a year.



The South Downs coast in Sussex

Benn said: "National Park status will attract new visitors to the South Downs and bring investment into the local area. The unique chalk downlands will now be protected for everyone to enjoy."

Green light for Heartwood Forest plans

Tree planting is set to get underway for the creation of a new 347-hectare (858-acre) native woodland in Hertfordshire – called Heartwood Forest – after the scheme was given the go ahead by the Forestry Commission.

The commission has approved an environment statement submitted in 2009 by the Woodland Trust, which will see more than 600,000 native broadleaf trees planted as part of the Heartwood Forest scheme.

Heartwood Forest will be the largest site in England operated by the Woodland Trust, providing publicly accessible green space.

Mayor launches Great Outdoors initiative

A new strategy outlining plans to transform London's public spaces and to create new green oases across the capital over the next three years has been launched by mayor Boris Johnson.

London's Great Outdoors – A Manifesto for Public Spaces sets out more than 50 projects, including reclaimed green spaces and waterways, that are set to benefit from more than £220m of investment during the three-year period.

The document is supported by two additional practical guides – Better Streets and

Better Green and Water Spaces – which outline the mayor's main aims for designing improved public spaces.

Johnson said: "If you Google our city with a satellite map you will see how the world beneath you is divided into two categories. There is private space – that is, homes and gardens occupied by individuals and their families.

"However, more than half of the London landscape is shared space including roads, parks, canals, rivers, squares, piazzas, malls and monuments."



HOK's Rod Sheard on why Wembley

Spa & Wellness

Luxury spa for Hoole Hall

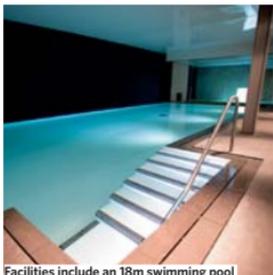
An £8m luxury spa opened to the public on 2 November in Chester, Cheshire.

The Club and Spa at Hoole Hall has been built on the grounds of the former 18th century Hoole Hall manor house, which is now the Doubletree by Hilton hotel on the outskirts of Chester. The Grade II-listed 72-bedroom hotel is operated by Sanguine Hospitality.

Located in the hotel's walled garden, the spa will offer a total of 14 treatment rooms, including two couples suites, a relaxation area, an 18m swimming pool, an experience pool and a plunge pool.

There will also be a Finnish sauna, a steam room, a Rasul chamber, a hammam and a meditation room.

The beauty spa's large health and fitness suite will include a gym, two dance studios and changing rooms.



Facilities include an 18m swimming pool

The opening of the spa is part of a multi-phase £26.5m redevelopment of the property by Denozon Contracts and Falconer Chester Hall Architects.

Steiner acquires Bliss for \$100m

Starwood Hotels & Resorts Worldwide has agreed to sell its spa company, Bliss World Holdings (Bliss), to Steiner Leisure for \$100m (£67.4m, £60.3m) in cash.

As part of the agreement, both the Bliss and Remède spas and amenities will remain exclusive to Starwood in the hotel category at W Hotels and St Regis Hotels.

Spa and skincare company Bliss has a global range of free-standing and hotel spa locations, offering services under the Bliss and Remède brands, and products under the Bliss and Laboratoire Remède brands. Bliss also operates an e-commerce business and distributes its prod-



Steiner paid £63m for the Bliss spas

ucts through a range of department stores including Bloomingdale's, Harrods, Harvey Nichols, Macy's and Neiman Marcus as well as the Sephora stores.

ISPA announces new board members for 2010

The International Spa Association (ISPA) has revealed its 2010 board of directors, including four new members.

For the second year, chair Jean Kolb will lead the board, while the four newly elected board members include Dr Kathryn Dundas, the CEO of Sublime Energy Medical Spa and the group director of spa for Mandarin Oriental Hotel Group, Andrew Gibson.

The quartet is completed by Ella Stimpson, spa director at The Broadmoor in Colorado Springs, US; and Paul

Schmidt, the owner and chief executive of Living Energy Design.

Each member of the ISPA board volunteers their time to help to lead the global association and develop plans for both enhancing membership and boosting the spa industry through research events and education.

Kolb said: "I'm honoured to lead the members of ISPA. ISPA will continue to provide valuable resources and opportunities to its members which will help them through this turbulent time."

Indigenous spa planned for Scotland

A new spa is to open within the luxury Blythswood Square Hotel in Glasgow, Scotland, with the redevelopment of one of the city's most famous buildings, the former Royal Scottish Automobile Club. Covering 10,000sq ft (929sq m), the spa will feature indigenous Scottish treatments designed by spa director Matt Laird in conjunction with the organic product house ILA, as well as therapies using Anne Sémonin products. There will be nine treatment rooms, including a double suite.

Cornish eco-hotel opens in Morgan Porth

The Scarlet eco-hotel in Morgan Porth, Cornwall, has launched on a cliff-top overlooking the Atlantic Ocean with a 9,149sq ft (850sq m) spa. Using Tri-Dosha ayurvedic products as well as Voya seaweed preparations, the treatments offered are holistic in focus. The spa offers seven different treatment types, each representing a journey.

Cowshed Carnaby launches in Soho

A new concept store and spa created by the Cowshed brand has opened in central London. Located in Soho, Cowshed Carnaby has been created to showcase the brand and follows the original Cowshed Relax Spa at Babington House in Somerset, and a sister site in Notting Hill, London. A range of signature treatments are offered, including manicures and pedicures.



Andrew Gibson, one of the new directors

Hospitality

D&D London unveils Moorgate hotel plans

Restaurant operator D&D London has unveiled plans to develop its first hotel after securing a deal with property company Frogmore for a new 80-bedroom property in Moorgate, London.

The 72,000sq ft (6,689sq m) boutique property will be designed by architects Allies and Morrison, while Conran and Partners – owned by D&D London's majority shareholder Sir Terence Conran – will design the hotel's interior.

A ground floor bar and grill; a seventh floor rooftop restaurant and bar with an outdoor terrace; meeting and events spaces; and private dining areas have all been proposed as part of the Moorgate hotel development.

Paul White, chief executive officer at Frogmore, said of the plans: "The hotel will be just what this location needs and



The hotel's interior will be designed by Terence Conran

D&D has the perfect background for both the hotel and the restaurants."

Construction work on the new hotel is scheduled to start in 2010, with the property set to open to the public in 2012.

The news came just weeks after it was revealed that Conran is also planning to expand his Albion-branded English café chain. Conran has already negotiated a lease on a possible site in Victoria, London.

Chipotle Mexican Grill coming to London

The Denver, US-based burrito restaurant chain Chipotle Mexican Grill is to open its first location in the UK.

Design and building plans are currently being finalised for a restaurant at 114-116 Charing Cross Road in London's West End, which is scheduled to open in April 2010. The restaurant will be the company's first eatery in Europe.

Steve Ellis – founder, chair and co-CEO of Chipotle – said: "London has become an important food city over the years, especially because of the awareness of and desire for things like locally sourced, seasonal, and artisanal ingredients." The com-



The restaurant will serve Mexican food

pany has further revealed that, beyond its interest in the UK, it has also looked at sites in both Paris and Munich but has neither identified specific sites nor released timelines for such expansion.

UK hotel operators bucking the trend

Both revenue and occupancy continue to fall at European hotels, but UK operators seem to be weathering the conditions better than their mainland rivals.

A year-to-date report from research company Deloitte shows revenue per available room (revPAR) in the euro zone was down 19.2 per cent on 2008. Although the UK too has suffered, the 'staycation' effect which has seen Britons take more domestic holidays has offset the fall in inbound tourism. London boasts the highest occupancy in Europe at 79.8 per cent, while Glasgow and Edinburgh were the only European cities to show growth.

TRG planning 20 new openings next year

The Restaurant Group has continued to trade in line with expectations, with like-for-like sales currently 3 per cent down on the same period in 2008. Total turnover, however, is up 4 per cent.

Announcing its trading update for the 46 weeks to 15 November, The Restaurant Group reported that it had opened 17 new restaurants in 2008, with another 15 to 20 new openings expected during the course of 2010.

Looking ahead to 2010, the company expects trading conditions to remain

tough for the sector, with tax rises, fuel price increases and the threat of higher unemployment all potentially impacting on consumer spending. However, TRG said it believes its strong brands and value-for-money offer will allow it to continue trading profitably.

The Restaurant Group operates around 365 restaurants and pub restaurants, mainly located in leisure locations and airports. Its primary brands are Frankie and Benny's, Chiquito, Garfunkel's, Blubeckers and Brunning & Price.



The company opened 17 sites in 2009

designnews

project: the yas hotel

design: asymptote architecture

location: abu dhabi

Hotel opens on Grand Prix Circuit

The Yas Hotel has launched on Abu Dhabi Yas Marina Grand Prix Circuit. The hotel actually consists of two separate buildings, which are connected by a bridge spanning the racetrack. Steel and diamond shaped glass panels 'drape' over the two buildings, uniting them visually.

New York architects Asymptote Architecture designed the 499-room hotel, which is owned by Aldar Properties. It features two George V concept bars, eight speciality restaurants and an ESPA-designed spa.

The hotel exterior features thousands of LEDs, creating the opportunity for dramatic light shows. Other unusual design features include bathrooms housed in frameless glass boxes, mounted with fine silk sheer panels. The bridge houses a café/bar offering views of the racetrack.



project: southend pier restoration

design: saville jones architects

location: southend, uk

Southend Pier restored after fire

Following the 2005 fire that destroyed the Old Pier Head in Southend, Saville Jones were appointed in 2007 to lead a design team in the restoration of the pier structure. The team also designed a new train station for the end of the pier.

The new canopies were inspired by 'the pattern of waves rolling in to the foreshore'. On a more practical note, the structures can be economically reproduced and easily dismantled if necessary. The zinc roof incorporates photovoltaic cells, which generate electricity for the pier's use. The new canopies are lit at night from underneath.



project: urban beach

design: lbhf

location: river thames, london, uk

Fulham urban beach plans unveiled

Plans for a new 'urban beach' on the banks of the River Thames in Fulham, London, have been unveiled by the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham (LBHF).

The local authority is hoping to create the beach as part of an £8m scheme to regenerate Bishop's Park. The urban beach is a recreation of an attraction that drew Edwardian families from across London. The original beach opened in 1903 but fell into disrepair during the Second World War before being closed due to safety reasons in 1949.

project: crosby street hotel

design: kit kemp (interiors)

location: new york, us

Firmdale launches first US hotel

Firmdale Hotels has opened its first hotel outside of the UK – the Crosby Street Hotel in SoHo, New York.

The Crosby Street Hotel has 86 rooms and suites, a bar and restaurant, a central garden, a screening room and a gym. Interiors are by Kit Kemp and are described as 'fresh, quirky and contemporary'. The ground floor features wide oak floorboards, large metal framed windows and a 10ft-high Jaime Plensa steel sculpture of a human head made from letters.

The guest bedrooms are all individually styled and feature original artworks and oversized warehouse-style windows. The cinema screening room has 99 orange leather seats and walls padded in violet wool.



project: wolgan valley resort & spa

architecture: turner & associates
interiors: chhada siembieda australia

location: wolgan valley, australia

Luxury conservation resort opens

The A\$125 Wolgan Valley Resort & Spa has opened on the edge of the Blue Mountains World Heritage Area, Australia.

The resort is Emirates Hotels and Resorts' first development outside Dubai. It features 40 suites, three restaurants and bars and a spa. It is set on 4,000 acres of land, most of which is set aside as a wildlife reserve.

The main building was designed by architect Dominic Bennett (Turner & Associates), and the interiors were created by Chhada Siembieda Australia. The design is based on traditional rural Australian homesteads. Solar panels are used to heat the resort's water, windmills are used instead of electrical pumps and all domestic water is recycled.



project: stonehenge visitor centre plans

design: denton corker marshall

location: wiltshire, uk

Stonehenge visitor centre plans

English Heritage has unveiled designs for the proposed new £25m visitor centre at Stonehenge after submitting a planning application for the scheme to Wiltshire Council.

The facility, which is to be built 1.5 miles (2.4km) to the west of the historic site at Airman's Corner, has been designed by London-based architects Denton Corker Marshall to be environmentally sensitive to its surroundings.

A pair of single-storey structures – one glass and one timber – are to be built as part of the visitor centre scheme which will house exhibitions, a café, a shop and toilets, while a low-key transit system similar to one in use at Cornwall's Eden Project will also be provided.



RENDERING: HISTORIC ENGLAND

PETER JOEHNK

Hamburg-based company Joi Design recently won the Best Futuristic Design at the Boutique Design Awards in Miami for its work on the Park Inn hotel in Krakow. Founder and managing director Peter Joehnk explains his vision

How did you get started?

I completed a diploma in interior design and a degree in ecological architecture, before setting up my own company in 1984. Right from the start, I specialised in hospitality, which was a niche market in Germany 25 years ago.

Because hotel projects are relatively large, you have to have four or five people on each project, so the company had to grow fast. Six years ago, Joehnk Interior Design changed into Joi Design, a limited company which I founded with my wife Corinna Kretschmar-Joehnk. We've designed over 200 hotels to date and we employ about 40 people.

What is your approach to interior design?

We start by finding a theme for a hotel – something special that will define the look. We might draw inspiration from the location, the guests or the brand, but it's different for every project.

We're currently reviewing all the guest rooms we've ever designed, and we've discovered that we've never copied ourselves. It's always a different approach.

Which other sectors do you work in?

Hotels are about 90 per cent of what we do, but we also do restaurants and spas. Our major client in restaurants is McDonald's. We have developed a new brand concept for them called the Mac Café, which has 600 sites in Europe, located within McDonald's restaurants.

It's an upmarket concept, with calm colours and easy chairs and coffee served in real chinaware.

How much experience do you have in the spa market?

Most of the hotels we do have a spa; we're currently working on a 2,000sqm spa for Steigenberger Hotel on Usedom [an island in the North Sea]. We've also done standalone spas – one of our clients is the Aspria Group in Europe.



Peter Joehnk originally trained as an ecological architect



What's been your favourite project?

I'm especially fond of a very small project in the south of Germany, called Hotel Ritter. It has just 60 bedrooms and is a very old, charming building. We really tried to preserve and showcase the building while also adding some modern elements. The results are very beautiful.

What project has posed the greatest challenge?

We're currently working on a very large project for Hilton at Frankfurt Airport. The whole project is costing about €1bn, and we're working on two hotels – 580 rooms in total – that constitute a third of the

project. The challenge there is working with so many different architects, consultants and engineers, and also keeping the design on a human scale. The lobby is 10 floors high and we somehow have to make it feel homely and nice.

Which other designers do you admire?

There are three. Philippe Starck is one of my greatest inspirations and the American designer Karim Rashid is also very innovative – he uses materials no one has ever used before. The third is Andrée Putman, the elderly French designer who designed the Morgan Hotel in New York; we worked with her on a Ritz-Carlton here in Germany. She was one of the first to develop design hotels, along with Ian Schrager.

What was your brief for the Park Inn Krakow?

Park Inn bedrooms are a standard design: young and modern with strong colours. But in the public areas, while keeping them modern and bright, the designers are free to do something more individual. In Krakow, the architecture of the building itself was very strong. It has a really striking façade, with a lot of



The curved form of the building (right) is echoed in the design of the reception desk (left)

PARK INN BY REZIDOR

A core mid-market hotel brand from the Rezidor Hotel Group, Park Inn was launched seven years ago with the opening of the Park Inn Berlin Alexanderplatz in Germany. Targeting business and leisure travellers, the properties are intended to be 'highly efficient, fresh and innovative hotels that are global in outlook, national in scale and local in operation'. There are

currently 130 Park Inns in operation or in development across Europe, the Middle East and Africa.

Soft-opened in April 2009, the Park Inn Krakow is located in the centre of the historic Polish city with 152 rooms and 10 suites. Other facilities include an RBG Bar & Grill (Park Inn's new signature restaurant concept), a wellness centre and gym, five meeting rooms and a business centre. Key future

openings include Park Inn Abu Dhabi; Park Inn Oslo Airport, Norway; Park Inn Sandton, South Africa; Park Inn Frankfurt Airport, Germany; and Park Inn Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

The Belgium-based Rezidor Hotel Group manages approximately 300 hotels and 60,000 rooms across 50 countries. As well as Park Inn, its portfolio includes Radisson, Regent, Country Inn and Missoni Hotels.

curved forms. So we tried to bring some of those forms inside, especially into the reception area, which is really the show-piece. These curves are reflected in the black reception desk, in the ceiling and flooring, the pattern of the fabrics and in the shape of the furniture.

Were you influenced by the location?

Yes, our other inspiration was the city of Krakow itself. There are glass sheets showing silhouettes of the city behind the reception desk and also separating that area from the restaurant. But it's not an old-fashioned view of the city – it's very modern and abstract.

Because Park Inn is a very colourful brand, we have used a lot of strong colour throughout the hotel's design. We wanted the customer to feel comfortable though, so we've used more subtle shades than the Park Inn brand colours of red, yellow, blue and green – although we have used those as an accent.

Why do you think you won the Best Futuristic Design award?

I would guess they chose it because it's not a typical, high-end design hotel – it's a standard three- to four-star hotel that shows some very strong design ele-

ments. There are plenty of design hotels that are much crazier, but this is a boutique hotel for ordinary people.

What were the biggest challenges of the project?

There was a very limited budget. Also, when designing a three-star hotel, functionality is very important, and it was a challenge to bring real design elements into a project like this. We did have to make some changes because of operational requirements – we couldn't have carpet in the lobby, for example. However, we were very lucky that the owner and the operator were open-minded and interested in modern design.

Traditional hotels are much safer for investors; it's much riskier to do a modern hotel, so it's very nice as a designer to have an opportunity like this.

How important is environmental sustainability in your work?

It's always been important. I trained as an ecological architect 26 years ago and when I started my business I put 'ecological architect' on my letterhead. But at that time no one was interested so I took it off! Now everyone recognises how important it is, especially in hospitality.

We use local suppliers and natural materials as much as we can; we'll always choose a woolen over a synthetic carpet, and try to use oiled or waxed surfaces instead of lacquered ones. We're also very conscious of energy saving – we think very carefully about lighting, even down to what light bulbs we use. Sometimes owners don't want to do things differently so we have to work hard to introduce new ideas.

What are some of the most common interior design mistakes?

It's usually to do with functionality. Very often interior designers are not experienced in hotel design, or it's the architect that does the interior design. They don't think about the fact that guests will be cleaning their shoes on the curtains and spilling coffee on the carpet!

What exciting projects are you currently working on?

The Dolce Hotel in Munich, a very eco-friendly project due to open in April 2010. The investor wanted something reliable and authentic, so we're using coloured screed instead of carpet for the flooring in the public areas, with lots of wood and textiles to make it feel cosy. ●



The tennis centre is part of a regeneration project for Madrid

DOMINIQUE PERRAULT

The Madrid Olympic Tennis Centre has been described as one of the world's most advanced tennis facilities. Dominique Perrault tells us more

What is the background to the Madrid Olympic Tennis Centre?

The centre, otherwise known as La Caja Magica, was part of a wider project to regenerate the area around the Manzanares river in Madrid. It is a brownfield site which is quite ugly and has some social problems. The idea was to improve the quality of the district with a huge new park, public spaces and a significant new building. A new highway means that traffic has been rerouted from the banks of the river and the project will see the area benefit from a new metro station.

What was your brief for the tennis centre?

La Caja Magica is central to the regeneration strategy. It is not only a tennis stadium, but also a multipurpose venue. It houses three stadiums [seating approximately 12,500, 3,500 and 2,500 people] with three separate retractable roofs. These stadiums can host tennis matches, but also other sports events, fashion shows, theatre, circus and music concerts. With the retractable roofs the venue is very flexible; it means the stadiums can be used during the day, at night and in any weather.

The retractable roofs open like the lid of a box – hence the name La Caja Magica (the Magic Box). They can also slide open, making the stadiums totally open air.

Can you describe the design?

The shape is very simple – it's a rectangular box. However it doesn't have walls like a normal building; instead it has a kind of mesh curtain made from a metal fabric. This curtain allows you to feel the fresh air and see the light from outside, but it acts as a filter against the sun, rain and wind. The idea was to wrap the three stadiums with this metal curtain. At night the building is illuminated and the inside of the stadiums can be seen.

The metal mesh is an idea I developed for the French National Library in Paris. I also used it to cover the Olympic Velodrome



Dominique Perrault's metal mesh walls have become his trademark

ALL PHOTOS: © GEORGES FESSY / DPA / ADAM

and Pool in Berlin. It is made from a mix of metals including steel, aluminium, copper and bronze.

What was your inspiration?

My inspiration for La Caja Magica came from the existing landscape and the environment. I tried to introduce a new building that would change the quality of the landscape and would fit within the context of its surroundings.

What was your favourite part of the design?

The roof. When you see it moving it is totally crazy and very spectacular. I think it's quite emotional for the public to see. When you are sitting in the main stadium and the roof lifts up slides open and the sky appears, it's very, very impressive.

What was the biggest challenge of the project?

Getting it finished! It was a really big project.

What impact has the project had on the area?

The idea was to introduce a landscape – the area just featured social housing and some warehouses. It was a bit of a 'nothing' area. Architecture is being used as a tool to transform the quality of this area of Madrid. The idea is to develop the relationship between the public and private spaces there. La Caja Magica is a key part of this transformation.

How did you get involved in the Octopus project in Salerne, Italy?

The Octopus is a renewal project for Salerne Quarry. The client, Cave Salernitane SPA, is a private construction company which spotted the potential for the disused quarry.

The client went to the Mayor and asked what the city was planning to do with the site. The Mayor suggested that they should find an architect and work with them to come up with a



The main court has a seating capacity of 12,500 and hosted the Madrid Open

THE MADRID OLYMPIC TENNIS CENTRE

The Madrid Olympic Tennis Centre opened in May 2009 in time to host the Madrid Open. The 100,000sq m centre was built on a former slum housing area, and features three main tennis courts that can be covered or uncovered with seating for

12,000, 5,000 and 3,000 spectators. The centre also features 16 outdoor courts, five courts with a covered area for 350 spectators each, a swimming pool, a tennis school, clubhouse and headquarters for the Madrid Tennis Foundation, as well

as restaurants. The buildings are organised around a large artificial lake. The roofs of the three main courts can be opened separately and allow 27 different opening positions depending on the weather and the event the spaces are hosting.

proposal for the site. I was already working on the redevelopment of a huge public square – Piazza Garibaldi – in Naples, so the client knew of me and contacted me with a proposal.

What would the project offer?

The idea, which is at a very early stage, is to create a multifunctional centre for music, culture and entertainment. It would include an 8,000-seater theatre, with restaurants, bars, educational centres, dance and music schools also included in the complex. A hotel would also be built nearby.

Can you describe your design?

The vision is to develop an octopus shape, with the 'tentacles' acting as a connection between the building and the mountain that it sits on. The core of the building will contain the main theatre, with several wings (or tentacles) leading out to the mountain outside.

What stage is this idea at?

It's just a thematic idea at the moment – it's a concept designed to create input and to kick things off.



Concept designs for the Octopus in Italy

What other leisure projects are you currently working on?

We're working on a project to design a new city centre for Sofia in Bulgaria. [Dominique Perrault won the international competition to design Sofia's new centre in April 2009. The firm was selected from a group of six architectural practices including Zaha Hadid and Norman Foster]. ●

JAMES CAAN & BEN SILCOX

Launched by ex LA Fitness sales manager Ben Silcox and *Dragon's Den's* James Caan, nuyuu fitness is the latest low cost gym chain to hit the UK. Caan and Silcox explain what sets the chain apart



How was the idea for nuyuu born?

Silcox: We wanted to find a health club model that would work in the UK, but that was a bit different – the industry hasn't changed a huge amount over the last 15 years in terms of what goes into a club and how it's paid for – and that could start to segment the market more. When we were researching our idea, the pay-as-you-go budget health club model was emerging in the US and Europe, which was very topical.

We also wanted to explore how we could grow a business relatively quickly but with the least amount of capital and expenditure. The easiest way to do that was to pick up existing health clubs from other operators.

Those two ideas work well together – if an existing site hasn't worked for one of the mid-market operators, the budget club model can often succeed in that same location – and it was by marrying the two that we came up with the nuyuu model.

James Caan, how did you get involved with nuyuu?

Caan: I was approached by Ben, who was working for LA Fitness. He'd seen me on *Dragon's Den* and approached me through my private equity company, Hamilton Bradshaw.

In the current economic climate, a membership fee of £45 is just not as attractive as it used to be. The idea is therefore to try and create a product that gives quality and delivers a high degree of service at a price that works for both the operator and the consumer. We're in a recession, yet we know the demand for health clubs exists. Ben was confident and we thought he had the right background and experience. He also put forward a substantial amount of his own money. Ben understands the business, has an incredible amount of passion, and the idea was good. He ticked all of our boxes.

What does nuyuu offer?

Silcox: It's a value for money proposition. We're not aiming for the lowest end of the market, though – the £10 a month concept. We're going for the look and feel of a mid-market club, but one where you don't pay for facilities you wouldn't use anyway.

Caan: A lot of clubs are throwing in the kitchen sink – lots of benefits and services which are not necessarily what the consumer really wants. We need to provide a service that focuses on consumers' actual needs, and our long-term strategy isn't necessarily to have wet clubs. We think there's a market for dry clubs where people just come in, do their workout and leave, and where they don't have to pay for all the extra bells and whistles. We charge between £19.99 and £24.99 a month.

How can you charge such low fees?

Caan: It's a bit like the easyJet model. You fly on a first-class plane and have a safe journey, but you pay only for the journey.

We're buying high-quality existing clubs in prime locations, but ours is a better value offering. Rather than having, for exam-





ABOUT NUYUU

Nuyuu is a new fitness club chain launched in partnership between businessman James Caan and former LA Fitness national sales manager Ben Silcox.

Nuyuu launched with three clubs – in Slough, Berkshire; Livingston, Scotland; and East Grinstead in East Sussex – in October 2009. These clubs, which were acquired from LA Fitness, were rebranded, cleaned and fitted with new equipment before relaunching.

The chain offers membership from £19.99 a month based on a 12 month contract, or £24.99 a month for members who choose to sign up on a non-contract basis. Nuyuu fitness clubs will offer customers modern facilities with a range of cv and resistance machines equipped by Precor, as well as Vibrogym systems, which are designed to accelerate weight loss.

Caan and Silcox aim to grow the chain to 15 clubs within two years, and 50 within five



years. They are currently looking for properties of between 10,000sq ft – 25,000sq ft.

ple, 1,500 members paying £50 a month, we think it's better to have 5,000 members paying £20 a month. People like going to places where there's a buzz and where they can meet other people. We believe that, by creating a better value proposition and attracting more members, we'll create a better atmosphere and a better environment. Everybody wins.

Who is nuyuu aimed at?

Silcox: We're targeting two distinct groups of people. Firstly the switchers – people who've been members of a gym for a while and are not happy with the service they've received or the fact that they've been paying for a large chunk of the facility they don't use. The other group comprises people who have never been members of a gym before, either because they feel intimidated by gyms or because of the price.

nuyuu has three basic principles: cleanliness, friendliness and member results. If we can provide real friendliness and real cleanliness, that will help address the intimidation barrier. And if we can provide a price point that lets people try our gym without feeling they have to sign up for a £600, 12-month contract, they're more likely to give it a go.

Is it a good time to launch a new business?

Caan: The current market conditions play right into our strategy; the market is very volatile, so sites are more available than they would otherwise be. In addition, everyone's looking at what they're spending at the moment, asking themselves: 'Is this something I really need? Can I justify this?' At £45 a month, a health club membership might be too much; at £20 a month, it might just make more sense.

"My father said observe the masses and do the opposite. I've never found that the pot of gold lies where the herd is. It generally lies in the opposite direction, where the least number of people go" Caan

What changes have you made to the LA Fitness clubs you acquired?

Silcox: We've rebranded them and installed around £850,000-worth of new kit into the three sites. The swimming pools at two of the sites were decommissioned and we made some structural changes to free up space.

We also gave the clubs a really deep clean from top to bottom, scrubbing everything and getting them looking like they haven't looked for quite some time. People aren't looking to be able to eat their dinner off the floor, but they are looking for the kind of cleanliness you get at home. That's all we're trying to do. The starting point is to get our clubs to a level of cleanliness we can then maintain.

You said you'd decommission the pools at all three clubs, but recently announced the pool at East Grinstead would remain. Why?

Silcox: We have a core model, but every facility needs to be localised to its particular market. In East Grinstead, there was an overwhelming desire for the pool to stay, particularly from the over-50s. We've listened to that, have figured out a way to make it work and have made a commitment to the members that we'll keep the pool open for one more year. It's quid pro quo: if we do our part and they do theirs, we'll be able to keep it open.

They are going to pay £35 for access to everything in the club, including the pool, which is still £2.50 less than LA Fitness was charging. We're not making money on the pool – we just want to try and cover our costs in running it.

What feedback have you been getting from the previous LA Fitness members?

Silcox: The vast majority of feedback has been incredibly positive. These businesses weren't getting much time, attention or money spent on them and the members like the idea of people coming in and investing in their club.

A percentage of members are unhappy because it's change. We're not a charity though, and we're not trying to be all things to all men. It's about engaging with members and trying to please as many people as possible.

You aim to open 15 gyms in two years, and 50 in five. Is there room in the market for this?

Caan: Absolutely. A value proposition makes sense across the country right now. We have no doubt of that whatsoever.



New Precor equipment has been installed across the three sites in Scotland, East Sussex and Berkshire

When will the next sites be announced?

Silcox: We're very hopeful that two more sites will be online by January 2010, and we have a further 15 sites in the pipeline.

What are you looking for from potential sites?

Silcox: We're looking for existing clubs that aren't working – empty shells that we can open clubs within. We'd also buy land and build a club if we found the right site.

Caan: I think there's a recognition that, in certain demographic locations, the existing health club model doesn't work any more, and we've already been approached by other operators who have sites they feel might be of interest to us.

If anyone else has clubs they think would work better under our model, I'd be delighted to speak to them, as it could be a win-win situation for both parties.

What will be the biggest challenge of this project?

Caan: Securing the right sites. We're not setting up the clubs from scratch – we're going to be acquiring existing facilities, so the challenge will be getting the right facilities in the right locations that match our proposition. That's never going to be easy.

What has been the biggest challenge of your career?

Caan: Launching my first business Alexander Mann. I was 21, with no experience, no education, no money and no track record. To launch a business that is now turning over nearly £400m a year from scratch was quite a challenge.

What's the best piece of advice you've ever received?

Caan: It came from my father, who said: "Observe the masses and do the opposite." When it comes to real estate, people in the UK tend to operate with a herd mentality. I've never found that the pot of gold lies where the herd is. It generally lies in the opposite direction – where the least number of people go. ●

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CAMILLERI

DON CAMILLERI

The Center Parcs development director tells Magali Robathan about the frustrations of getting planning permission to build a new village at Woburn, the innovations he's working on and the plans for a sixth site in Ireland

I arrive early to meet Don Camilleri, development director for Center Parcs. It's 9.30am, and in the main plaza at Center Parcs Longleat Forest Village the queue for the pool – which opens at 10am – is already huge. The bowling alley is bustling with life and outside the forest paths are busy with families cycling across the site.

At a time when the UK is experiencing the worst recession since the 1930s, Center Parcs is thriving. "We've actually increased occupancy during the credit crunch," says Camilleri with satisfaction. "Occupancy has been 96 per cent for the last 12 months; the year pre-recession, our occupancy levels were 93.4 per cent."

The first thing I notice about Camilleri is his enthusiasm. He is absolutely passionate about his job and about Center Parcs. When I meet him, he is staying at Longleat Forest with some friends who

are visiting from Malta, and he couldn't be more excited if he was a member of the public visiting for the first time. He tells me about the "fantastic" Indian meal they had the night before, describes their lodge in detail and rubs his hands together at the prospect of spending the afternoon in the Aqua Sana spa.

The second thing I notice is how much he uses the word 'challenge'. When I ask what drives him, he tells me he loves a challenge. This is probably a good thing. From the epic battle to win planning permission for the company's fifth UK park in Warren Wood near Woburn to changes of ownership and the largest capital investment programme in the company's history, it's been a challenging few years.

A LONG ROAD

We turn first to the new village which is being built at Woburn. Camilleri has



worked for Center Parcs since 1986. His role as development director covers all aspects of creating a new park, from finding the site to handing the completed park over to the operations director. The last one he opened was Longleat, in 1994, and the whole park was designed, developed and opened in four years. Plans for Woburn were announced five years ago, and the company is still two years away from starting construction.

"It's a shame because by now Woburn should be up and trading," says Camilleri. "After five gruelling years, we've finally got planning permission, but it's been an incredibly frustrating experience."

The initial planning application for the Woburn site was rejected in 2006 by Mid Bedfordshire District Council on the grounds that it wasn't appropriate for green belt land. The Department for Communities and Local Government overturned this decision in September 2007 and awarded outline planning permission, dependent on a list of conditions including the diversion of two public rights of way. This took almost two more years, but in May 2009 Center Parcs finally received confirmation of orders of the diversion of the rights of way.

"I'm not trying to say that we shouldn't have been challenged – it's green belt land and we respect that, and we respect the fact we've had to prove why we

"After five gruelling years, we've finally got planning permission, but it has cost us £8m. How many businesses are going to be attracted to invest in Britain if, instead of getting help, you get this kind of frustration?"



An artist's impression of the Woburn village, set to open in 2013



should be allowed to build on it," says Camilleri. "But it has cost us a lot of money. By the time we put the first spade in the ground to actually start building the village, we will have parted with more than £8m.

"It's important that the powers that be reflect on this if Britain wants to be successful. How many businesses will be attracted to invest if, instead of getting help, you get this kind of frustration?"

LOOKING AHEAD

Center Parcs has now set a target date of early 2012 to start construction on Woburn, and is aiming to open the new park in the summer of 2013. When it launches, the new village will feature 700 forest villas, a 75-bed hotel and spa with 12 associated spa suites and two main centres including indoor sports, a swimming pool, restaurants and shops. It will also include outdoor sports, leisure facilities, a nature centre and a lake.

Part of Camilleri's remit is to ensure that Center Parcs is constantly innovating, and he promises several exciting new additions at the Woburn village. These will include the 12 spa suites, allowing the company to expand its spa offer. "This will allow people to come for a dedicated spa break and really pamper themselves," he says. "Woburn will also feature some fantastic new ideas

Camilleri promises major new innovations for Woburn's subtropical swimming paradise. The pool is a key part of Center Parcs' offer

in the pool. We have a team researching the world's best examples to introduce in our subtropical swimming paradise. We'd like to think we can bring in some very significant attractions within the pool."

Other new ideas include a travel package to encourage people to journey by public transport. This is part of Center Parcs' green travel policy. "We have an idea of working with local train providers so that we have a presence at London's St Pancras station and can offer a seamless journey to our park," says Camilleri. "You'd pay for the travel as part of your stay, check in at the station and we'll provide an added value package – possibly an upgrade to first class travel and discounted cycle hire. We'll pick you up from Flitwick station and take your bags to your lodge while you start enjoying your holiday. You could leave work at 5pm on Friday, and by 7pm you could be in our spa. What a way to escape."

EARLY YEARS

Camilleri's early career was filled with adventure. He graduated in civil engineering in 1971 in Malta during a time

of political upheaval, making finding – and keeping – a job extremely difficult. He moved to London aged 22, where his father found him a room in a nuns' convent. "I immediately started working on a plan to get out of there," he laughs. He quickly found work with engineering practice Arup.

His early years with Arup saw him work on the Pompidou Centre in Paris before being sent to Iran where he remained until the 1979 revolution meant he had to flee the country with his family. Next came an 18-month stint in Libya, followed by four years in Nigeria where he really found his feet.

"This period was when my engineering capabilities were stretched to the limit," he says. "I spent many nights during monsoons and storms watching the buildings I'd designed in case they fell down! I was still nervous about trusting myself and my designs."

Camilleri and his family moved back to the UK in 1984, and Arup asked him to open a Leeds office. At the same time, Dutch holiday company Sporthuis Centrum approached Arup for help in translating its forest holiday village concept for the English market.

Camilleri was put in charge of creating the company's first UK park in Sherwood Forest, Nottinghamshire, with the idea that once it was finished he'd pass it over

"We are looking at potential sites in Ireland for village number six. England, Scotland and Wales couldn't support another site of this dimension. We doubt very much there will be another park of this size here"

to someone else to run and get on with opening his Leeds office for Ove Arup. It didn't work out that way, however. The management at Sporhuis Centrum were so impressed with Camilleri that they asked him to join the UK team to start up Center Parcs in the UK.

"The Dutch company was a very exciting operation," says Camilleri. "I liked their style; their directness. They had a very effective way of working. The thing that really caught me, though, was the offer itself. Center Parcs is a place for people – particularly families – to get together and do as little or as much as they want. People can just come and breathe the fresh air of the forest if that's what they want. It's a very simple escapade from city life. Piet Dirksen, [who founded Center Parcs], had a moment of genius when he came up with the concept in 1966."

The Sherwood Forest site, which opened in 1987, was followed by Elvedon Forest in 1989. Longleaf Forest Village opened in 1994 and in 2001 the Oasis Holiday Village near Penrith was taken over by Center Parcs from Rank and renamed Whinfell Forest.

The company has gone through several changes of ownership and was floated on AIM in 2003, before moving to a main stock market listing in 2005. In 2006 private equity firm the Blackstone Group acquired the operations of Center Parcs for £265m, and immediately put a major investment strategy in place.

"We've flourished under Blackstone," says Camilleri. "They've invested significant money and have really challenged us. They very quickly saw the areas we could improve on. They focused us on those areas and made the funds available for us to make improvements."

NEW INVESTMENT

After acquiring Center Parcs, Blackstone spent £825m buying back the property estate which had been sold to Sun Capital in a sale and leaseback deal in 2002. Blackstone then spent £150m expanding and updating the accommodation at the four villages, revamping the food and beverage offer and adding new facilities.

This was completed in August 2008, just before the global financial meltdown began and Britons began swapping their

foreign holidays for UK breaks. "Our villages were sparking with new products, new ideas and new accommodations. We were ready," says Camilleri.

This fortuitous timing has been great for Center Parcs, with the recession attracting a whole new kind of customer – those that previously spent their short breaks abroad and were now having to look to the UK instead. "These people used to say 'Center Parcs is not for us'," says Camilleri. "These Doubting Thomases have given us a try and guess what? They're converted, and they are bringing more of their friends in too."

EYING UP IRELAND

I ask Camilleri about plans for a further site in Ireland. He says it's too early to talk about them in any depth, but does confirm that "we are looking at potential sites in Ireland for village number six," and adds that the site would need to be smaller than the existing parks. Would they need to wait until Woburn is up and running to make a move with this Irish site? He shakes his head, saying "I don't think so. Ireland can potentially stand on its own two feet with a catchment of six million people plus tourists."

As for the UK, the thinking is that coverage is probably complete. "England, Wales and Scotland couldn't support another site of this dimension. We'd need to open Woburn and let it settle, but we doubt very much there will be another Center Parcs of this size here."

THE ENVIRONMENT

Center Parcs is well known for its commitment to the environment. The company has been granted ISO 14001 certification for its environmental management system – a guarantee of a responsible environmental performance.



The village square is at the heart of each Center Parcs site

CENTER PARCS' HISTORY

1968

First Center Parcs village opens at De Lommerbergen in Holland

1987

The concept of the "villa in the forest" finds its way to the UK with the opening of Sherwood Forest in Nottinghamshire

1989

Elvedon Forest opens in Suffolk and the British brewers and retailers Scottish & Newcastle become the new owners

2001

Center Parcs UK is sold to venture capitalists Deutsche Bank Capital Partners

2002

The Oasis Holiday Village near Penrith is taken over by Center Parcs UK and re-named Center Parcs Whinfell Forest

2003

The business is floated on AIM (Alternative Investment Market)



When I interview Camilleri, the company has also just been awarded The 2009 Green Business Award for Biodiversity Protection, which celebrates initiatives by UK businesses for achieving environmental sustainability. This recognises the company's efforts to protect the natural environment and wildlife at its sites by the conservation rangers and ground services teams.

"We've always been a very sound environmental company," says Camilleri. "The woodlands we choose are all commercial woodlands. We turn them around; open them up selectively, introduce water features and bring the indigenous woodland back."

Center Parcs' green travel policy could see discounts on cycle hire for guests arriving via public transport

In the new lodges, water saving devices, underfloor heating, energy efficient light bulbs and intelligent thermostats have been installed. The villages' vehicle fleets are being replaced with greener vehicles and programmes are in place to limit landfill waste, recycle more and cut energy and water usage.

With the Woburn site, Center Parcs has the opportunity to really push the boundaries. Camilleri reels off a list of "potential ingredients" they could intro-

duce to the new village to make it as green as possible, including ground source heat pumps, biomass boiler systems and better insulation.

"We are actually questioning whether we should use gas again in our next village," he says. "We could use electricity instead, and maybe we could generate that electricity ourselves."

The interview draws to a close, but as Camilleri walks me to my taxi he is still proudly pointing out new developments in the village and sharing his ideas.

I comment on his passion for his job and he looks at me as though I'm mad. "Well of course," he says. "If you don't have passion, what's the point?" ●

2005

Center Parcs moves to main stock market listing

2006

Private equity firm The Blackstone Group acquires Center Parcs

2007

Unprecedented investment programme begins with over £100m spent on accommodation, restaurants and retail outlets

Outline planning permission is gained for 5th UK village near Woburn

2008

As part of continued investment at Center Parcs every single bed on the four villages is replaced as well as the entire bike fleet

Celebrity Chef Aldo Zilli opens the first Zilli Café in Longleat's Aqua Spa

2009

Phase 3 of the accommodation refurbishment starts

Planning permission is awarded for Center Parcs' fifth village in Warren Wood near Woburn



Should young children be banned from touching farm animals?

Following the outbreak of E.coli 0157 last summer, which saw 12 children hospitalised and several farm attractions closed, we ask whether calls for youngsters to be banned from touching animals are overzealous, or common sense

On 12 September 2009, Godstone Farm in Surrey was ordered to close by the Health Protection Agency following an outbreak of E.coli 0157, which led to severe illness in a number of visitors. By October, there were 93 confirmed cases linked to the farm, and 12 children were hospitalised as a result of the outbreak. Several other farms closed as a precautionary measure.

The farms have all now reopened and the children hospitalised as a result of the bug have all been sent home, but farm attrac-

tion visitor numbers are down and debate is raging over whether guidelines on children's contact with animals need to be changed ready for next season. An independent investigation into the outbreak is being led by George Griffin, professor of infectious diseases and medicine at St George's, University of London.

So, are the risks being exaggerated or are children's lives being put in danger? Should they be banned from touching animals, or just supervised more closely? We ask the experts

My view is that, for children under the age of five, touching farm animals is a risk not worth taking. Young children are more likely to get E.coli 0157 and are more likely to develop serious complications if they do get infected.

E.coli 0157 is quite common in farm animals; roughly 10 per cent of cattle, sheep and goats carry the bug and there's no way of knowing whether they're carrying it or not.

Young children are more likely than older people to become infected with E.coli 0157 as a result of contact with animals, as they tend to put their fingers in their mouths and it's harder to ensure they wash their hands properly. Infection can cause a complication



Professor Hugh Pennington

Emeritus professor of bacteriology
Aberdeen University

called hemolytic uremic syndrome (HUS). This can cause kidney failure, brain damage, mini strokes and cardiac complications, which can be fatal.

Once you're infected there's very little you can do – it's just the luck of the draw whether you develop serious complications or not. And a tiny number of microbes can be enough to set off a potentially lethal infection. That's why prevention is so important.

I'm very unhappy about young children touching farm animals. It's just a

risk too far. It's down to the operators of the farm attraction businesses to follow the guidelines properly.

Operators need to design the farm attractions so that very young children don't come into contact with E.coli 0157. Farms need to have information on display for parents – it's about good signage, good hand washing facilities and good farm design. They should be designed, for example, so that in order to reach the café or restaurant visitors are obliged to pass handbasins.

The E.coli outbreak was unsettling news for anyone involved with hosting farm visits.

One must not be flippant about the seriousness of E.coli. But neither can we allow knee jerk legislation to undo all our good work. Inevitably, the Health Protection Agency and the Health and Safety Executive will be pressured to amend current guidelines for farm visits to mitigate risk, but these must be tempered. Whispers that only children over five years should be allowed to visit farms, for example, would appear overzealous.

Heavy-handed legislation, imposing segregation of animals in a sterile environment, will re-awaken the 'them and us/town and country' divide we have been working so tirelessly to eradicate.



IAN PIGOTT

Farmer and founder
Open Farms Sunday

Farms and farm attractions would once again appear unwelcoming to visitors.

Aside from the thousands of children and parents that visit farm attractions each year, around one million children made a school visit to a farm in 2009. This is three times more than a decade ago and represents nearly a sixth of all school children – among the best pupil to farm visit ratios in the world.

Seven years ago farming was being written out of the school curriculum. Today, FACE (Farming And Countryside Education) is being consulted by

the Qualifications, Curriculum Development Agency on how farming can help shape the curriculum, because they can see the merits of farm education and visits to farms

I would hate to see this E.coli episode dampen farmer's enthusiasm for welcoming visitors or indeed the public's appetite for visiting farms.

Of course the ramifications will present a challenge. But each day UK farmers get closer to consumers. Now is not the time to shut our gates. *With thanks to Farmers Weekly*



NFAN members have been affected by the E.coli outbreak; more so in the south than the north as the major outbreak was at Godstone Farm in Surrey.

Visitor attendances in the southern county areas have been down by an estimated 10 per cent. Having said that, attendances have only dropped to the levels they were at in 2006/2007. 2008 was a bumper year for countryside attractions and 2009 was a good year up until September.

The NFAN has had encouraging discussions with the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), which produces the guidelines AIS23 *Avoiding Ill-Health on Open Farms*, and with the regulatory body LACORS. Both organisations have



BARRY DAVIES

Treasurer

National Farm Attractions Network

been supportive to NFAN members. NFAN does not consider the official HSE guidance needs to be changed; AIS23 is very much 'fit for purpose'.

Ill-health following a visit to an open farm is unusual, even among children, and these risks need to be balanced against the benefits for a child's education and development that arise from contact with animals.

Professor Hugh Pennington has said: "The safest way for these farms [attractions] to proceed would be for

them to get rid of the ruminants." Since Pennington made his comments, hundreds of members of the public have emailed the BBC News website, with the majority expressing opposition to a ban on the petting of animals.

To stop toddlers from being able to interact with animals is utter madness. What is required instead are facilities where children handling animals are strictly regulated, with parental supervision, and there are always handwashing facilities available.

We've never had any incidents of E.coli here at Old Macdonald's Farm, but since the outbreak at Godstone Farm we have seen visitor numbers drop.

When the outbreak first happened our visitor numbers dropped by around 50 per cent. They have been picking up slowly but are still down on what they would normally be at this time of year.

We've made a few changes: we've put in more hand washing facilities, have put up more signs (with pictures for the children) and have moved our picnic areas away from the animals.

I'm satisfied with the standards we've got in place, but some of the smaller operators are not up to scratch and maybe need to be better regulated. There are a lot of cowboys out there



JOSEPH MANNING

Owner

Old Macdonald's Farm, Essex

- people who suddenly want to open their farm up, but don't have much of an idea about dealing with the public. This affects the good operators as we all get tarred with the same brush.

I think it would be a shame if under fives were banned from touching animals [as Professor Pennington has suggested] because it's a natural thing for children to want to get up close to the animals. It's part of the experience.

If parents are sensible they will make sure their children's hands are clean after coming in contact with the

animals. I don't think it should be a hands-on experience without supervision, but I think that as long as children are supervised they should be allowed to see the animals from the fence line.

We operate a traffic light system, which we put in about three years ago. We have big signs at the entrance and throughout the farm explaining how it works: green shows children what they can touch, amber shows they need to be supervised by parents, and red shows what they can't touch. It's very simple and it really does work. ●

Building Butlins

At Butlins' new Ocean Hotel and Spa, men watch football while having a massage and the lifts act as mini discos. Matthew Goodman finds out how Butlins is branching out while staying true to its market



Among the litany of problems that company bosses have to face, coping with strong demand is probably the one they mind the least. It's a lot less worrisome having to turn trade away than deal with not having enough in the first place.

But for Richard Bates, Butlins' managing director, such issues cause no end of

stress as well as some regret. There's no sign of complacency at a beloved British institution approaching its 75th anniversary.

It is just a few months since Bates presided over the opening of the Ocean Hotel and Spa at Butlins' operation in Bognor on England's south coast, yet, despite meeting its annual target by the end of October and already taking £1m-worth of bookings for 2010, Bates claims there is still room for improvement.

"Sometimes we don't quite measure up," he says. "If we were going to change one thing, I would have built more treatment rooms in the spa. We built 10, and there should have been 20."

INVESTING IN THE BRAND

The Ocean Hotel and Spa is the latest manifestation of a £100m investment programme at Butlins over the past six years; just over half the money has been spent on adding to and improving the room stock at the company's three resorts.

The Ocean is not the first hotel that Butlins has built. In 2005, the group opened the 160-room Shoreline Hotel, also at Bognor, in response to guests' demands for accommodation that afforded a sea view – prior to that, all the existing rooms faced inwards. As well as meeting this particular need, an added bonus was that the new hotel also helped attract guests who had not previously taken a holiday with Butlins. Of the visitors who stayed at the Shoreline Hotel in its debut year, 62 per cent were first-time users of the brand.

Within a year of opening, occupancy levels were near to their maximum, prompting the company to begin thinking about a second such project. The initial design sketches for the Ocean were put together in July 2006. It marked an opportunity to correct a few of the issues with the Shoreline; for example, it was decided the new building would have a larger reception and lobby area to cope with the number of guests arriving simultaneously – a feature of Butlins. But to make the follow-up hotel stand out, it was also decided that it should have a spa.

Such a move would seem sensible. Recent data published by market research company Mintel shows that 14.6m adults took part in some form of 'health and wellness' activity while on holiday, with spa treatments accounting for the vast majority. And while such breaks form a relatively niche market, there is a sizeable chunk of the population who have never been on a spa break or a 'wellness holiday' who could be tempted to do so.



Facilities in the spa include a snow cave (pictured), disco showers and a crystal steam room



The Ocean Spa (above) uses bright colours and fun treatments to ensure it fits in with the Butlins ethos. The £20m Ocean Hotel (left) opened in August 2009

It was important to Butlins to operate the spa itself rather than outsourcing the operation to a third party as it's felt that outsiders don't fully comprehend what makes the brand tick

A SPA WITH PERSONALITY

Butlins had already dabbled in the spa market – its site in Skegness in Lincolnshire had been successfully running a spa for some years. “It’s absolutely the right thing for Butlins,” said Bates. The Skegness spa has steadily expanded since its 2002 opening; today it has 14 treatment rooms.

Bates acknowledges that moving into the spa market is not a natural move for Butlins, however. “We recognise that we’re not in the spa business,” he notes, “and it’s unlikely we’d build the most luxurious spa in the country.”

That said, it is something that guests embrace and so the company has endeavoured to stamp its treatment rooms with the Butlins personality. At the Ocean Spa in Bognor, for example, a deep tissue massage for men has been dubbed the Premier League massage and recipients can watch footage from the 1966 World Cup final while they’re being treated. Another treatment involves lying on a giant marshmallow. It was also important to the company that it run the spa itself rather than outsource the operation to a third party, because of the style of the venue. It is felt within Butlins that outsiders do not fully comprehend what makes the brand tick.

Having opened in August, at a cost of £20m, the Ocean Hotel and Spa has been “hugely successful”, surpassing the company’s initial expectations, says Bates.

In part, the timing of the opening has been fortuitous, riding the ‘staycation’ trend that has seen many holidaymakers attempt to shrug off the double whammy of higher air fares and the strong euro by staying in the UK for their annual break.

Another factor is of the group’s own making. Bates says he spends long periods sitting in on focus groups, particularly with mothers – “it’s the mums who book the family holiday”, he

points out. He argues that Butlins’ success partly stems from its efforts to deliver precisely what customers expect. “We do [these projects] with a high degree of confidence,” says Bates.

Customers have indicated what they want from a Butlins hotel. As well as the sea view, they demand everything from air-conditioning to floor-to-ceiling windows. “It makes it easy for us when we sit down with the designers,” he says.

Like the spa, the hotel has been marked with the Butlins stamp, and includes disco lifts complete with lighting and tunes.

Nevertheless, projects still have to be financially attractive. Butlins tends to expect such capital investments to pay for themselves over somewhere between five and seven years.

LOOKING AHEAD

Emboldened by the success of the Shoreline and Ocean hotels, there are a number of further projects in the pipeline. A third hotel has been pencilled in for Bognor, while Butlins Skegness and Minehead may also have hotels added.

It may be some time, however, before Butlins embarks on a campaign to begin opening standalone hotels or spas in resort towns where it currently lacks a presence. Partly, this is because Bates is acutely aware of history; Billy Butlin once attempted to open a resort in the Caribbean but it failed: he wants to see the group survive for its next 75 years.

Arguably a more important consideration is that there is too much work that needs doing on the company’s existing trio of resorts without having to get distracted by other projects. It seems that despite its success, Butlins’ management will continue to focus on how to keep it up. ●

Matthew Goodman is a journalist with The Sunday Times

PARADISE FOUND

Pristine beaches, lush olive groves, rugged mountains and the backdrop of a sea

so blue it takes your breath away. This is the Messinian Peninsula, in the Peloponnese area of Greece, and it's easy to see why Vassilis Constantakopoulos, founder of Athens-based developer Temes SA (Tourist Enterprises of Messinia), is so passionate about his homeland.

Constantakopoulos has spent the past two decades buying land in order to turn his vision for Costa Navarino – a massive, sustainable, upscale holiday resort – into reality. Costa Navarino is a truly ambitious project. A E1bn resort covering more than 10 million sq m, it will feature 3,000 hotel rooms and suites, seven golf courses, six thalassotherapy centres and spas, a marina and conference facilities.

What's more, Constantakopoulos has pledged that Costa Navarino will be the first 100 per cent emission-free resort in the world, and will lead the way in a new era of more sustainable tourism for Greece. "Messinia – and most of the Peloponnese – has been lucky not to succumb to the anarchic development seen elsewhere [in Greece]," says Constantakopoulos. "Today there are

A E1bn, 10 million square metre luxury holiday and spa resort is aiming to change the face of Greek tourism. Magali Robathan finds out what Costa Navarino will offer, and hears how its founder plans to create the world's first 100 per cent emission free resort

laws protecting the environment and people are much more aware.

"Costa Navarino and other investments like it will bring about big changes. It is up to us to exploit those changes in way that will maximize the benefits and minimise the negative effects. The policy of making easy profits has brought about the crisis we are now experiencing."

Constantakopoulos has made his fortune in the shipping industry, and is founder and president of the Costamere Shipping Company.

So far Starwood Hotels and Resorts and Banyan Tree have signed up to open hotels and a spa within the development, while Troon Golf will be operating the first two signature golf courses.

OPENING IN STAGES

Costa Navarino will eventually consist of four separate resorts. The first two resorts – Navarino Dunes and Navarino

Bay – are due to open in May 2010 and 2012 respectively.

Navarino Dunes will cover 1,300sq m and will feature a 4,000sq m standalone spa and thalassotherapy centre, two hotel developments by Starwood Hotels and Resorts – The Romanos and The Westin – a signature 18 hole golf course, a private beach and a central entertainment and shopping village.

The Romanos, a Luxury Collection hotel, will feature 321 rooms and a range of restaurants and bars. The 445 room Westin, meanwhile, will feature four speciality restaurants and a range of bars. Both hotels offer low-rise villa style accommodation and use traditional Greek architecture as inspiration. They will share a central village with a traditional Greek amphitheatre, an open air cinema, shops, restaurants and tavernas, and the resort will also feature a 2,000 capacity conference centre.



Costa Navarino will offer visitors spectacular views of the Ionian sea



The design of the lobby allows the natural surroundings to take centre stage, and is inspired by traditional Greek architecture

“The vision is a destination that enables guests to explore the natural beauty, history and traditions of the area while helping Messinians stay in their homeland”

The standalone 4,000sq m spa, which also opens in May 2010, features kinesiotherapy, thalassotherapy and floating pools, indoor and outdoor treatment areas, and a range of light therapies and heat experiences, including ice-grotto rooms, mist showers and herbal saunas. It will offer a range of Eastern and Greek treatments including therapeutic olive oil treatments “based on ancient local practices inscribed on clay tablets discovered at the nearby Palace of Nestor” (the remains of a large Mycenaean palace). The spa operator has been signed, but the developer hasn’t yet made an announcement about who it will be.

The Dunes Golf Course is an 18 hole, par 72 course which has been designed by Bernard Langer in association with European Golf Design. The course will be managed by Troon Golf and will feature a 3,500sq m clubhouse.

Just a few miles down the road, Navarino Bay will cover 1,400sq m and will feature two luxury hotels – the first operated by Banyan Tree and the other operator yet to be announced. It will also boast an 18 hole golf course which is

being designed by Robert Trent Jones II and will be operated by Troon Golf.

The Banyan Tree Costa Navarino – Banyan Tree’s first hotel in Europe – is due to open in 2012 and will feature 117 villas with landscaped gardens featuring infinity pools and outdoor showers. It will feature three restaurants and a Banyan Tree Spa with 10 indoor and four outdoor individual treatment pavilions, Banyan Tree’s signature Rain Mist experience, hydrothermal facilities, fitness training rooms and an indoor swimming pool. The treatments will be based on traditional Asian treatments.

The buildings in Navarino Bay will be ‘earth sheltered’ – meaning they will be embedded in the site’s natural terrain with living roofs planted with local plants. This traditional style design reduces energy consumption by providing natural cooling and insulation.

The final two resorts, Navarino Hills and Navarino Blue, are not yet under construction and detailed information about what they will offer isn’t yet available. Temes SA is still looking for operators for these developments.

A YEAR ROUND DESTINATION

One of the problems faced by the Greek tourism industry is the seasonal nature of its offer, with 70 per cent of tourists visiting between May and October. Temes SA is determined to ensure Costa Navarino will attract visitors throughout the year, and golf is a key part of this strategy.

“Golf has become an increasingly important part of luxury tourism worldwide,” says Marina Papatonis, marketing director of Temes SA. “Although there are many opportunities to enjoy the sport throughout the Mediterranean, the same cannot be said about Greece. We decided to change this.

“Golf will enhance Costa Navarino’s attraction as a year-round destination. In many ways, it is the perfect sport for this particular area for a number of reasons, not least the climate. Costa Navarino enjoys comparatively mild winters and comfortable summer temperatures on account of the seaside location.”

The resort will also offer a range of other year-round outdoor activities including water sports, rock climbing, hiking and mountain biking.

Costa Navarino & the environment

ARCHITECTURE:

- The building footprint will be less than 10 per cent of the total land area
- Costa Navarino's design is based on the principles of bi-climatic architecture (the design of buildings working in harmony with their natural environment)
- The resort will feature 5,000 square metres of planted roofs and optimal use of natural light and ventilation

ENERGY:

- Temes SA is waiting for a permit from the Greek Regulatory Authority for Energy to develop a prototype 22MW photovoltaic system to generate energy for the resort
- Geothermic equipment will be installed under the golf course. This will use geothermal power for the cooling and heating of the resort
- A cooling system using seawater is also under construction

NATURE AND BIODIVERSITY:

- Organic fertilisers are being used for all green areas
- Use of self sown plants adapted to local terrain
- A major replanting programme is seeing thousands of olive and fruit bearing trees uprooted and temporarily replanted during construction. They are currently being replanted on site
- Temes SA is working with the Hellenic



Ornithological Society on a project to upgrade the nearby River Sellas wetlands

- The developer has also established a fire monitoring system to prevent forest fires.

WATER:

- Two reservoirs with a total capacity of 850,000 cubic metres have been constructed to use some of the excess runoff from local rivers
- Temes has financed a water resource management study with the University of Thessaloniki

ENVIRONMENTAL CERTIFICATION:

- "The Costa Navarino construction project is certified under the ISO 14001 and EMAS environmental management systems

IMPACT ON LOCAL ECONOMY

Investment in the development stands at around E1bn, not including land costs. It is being funded by a combination of equity, debt and government funds.

As the largest tourism development in Greece, Costa Navarino has been debated in parliament with both of the main political parties voting in favour of the project. The development fits well into the plan of the Greek government to move the country away from mass tourism towards higher quality tourism.

As for the impact of the development on the local economy, Constantakopoulos estimates that 750 new jobs will be created initially, rising to 1,200 once phase one becomes operational. Temes SA has pledged that Costa Navarino will recruit mainly from local communities, and will use local products and services as much as possible.

"This will be combined with educational programs for SMEs and local producers to help them adopt high quality standards in their businesses," says Papatsoni. "Costa Navarino will create a significant number of new business

opportunities in the area, providing substantial motivation, especially for young people, to remain in their homeland. The indirect effect of our development in job creation is even bigger, since it is estimated that for every job within Costa Navarino, 0.8 jobs is created outside.

"The vision of Costa Navarino is a destination that enables guests... to explore the natural beauty, history and traditions of Messinia, while at the same time creating jobs, supporting education and building infrastructure to help Messinians stay in their homeland."

THINKING GREEN

Costa Navarino's electricity needs will be met by solar power – the developer has applied for a permit for a 22MW photovoltaic system to be hidden in the mountains – and a geothermal installation will be installed under the golf course to provide cooling and heating for the resorts. A cooling system using technology based on seawater circulation is currently under development.

Hotels and golf courses are notoriously water-hungry – to meet this demand two

reservoirs have been constructed, which will store some of the excess run off from local rivers, and the resorts will also use recycled water and collected rainwater.

A major replanting programme has seen 5,500 native trees uprooted and temporarily re-sited, before being replanted on site. Organic fertilisers are being used in all green areas and comprehensive waste management and recycling programmes are planned.

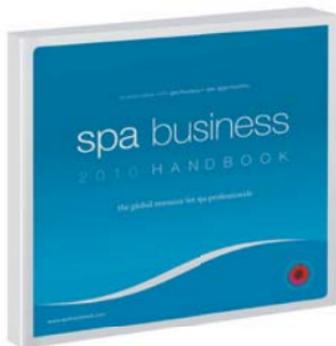
Temes SA is working with environmental organisations including the Hellenic Ornithological society to protect local wildlife. The developer has also teamed up with the Bert Bolin Centre for Climate Research of Stockholm University to build a research centre at Costa Navarino, which will study the Mediterranean climate and environment.

No-one could accuse Constantakopoulos of not thinking big with Costa Navarino. His vision is for a truly sustainable, luxury resort that enables visitors to enjoy the local area while helping locals to stay in their homeland. Only time will tell whether he manages to achieve all of his aims. ●

spa business 2010 handbook

*the global resource
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The *Spa Business Handbook* is the ultimate reference guide for the international spa market. Published in January 2010 as a comprehensive resource for operators and suppliers worldwide, it will be distributed to key decision makers including leading hotel and spa operators, suppliers, developers, consultants and other experts. It will also be distributed at key spa events, making it a must to be seen in.



What's in the handbook?

{ Operator information }

- Industry movers and shakers
- Global market hot spots
- Key industry statistics and research
- A 2010 diary highlighting events, shows and networking opportunities
- Predictions and trends for 2010
- A development pipeline
- Spa design
- Disability
- Fitness in spas

{ Supplier information }

- Company profiles including key information, contact details, images of products and a picture of a key contact
- A-Z listing of trade associations
- A-Z listing of green resources

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MAKING FRESH TRACKS

Although Hemel Hempstead's dry ski slope had earned a reputation of providing good instruction and turning out good skiers and snowboarders, the advent of artificial snow ski centres meant there was a limited future for dry slopes. The launch of Xscape Milton Keynes, just a stone's throw away, added to the problem. Lesson bookings stayed buoyant, but there was a dramatic fall in the numbers of people using the slope for recreational skiing and boarding.

Owner/operator, David Surrey, who developed the Hemel slope with his father, had a choice of either continuing to tick along or creating an ambitious, next generation centre. He chose the latter option, putting together an experienced board of directors, and enlisting the expertise of Pete Gillespie as snowsports director. Now Xscape Milton Keynes may have cause for con-

cern, since The Snow Centre is 30 miles closer to London and could stem the flow of visitors to Xscape.

CREATING THE SNOW CENTRE

"We decided we wanted to create a training academy and a centre of excellence, not a theme park," says Gillespie. "We went around all the snow centres and took the best of the key things [we found] and designed out the things we thought didn't work. We wanted a big nursery slope, as most people come for lessons, and we wanted it to feel open, with wide slopes and a high roof."

To animate the space, the walls are decorated with mountain vistas. Gillespie contacted the Austrian Tourist Office to ask whether any of the ski regions would be interested in sponsoring the walls and two regions, Ötztal and Zillertal, took up the offer. The back wall is sponsored by

Columbia, which also provides all the ski and snowboard clothing, and the equipment is sponsored by Head Tyrolian.

The Snow Centre has been five years in the making and opened for business in May 2009, giving ample time to sort out any teething problems before winter. "There were a few planning issues," says Gillespie. "This is quite a funky building to be situated right in the middle of a residential area, but this site was always designated for sports and recreational use. The town is being renovated and the council is keen to make it more of a destination, so they were generally enthusiastic about creating an exciting venue to bring extra revenue to the town."

"We did have to make some changes to the initial plans though. To start with [the building] looked a bit like a massive shed. The council told us we had to be more eco-friendly so we've now got one of the biggest cedar roofs in Europe."



THE SNOW CENTRE HAS:

- 120 BASI qualified instructors
- 8000sq m real snow slopes
- An 160m-long main slope
- The UK's largest indoor lesson slope: 100m x 30m
- A snow play area for under sixes, with rings and toboggans
- Rails and freestyle features
- Snow and Rock store
- The Edge cafe bar
- Three conference rooms
- It cost £23m to develop



Hemel Hempstead's 30-year-old artificial ski slope could no longer compete with the real snow ski centres on the market.

Following a £23m makeover, The Snow Centre is now giving its rivals a real run for their money, says Kathryn Hudson

AMBITIOUS TARGETS

The operating costs to run what is essentially a massive fridge are high, so the target visitor numbers have been considerably raised from those of the artificial slope. In the first year, the target is for 300,000 visits, with a £6.5m turnover. This compares with between 30,000 and 40,000 visits per year and £1m turnover for the original dry ski slope.

"It was a worry opening in the middle of the recession, but by that time we were already committed," says Gillespie. "However, we have been overwhelmed with the response and the level of success. We are on target at the moment and looking like we will achieve our year end goal. In a few years we hope to be getting 500,000 visits a year."

The Snow Centre is being marketed via the website and email, as well as ski and snowboard and lifestyle magazines. Although ski and snowboard fanatics

are obvious targets, the marketing is more focused on reaching new people, and is particularly targeting the family market. Most of the visitors are As and B1s: within 45 minutes travel time, which encompasses a population of six million people.

Fanatics come from further afield – two to three hours drive – on a monthly basis

CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE

The level of the tuition is the USP. The Snow Centre is the only British Association of Ski Instructors-accredited Centre of Excellence in the south. As well as taking ski and snowboard lessons,

As a ski and snowboard addict who has been deprived for the past few years, I was excited about the prospect of getting a fix at The Snow Centre.

It's an impressive building which flows well. The café bar, with its views of the slopes, has enough wood and slate in the design to give it a homely Alpine feel.

Much time and money has been invested in the manufacture of the snow, and the quality was good. Probably good enough to live up to the tongue-in-cheek strapline of 'the best snow this side of the Alps.'

I was pleasantly surprised at the standard of the tuition. My snowboard instructor, Tom, was extremely likeable and I was impressed with the subtle changes he made to my rusty technique. He gave me digestible advice and by the end of the hour-long lesson I was snowboarding 100 per cent better and with much more confidence.

It would have been an excellent pre-holiday refresher, if only I had a holiday to look forward to!



my experience
KATH HUDSON

people can learn to become instructors, take refresher qualifications and take courses in teaching people with disabilities. The uptake for the instructors' courses has been extremely good, with all of the courses sold out.

Gillespie is not planning to stop at one ski centre. "We're already doing feasibility studies for the next one," he says. ●

SPORTS CITY

Cardiff's sports provision has changed beyond recognition over the past decade, with Cardiff City Stadium the latest major venue to open. Terry Stevens and Tom Morgan look at how the city is using sport as a tool for change

Sport has always helped form the Welsh national identity, and has played a major role in shaping civic pride for Cardiff.

Today the Millennium Stadium dominates the Cardiff skyline, and acts as a physical representation of a strategy that has seen sport used as an economic driver for the city over the past decade.

The last 10 years have seen huge changes for sports provision in Cardiff. The completion of the Millennium Stadium for the 1999 Rugby World Cup and the launch of the National Indoor Athletics Centre at the University of Wales Cardiff (UWIC) in the same year marked a real high point for the city.

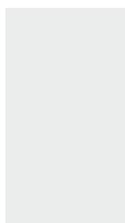
However, these successes were followed by a number of disappointments, including the aborted supercasino bid, which was linked to the International Sports Village (ISV) project in Cardiff Bay. Cardiff Council said at the time that

the casino was needed to ensure the ISV would be completed in time for the 2012 Olympic Games, but it was abandoned, when the government scrapped its supercasino plans in 2008.

Yet since 2005 – and Cardiff's centenary celebrations, as well as its golden jubilee triumph as the Capital for Wales – the vision of selling Cardiff as a 'sports city' has been delivered with a new energy through strategic partnerships with both the private and public sector.

WATERSPORTS AND SWIMMING

Cardiff Council, working with governing bodies from watersports and the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG), has delivered a major event experience within Cardiff Bay. The Bay has hosted national and European sailing regattas, round-the-world yacht races, Formula 1, 2, 3 and 4 Powerboat Grand Prix rac-



Cardiff International Pool (below left) opened in 2008. Cardiff City Stadium (right) was opened by First Minister Rhodri Morgan in July 2009



ing, European and international rowing events, water skiing, and flatwater and slalom canoeing, as well as a range of community events.

The new Olympic-standard Cardiff Canoe Slalom course and Cardiff International White Water rafting centre at the ISV will soon complement Cardiff's existing watersports offer. Due to open in March 2010, it will be the first of its type in the UK. It has been designed by Hydrostadium of France, designers of the Olympic white water courses at Sydney and Athens.

In January 2008, Cardiff International Pool opened. This was a long awaited replacement for the old, worn out Empire Pool, which was demolished in 1998 to make way for the Millennium Stadium.

The new 50m x 25m pool, together with the 25m warm-up pool and leisure facilities, opened at the ISV with Parkwood Leisure operating the pool on behalf of the partnership. The first year



saw 18 clubs swim every week at the pool with 733,000 paying customer visits. More than 40,000 people attend health and fitness classes each year.

A NEW HOME FOR CRICKET

The launch of the Cardiff International Pool was followed in May 2008 by the opening of the new SWALEC Stadium at Glamorgan County Cricket Club (GCCC), built on the site of the existing Sophia Gardens ground next to the Welsh Institute for Sport.

This facility was the vision of Paul Russell, chairman of GCCC, who entered into a partnership with the council and the Welsh Assembly to deliver this stadium for the premier tournament of Test Match Cricket with the Ashes in 2009. This facility, right in the middle of the city centre, has held several one day internationals and the first Ashes Test match in June 2009. After much nega-

tive media before the Ashes Test Match, it was widely heralded as a triumph by the media, both during and after the First Test. Both the ground and Cardiff were proclaimed an international cricketing success, and the event created a legacy for the future. Part of this legacy includes the tremendous partnership work being carried out by the club and council in local schools and communities to support healthy living, team building and the city's physical and social infrastructure.

CARDIFF CITY STADIUM

Early 2009 saw the opening of the International Athletics Stadium at Leckwith to the west of the city, delivered as part of the foundation works for the new Cardiff City Football Club Stadium. The stadium was opened by Colin Jackson and the leader of the council, Rodney Berman, and it replaces the old Leckwith Athletics Stadium.

In July 2009, Cardiff City Stadium was

opened by Wales' First Minister Rhodri Morgan. The new £56m, 26,850-capacity stadium and associated development hosted its first major game between Cardiff City and Celtic the same month.

The stadium was built on the site of the former Cardiff Athletics Stadium and now forms part of the larger £100m, 240,000sq m Leckwith Development that includes retail developments, new housing and new road systems. It is the base for both professional soccer and rugby clubs and also the hub for community engagement with rugby and soccer in Cardiff's schools and communities.

The initiative for a partnership approach to developing the stadium came when the council agreed a way forward for planning and business development with the football club. This resulted in planning approval by the council in August 2003 and Welsh Assembly Government support in September of that year.



The SWALEC Stadium (left) opened in time for the Ashes 2009; Cardiff International White Water (above) will feature a 250m rafting course when it opens in spring 2010

Three years later Laing O'Rourke won the contract to build the stadium with Arup Sport and Holder Mathias as the architectural team and PMG Developments as the developer.

Land clearance started in February 2007 and the structure was completed in autumn 2008. The stadium is owned by Cardiff City AFC, and the Cardiff Blues rugby team are tenants.

Davies Langdon was involved with the project from inception to completion, acting as the employer's agent and cost manager on the total development. Construction started in November 2007 and completed in May 2009, three weeks ahead of schedule and under budget.

As part of the overall scheme for the football stadium, the existing athletic stadium had to be demolished and a new facility built on the other side of Leckwith Road. This is one of only five such venues in the UK that provide the highest international athletic facilities.

EUROPEAN CITY OF SPORT

Cardiff became the UK's European City of Sport 2009, combining its centres of sporting excellence with its healthy living and community facilities, successfully delivering the major elements of the UK School Games in September 2009.

The city, working with its partners, has delivered a one stop shop for sport. The multi-agency support of professionals; academics; health and social practitioners; and local and central government is part of the agenda to develop and pro-

CARDIFF CITY STADIUM – AN ECONOMIC FORCE

In April 2002, as part of the planning process and case making for the new stadium, a comprehensive economic impact assessment was undertaken by Stevens & Associates. The study benchmarked research undertaken elsewhere in the UK; it was based on surveys of spending patterns by football fans undertaken by the Premier League and the Sir Norman Chester Centre for Football Research, as well as the Deloitte's 'Annual Survey of Football Finance'.

In addition, the study was able to draw upon Cardiff's recent hosting of the FA Cup and League play-off games that had relocated to the Millennium Stadium during the re-build of Wembley. The hosting of the FA Cup Finals in Cardiff, for example, generated £4.2m of visitor spend in the local economy while the contribution of the then Charity Shield games was £3.6m.

The economic impact assessment, while examining the potential if Cardiff were promoted to the Premier League, based its case upon a successful Championship side. On this basis the findings estimated that the new stadium would generate around £24m per annum, of which £14.5m would be retained in the local economy. Through the multiplier effect, that £14.5m would generate an additional £5.5m of indirect spending. In addition the stadium would support 250 to 300 jobs (125 to 150 full time equivalents).

mote sport and active lifestyles in Cardiff. It includes not only the sports already mentioned, but many more such as baseball, gymnastics and weightlifting. It also includes innovative schemes such as 'People Versus Handicap', which is using international athletes and teams to provide an example for children.

Cardiff Council is currently working with Matt Burge, chairman and owner of the Cardiff Devils Ice Hockey team, to deliver a new permanent Ice Arena for European ice hockey. The council is also working with Orion Land and Leisure on new waterfront snow facilities. These projects should start on site in 2010, a year that will bring huge opportunities for

Cardiff with the Ryder Cup taking place at Celtic Manor and the city's facilities used for world class events.

Council Leader, Rodney Berman, and the Executive Member for Sport & Culture, Nigel Howells, have been instrumental in driving this agenda, and have been supported by a dedicated team of officers and strategic partners.

Sport in Cardiff, while taken seriously at the highest international level, is also for family and communities, with all encouraged to take part. ●

Dr Terry Stevens is MD of Stevens & Associates. Tom Morgan is corporate director at Cardiff Council

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BUILDING A BRAND

Merlin Entertainments hopes to build its new Legoland Discovery Centre concept around the world, one Lego brick at a time.

Andrea Jezovit hears about the plans

Amini Legoland in a shopping mall? It's a striking concept – and one that Merlin Entertainments has been rolling out since 2007. Merlin's Legoland Discovery Centres (LDC) are indoor, city attractions bringing the brand to local day-trippers with a world of Lego model-building, themed areas, a 4D theatre and a ride or two. Unlike Legoland theme parks, they're weather-proof, open year-round, and don't require a whole day to visit. "People typically stay for about two hours, whereas they'll stay seven hours in a Legoland theme park," says Glenn Earlam, manager of Merlin's Midway Attractions Operating Group.

With three locations – Berlin, Duisburg and Schaumburg, near Chicago – already in operation, and more on the way as part of Merlin's aggressive roll out strategy for its Midway attractions, dozens of retail centres around the world could, one day, be hosting their own LDC.

Next up is a £7.5m LDC set to open at Manchester's Trafford Centre for Easter 2010. The 3,500sq m attraction will be the first LDC in the UK, and Merlin's first new UK attraction since the launch of the Edinburgh Dungeon in 2001. Also in the pipeline are LDC launches in New Jersey (as part of the US\$2bn Xanadu shopping and entertainment complex) and in Dallas/Fort Worth at the Grapevine Mills



Manager of Merlin's Midway Attractions Operating Group, Glenn Earlam, believes that operating a good product at a good price has helped Merlin during the recession



Most LCDs are in shopping malls. One parent amuses the children at the attraction while the other shops

shopping mall. With the New Jersey launch delayed due to Xanadu's postponed completion, both US locations are now projected to open in 2011.

"Because they operate off a smaller basis, LDCs have the potential for being in many more locations all over the world. They don't require million and millions of visitors for us to make money, so potentially we can have lots more of them. It's a different operating model from Legoland theme parks, so they complement each other nicely," says Earlam.

A NEW BRAND IS BORN

The LDC concept was born when Merlin was acquiring the Legoland theme parks from Lego Group in 2005. Merlin wanted to "combine the intellectual property of Legoland with the most lucrative and highest margin bits of our attractions business, which is the Midway format," Earlam says. "We wanted to come up with a Midway format using that very strong Legoland brand, so we came up with the idea of an indoor Legoland."

"We're not trying to penetrate tourist markets

– LDCs are for people who live in the city.

Shopping malls often have other leisure anchors so give us competitive rates for renting space"



"Midway" is the term Merlin uses for its indoor attractions division, which also includes 26 Sea Life aquaria, nine Madame Tussaud's museums, six Dungeons and the London Eye – all built around a one- to two-hour-stay. Merlin also has a division for Legoland parks, and a third for resort theme parks such as Alton Towers. As with all of Merlin's Midway attractions, populous city locations with reasonably wealthy residents were a must for the new LDCs. Locating the new LDCs in retail environments – all but Duisburg make their home in shopping centres – was a natural extension of this. "With the LDCs, it's a residential, local audience, so we're not trying to penetrate tourist markets in particular – this is for people who live in the city. And that's actually first and foremost where

shopping malls tend to put themselves. They already have large quantities of parking space and quite often other leisure anchors to their business, so they're prepared to give us competitive rates for renting their space," Earlam says.

Another benefit of a retail centre location is the advantages it provides for visitors. Merlin's experience with Berlin, the first LDC to launch, has been that guests often combine shopping with a visit – one parent amuses the children at the attraction while the other shops.

Merlin has learned other location lessons from Berlin – the attraction is near the city centre, allowing for some tourist footfall as well as visits from city residents, but Merlin now focuses on less central sites with parking which are easier to access by car for local families.

TUSSAUDS GROUP

Since the acquisition of Tussauds Group in 2007, Merlin has been the number two visitor attraction operator in the world. As well as the LDCs, Merlin also operates these attractions



Legoland: four parks in the UK, Denmark, Germany and California, and two more in development in Malaysia and Dubai.



Sea Life: the number one aquarium brand in the world will see its third US site open in Phoenix, Arizona in 2010



Gardaland Resort: Italy's top theme park with more than 40 rides and a hotel resort. Plans for a second hotel are underway



Madame Tussaud's: Merlin Entertainments opened its ninth wax museum in Hollywood in 2009



The Alton Towers Resort: a new pirate-themed Sea Life attraction was added to the 500-acre resort theme park in 2009

"We aim at children under 12, and the core is ages five to eight. It's a reasonably young audience, so parents want to be able to drive and park," Earlam says.

The Trafford Centre in Manchester fits the LDC location criteria perfectly, Earlam says. "It's got what we'd look for almost anywhere in the world – a high residential population that's reasonably affluent. It's right next to the motorway system that links the whole of the north west, so you've got easy access from Liverpool and all the surrounding areas of Merseyside, you've got easy access from the whole of Greater Manchester, and it's quite easy to come up from the Birmingham area as well," he says. "The actual Trafford Centre is a brilliant location. It's positioned itself as a leisure destination as opposed to just shops – there are leisure offerings, cinemas and the snow dome, and it's getting a reputation for being very high quality."

LEGO GALORE

Despite different international locations, the LDCs all follow a similar concept.

Children can build models of cars and race them in the Build and Test area of the centres

Each features a 4D theatre, a 'factory tour' showing children how Lego is made, a themed jungle walk area, a model-making area, a Build and Test area, where children can build models of cars and race them, and a Hall of Fame featuring famous characters rendered in Lego. There's also a soft play area, Miniland, with a detailed miniature model of the home city constructed from over a million Lego bricks, and the Dragon Ride, which takes visitors through a medieval castle populated by moving Lego models. A second ride, Technicycle, was added to the Chicago site this year, inspired by Lego Technic.



Earlam says Merlin has been learning about what works and fine-tuning the product. "We've worked out ways so that the 4D cinema has an ever-changing film, and we've found better ways of making the Minilands more interactive, with more buttons the kids can press to make them come alive," he says. "We're tweaking and evolving the product to be the best it can be. It's difficult to launch a totally new concept and brand in a less-developed format, and Midway is probably a less developed format worldwide than the theme park format, so it's been quite a challenge and learning curve for us, but we're very pleased what we've been up to and with the future of the brand."

Merlin doesn't divulge its attractions' visitor numbers and revenues, but Earlam says he's happy with the visitor response

“The Trafford Centre's got what we'd look for almost anywhere in the world – a high residential population that's reasonably affluent and is easy to access from the surrounding areas”



Chessington World of Adventures: the zoo and park will unveil a new Asian-themed land in March 2010



The Dungeons: an experience combining history, horror and humour. Merlin operates six sites in Europe



The London Eye: the world's tallest cantilevered observation wheel saw the addition of a 4D cinema pre-show in 2009



Thorpe Park: aimed at thrill ride-seekers, the theme park unveiled horror film-themed SAW: The Ride in 2009



Heide Park Resort: North Germany's largest theme park, it features a new 440-bed holiday centre and four-star resort hotel



Earth Explorer: this Belgian attraction features interactive areas immersing guests in natural forces

to the LDCs so far, noting that they attract in the region of several hundred thousand people. "[The LDCs] typically cost between around £5m and £7m, so 400,000 visitors is a satisfactory return," he says. "We're very pleased and they've been very successful, but because we've learnt as we've gone along, Chicago's the most successful so far. It's in the right location, in a mall, with lots of parking, and it's the most sophisticated."

The fact that LDCs cater to locals looking for days out – similar to Merlin's other Midway attractions – has meant that opening them amid the recession hasn't been a big problem, Earlam says.

"I don't think Merlin's been very affected by those things," he says, noting that the company's multitude of local attractions have benefited from the rise of the 'staycation'. "Our experience is, if you give the customer a good product at a good price in the attractions business, they'll still find the money to prioritise that. Maybe it's the big two-week holidays that are suffering, but people are still going on big days out."

One challenge with the LDCs, however, has been branding. "It uses the name Legoland, so there's a danger that people might perceive it as a theme park," Earlam says. "In places like the UK and Germany, people understand the concept of Legoland as a big theme park, so we've had to explain to the customer that this is a different proposition." This has led Merlin to consider tweaking the logo.

The Legoland Discovery Centre's core age group is children aged five to eight-years-old

UP NEXT

So where might LDCs be headed after the launches in Manchester, New Jersey and Dallas? "We'll do one or two a year for the foreseeable future. In the long term, I really don't know, it depends on how much we're able to penetrate those medium-sized cities in the US. We see the potential for 50 locations," Earlam says, noting that many different American cities could accommodate LDCs. "And there are lots of large and medium-sized cities in Europe and Asia. We have to get our model right, but our perception is that we could roll them out quite aggressively around the world." That could mean up to five UK locations, he says.

This fits into Merlin's strategy of rolling out around four Midway attractions a year. Earlam calls the LDCs a core roll-out brand for Midway, along with Madame Tussaud's and Sealife Centres, which will also be rolling out at a rate of one or two a year. The company continues to look for locations for its Dungeons, as well as observation oppor-



tunities such as the London Eye and Pepsi Globe Observation Wheel, which Merlin will be operating at Xanadu in New Jersey. "They're the five key areas, and one of the strategic things we're trying to do is roll them out together. We've found in cities like Berlin and London that we're able to save on costs by operating either shared services or one management team. And, most importantly, there's the cross-marketing and cross-selling, which increases our total market share."

The years ahead will also see the current LDCs injecting new features to attract Lego fans – first up is a 4D Lego film launching at LDCs and Legoland parks this year. "There are bits and pieces of product that we tweak," Earlam says, "and we'll continue to evolve to what we think is our perfect model." ●

**Winner of the 2008
World Leisure
Innovation Award,
Ginsters' Active
Workplace employee
wellness programme
has seen great results,
finds Kath Hudson**

Play together Stay together

"Cornish children used to be told that, if they didn't behave themselves, they would end up working at Ginsters," says former Caradon Council leader, John Turner. "Now parents say: 'If you're good you might get a job at Ginsters.'"

Part of the Samworth Brothers group, which has 15 food sites, Ginsters didn't have a high standing as an employer, despite the company's attempts to communicate the fact that it offered a wide range of career opportunities and that it needed skilled workers.

The company faced a number of challenges. Around 18 per cent of the 450-strong workforce came from ethnic minorities and were resisting attempts to integrate them into the team. The night and day shifts didn't mix, and separate areas of the production line mistrusted each other. Not surprisingly, the annual staff survey showed staff morale was low.

Three years after the implementation of the Active Workplace programme, sur-

veys show staff are now engaged with the business and take pride in their work. Best of all, comments from local schools have proved Ginsters' negative external image has been turned around.

TAKING A GAMBLE

Caradon Council started the ball rolling in 2004. Under the government's Choosing Health White Paper, it managed to get funding to offer fitness testing to employees at local companies. Half of Ginsters' workforce volunteered to be tested. Because they worked long hours, standing up and being busy, staff considered themselves to be fit. The results showed that, in fact, they weren't fit at all.

Clearly some work needed to be done, and at this point the company made the commitment to invest in an active workplace, in spite of a lack of evidence about the success of such projects.

Caradon Council's then health improvement officer, Jane Abraham, played a vital role in the project. She

approached Sport England and secured funding to appoint a full-time fitness co-ordinator, Steve Smeeth, and also to buy equipment to create a gym in an existing building. A partnership was struck up with the Bristol Business School to monitor the results, using another of the Samworth Brothers' sites as a control.

Ginsters' managing director, Mark Duddridge, concedes the whole scheme was a gamble, but he also saw it as an extension of the company's Training Academy, which supports individuals in further learning, languages and interests.

"It felt like the right thing to do, because of the Academy. Nearly all the staff on site are permanent and it's really important we keep hold of them after we've trained them," he says.

"However, there was the fear it might not work because it's a 24 hour operation – people have to do the activities before or after work. We were a bit nervous we might do all this work and it wouldn't work or it would just appeal to



The scheme won the 2008 World Leisure Innovation Award (left) Allotments have been made available to staff (this picture)

"It felt like the right thing to do. Nearly all of the staff on site are permanent, and it's really important we hold on to them once we've trained them"



Football matches have helped break down barriers between employees

Three years after the implementation of the Active Workplace programme, surveys show staff are now engaged with the business and take pride in their work

those who were already fit. Although we were hopeful, we wouldn't have been surprised if it had faltered."

GENTLE APPROACH

Duddridge and Smeeth both agree the key to the scheme's success is the fact that employees have been encouraged to take part in activities, but there has been no compulsion to do them. "It has been non-threatening and non-competitive. We have taken a really softly, softly approach, by making opportunities available and by offering gentle encouragement," says Duddridge.

Thanks to the Sport England funding, the financial outlay for Ginsters was not extensive, the biggest investment being the supply of activity taster sessions.

After an initial survey to find out what staff wanted to do, they were given the chance to try a range of activities including golf, kayaking, canoeing, surfing, skating, skiing (at a nearby slope), archery and deep sea fishing. In the first year the company funded all the sessions. It's now funded 50/50 company/employees, but interestingly this hasn't detracted from the uptake. Indeed

Smeeth says that people are now starting to involve their families more in the day trips.

Free fruit was made available in the canteen and more healthy food choices were given, as well as advice on diet and exercise. A number of other activities were organised on a weekly basis: badminton, spinning (a couple of employees have now trained as instructors), kettlebells and football.

The football matches have had the most impact in unifying the workforce. Initially international rivalry was intense, but when the teams were mixed up it really improved employee relations. The turning point came when the Polish players voted to speak English during a match and they all started working together.

MOVING ON

Having started off sporty and gym-based, the project has become softer and broader in scope as it has progressed. In January 2009 a number of allotments

THE PROJECT IN BRIEF

Caradon employed an Active Workplace Co-ordinator with funding from Sport England in an attempt to help Ginsters engage 50 per cent of the workforce in more active lifestyle.

Activities include a slow running club, walking club, badminton, tennis, jive, table tennis, trampolining, yoga nad martial arts. There are 10 mountain bikes available to borrow, together with subsidised skiing and snowboarding taster sessions. There are also 11-a-side interdepartmental football matches between shifts throughout the summer.

Ginsters has also installed a free on site gym. The Active Workplace co-ordinator works closely with the occupational health nurse who refers people on to an exercise referral programme in the gym. There are also opportunities for staff to have health and free chiropractor assessments and advice on healthy eating with healthy options available in the canteen.

were made available, targeting those employees that were still inactive. The uptake for this has been excellent and has been accompanied by guidance from tutors at the local college.

The success of the scheme has led to management becoming braver about the initiatives it runs, and difficult issues like drink, drugs and domestic abuse are now being tackled as part of the programme.

"We ran a large campaign on domestic violence and set up a room with a screen so employees could chat to the



Ginsters' staff are given the chance to try activities including kayaking (below), skiing, surfing, golf, archery and deep sea fishing

"Buyers comment on how confident and engaged staff are with their work, which helps us get contracts. But the biggest success for us has been the increase in staff morale and the way everyone is now linked together"

Citizens Advice Bureau in work time," says Smeeth. "This would never have worked if we'd set it up in the beginning, but we've won their trust."

WORLD LEISURE INNOVATION PRIZE

It was Turner's idea to try to win recognition for the project. "When I became council leader I got more greatly involved because I could see people were showing a significant interest at government level, and wanted to find out more," he explains. "They all started to take note, which was when we began to enter awards. I suggested we went for the Local Government Award and the Municipal Journal award, which we won. This is what led us to entering the World Leisure Organisation's Innovation Award."

The World Leisure Organisation's Innovation Award focuses on the social and cultural aspects of leisure as part of the lived experience. It recognises the use of leisure as a creative solution in collectively enhancing the social, cultural, environmental and economic quality of life in a particular area.

The prize seeks to recognise and

reward organisations which have implemented creative solutions which foster local, national or international leisure opportunities for the benefit and development of individuals and communities.

Turner thinks the Active Workplace was a winner because staff became so engaged by the scheme, and because it could be implemented in any company and be of benefit. "The savings [employers] could make from the initial investment and benefits to people's health are extensive, and it could be applied anywhere in the world," he says.

Duddridge thinks the fact it can be replicated so easily gave it the edge. Now there is a constant stream of companies visiting Ginsters and, having left Caradon Council, Abraham has taken the blueprint to Unilever, Tate and Lyle and Boots. With the final evidence from Bristol Business School released in December, the offshoots are likely to be even more wide-ranging.

Even in the current economic climate, Duddridge says he'd launch the programme again; in fact he says he'd be even more likely to do it now there's evidence available to show that it works.

THE END RESULT

Recruitment advertising costs at Ginsters have fallen from £55,000 to £15,000 in the last three years and staff turnover has decreased by 14 per cent. Most people are now recruited directly, which didn't happen before.

"Even before the downturn in the economy we had seen staff turnover creep up, but now stability is at 90 per cent, which is rare for the food industry, says Duddridge. "The survey results corresponded almost exactly with the implementation of the programme. Buyers also comment on how engaged and confident staff are with their work now, which helps us get contracts. But the biggest success for us is the increase in staff morale and the way everyone is now linked together. This has cut right across the boundaries in the workforce, and management going into the bakery is no longer like a royal visit."

Indeed, having been witnessed by many workers trying to squeeze himself into a wetsuit on a surfing taster day, one senior manager commented that no airs and graces are now possible among the management team! ●

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capitalising on CARBON REDUCTION

Despite the seemingly never-ending debate on the state of the UK's economy, the other great issue of our times – climate change – still lurks ominously. Although the number of column inches dedicated to it may have diminished over the last year, its consequences are still clearly there to see and much is being done behind the scenes to mitigate mankind's impact on the environment.

UK government policy sets out a range of mechanisms for business to reduce CO₂ emissions, the most recent of which is the Carbon Reduction Commitment (CRC), which comes into force in April 2010. Organisations will qualify if their mandatory half hourly metered electricity consumption is greater than 6,000 MWh/year or they have an annual energy bill of greater than £500,000. It's mandatory for those not covered by other legislation such as the Climate Change Agreements or European Emissions Trading.

Under the scheme, organisations will be compelled to measure, manage and report their energy consumption and emissions data, purchasing carbon allowances according to those emissions. This money will be repaid annually to participants, with a bonus/penalty, depending on their performance (the size of these bonuses/penalties increases over time). This performance will be captured in an annual emissions league table.

Many hotel groups, health clubs, spas, restaurants and visitor attractions will fall under the scope of the CRC, and many

The advent of the Carbon Reduction Commitment brings with it some fundamental questions for the leisure and hospitality industry. John Beddoes looks at how businesses in the sector can turn its introduction to their advantage

have already registered and made provision for managing the process. The key dates for the CRC are:

- April 2010 – CRC starts, committing participants to measure and report energy consumption/CO₂ emissions.
- April 2011 – fixed price sales of carbon allowances to cover 2010/2011.
- October 2011 – first league table published and first recycling payment made.

TAKE CONTROL

Businesses in the hospitality and leisure industry may actually be able to turn the CRC's introduction to their advantage on a number of parameters with appropriate planning. The implications of the CRC cover not just environmental performance, but they also have financial, reputational and HR dimensions.

Those in the industry should actively try to reduce emissions as early as possible. Some may already have carbon management strategies and management teams in place and will be able to focus their activities on the CRC to deliver real change to their organisation.

Key for all will be to recognise that the financial and reputational implications of CRC will only increase over time, with the first three years of the scheme being seen as a 'learning process' before the regulations become tougher.

It's critical that businesses gain the most in terms of cost reductions from the regulations. It will thus be preferable to build a CRC management team that covers a range of skills and expertise – or at least which can work closely with these disciplines. That team will also need to have a good understanding of how to manage energy that is used to meet a

wide range of power demands, from heated pools to ambient lighting, across several sites.

From a financial perspective, it will be important to involve senior management and financial functions at an early stage, given the up-front cost and cashflow implications of purchasing allowances.

Subsequently, any reductions in carbon emissions should, in the medium term, result in cost savings – from reduced energy consumption, as well as from bonuses accrued through the CRC. The other side of the coin is that any increases in carbon emissions can prove costly both in terms of increased energy costs and the penalties that will become due from the CRC scheme.

A SLIDING SCALE

The financial implications of the scheme become more pronounced over time and participating organisations will need to prepare for this. The bonuses/penalties accrued begin at between +/- 10 per cent of the allowances paid, but these figures will increase to between +/- 50 per cent by 2014/15.

As an example, a business generating 10,000 tonnes of CO₂ a year would have to pay £120,000 in allowances for the first year – and could expect to receive this back as a recycled payment adjusted by a maximum bonus or penalty of £12,000 for Year 1.

Reputation management will also potentially become an issue. The publication of a CRC performance league table each year will almost certainly put the spotlight onto the best and worst





PHOTO: ISTOCK.COM © CLAUDE DUBERNIA

“Reputation management will become an issue. The CRC performance league tables will put the spotlight onto the best and worst performers”

performers, undoubtedly with accompanying positive or negative media coverage. Thus CRC management teams in each organisation should ideally include representatives from PR and/or corporate social responsibility to help plan for these scenarios.

Given that bad news still sells newspapers, the onus will be on organisations to defend themselves where necessary, and actively promote their credentials where they can, depending on where they rank.

With the first league table due in October 2011, it will become critical to identify the likely scenario as early as possible and ensure the organisation's communications resources are available to deal with it both proactively and reactively once the table is published.

It's possible to already take practical steps to boost your ranking before the CRC comes into place by taking advantage of two early action metrics: installing smart meters to cover 90 per cent of your energy consumption across your portfolio; and applying for the Carbon Trust Standard, an accreditation which

rewards organisations that demonstrate absolute or relative reductions in emissions over the last three years and takes into consideration both current and future plans to reduce energy usage.

Of course, central to the CRC management team should be an environmental manager, who will take overall responsibility for managing the CRC process as part of an overall carbon management strategy. He or she should work with a multi-disciplinary team to deliver carbon reductions for the business, meeting both its goals and those of the CRC.

ENERGY REDUCING TIPS

One of the priorities for the leisure industry is to ensure that energy is being used efficiently in site areas. It's important to ensure lights and other electronic equipment are being switched off or automatically going to standby when that area is not in use. Another priority is keeping heating and ventilation costs under control, as these make up almost half of the energy costs for health clubs. Simple measures such as installing auto-

matic or revolving doors to keep the heat in during the winter months can make a real difference. Tools which compensate for changes in weather and temperature and optimise how buildings are switched on and off can greatly improve efficiency in these areas, as can more simple actions such as regularly maintaining heating and ventilation systems.

Add to that the multi-use nature of many sites and the potential complexity of the challenge is clear to see. Quick wins for hotels include use of building management systems; aerated showerheads to reduce water flow and so reduce hot water consumption; improved management practices such as switching off heating/cooling systems before airing guest rooms; and centralising controls to manage the temperature to stop hotel guests from creating 'extreme' variations in room temperature.

Cutting back on energy now will make life a lot easier for the future. ●

John Beddoes is director of energy efficiency at British Gas Business



Bernardo opened a second Il Vino restaurant in Courchevel in 2007

IL VINO D'ENRICO BERNADO
 PARIS & CORCHEVEL, FRANCE

A Liquid Lunch

In most restaurants, diners ask staff to help choose the wine to go with their meal. At Il Vino d'Enrico Bernardo in Paris and Courchevel, France, it works the other way around.

The concept behind Il Vino is based on the premise that the wine should come first. The menus feature an extensive list of wines, but no food at all. Diners choose what they are going to drink – usually by the glass – and the waiters bring a surprise dish that

has been selected to complement the wine perfectly. The waiters are all sommeliers and are trained in guiding the customers to ensure they end up with a meal they're happy with.

A blind tasting menu is also available, where the waiters choose both the wine and the food for customers.

Il Vino is the brainchild of Enrico Bernardo, who won the World's Best Sommelier Award in 2004. According to Bernardo, the goal of the restaurant was to make wine drinking more fun and less intimidating.

Although the focus is on the wine, the food doesn't take second place; the restaurant was awarded a Michelin star in March 2008.

Dining with a Difference

From supper in the sky to breakfast behind bars, Magali Robathan takes a look at some of the world's more unusual restaurant concepts



MJ Murphy worked with Hilton to create the Ithaa Undersea Restaurant

ITHAA RESTAURANT
 RANGALI ISLAND, MALDIVES

Beneath the Waves

It's not new, but it's certainly unusual – the Ithaa Undersea Restaurant is 5m below sea level at Hilton's Conrad Maldives Rangali Island resort. It seats 12 people and serves Maldivian-Western fusion dishes in a spectacular setting, offering 360 degree views of the coral reef and marine wildlife.

The restaurant opened in April 2005 and was designed by MJ Murphy Ltd. A 5m-wide acrylic arch offers views of

the Indian Ocean, and the interiors have been kept deliberately very simple. The structure was built in Singapore and 'sunk' in the Maldives.

Although the Ithaa Restaurant has attracted more attention – probably due to the dramatic 360 degree views of the ocean – the Red Sea Star Restaurant in Israel actually got there first. It opened in 1998, and is 6m below sea level and 70m from the coast of Eilat. Unlike Ithaa, it

features individual windows – each table has a window above and two windows to the side, offering views of the sea.

The site of the restaurant was home to a coral reef which had been largely destroyed by pollution. Four years before the Red Sea Star Restaurant opened, its team created an underwater plant nursery in co-operation with the National Parks and Nature Preserves Authority, recreating the destroyed reef.



The Treehouse reached the finals of the World Architecture Awards

THE YELLOW TREEHOUSE RESTAURANT
NEAR AUCKLAND, NEW ZEALAND

Branching Out

The Yellow Treehouse Restaurant in New Zealand started life as an ad campaign for Yellow Pages – the task was to create the restaurant using suppliers and services from the directory. It sits 10m up a giant redwood tree in a private forest north of Auckland and seats 18 diners plus waiting staff.

Designed by Auckland-based Pacific Environments Architects, the restaurant looks like something out of a fairytale – the wooden, birdcage-like structure is wrapped around the trunk of the tree and looks particularly attractive at night, when it glows from within. It is accessed via a treetop walkway.

The restaurant was open for just over a month and seated 2,000 people, before closing in February 2009. It was so popular however, that new owners Redwood Forest are considering opening it as a permanent restaurant. It is currently used as a venue for weddings and private functions.

MOTO
CHICAGO, US

A Tasty Menu

At Moto restaurant in Chicago, US, hungry diners can whet their appetites by tucking into their menus. Chef and co-owner of the restaurant Homaro Cantu is famous for his culinary inventions, which include edible menus – he creates 'paper' from potato starch and soybeans, and uses an ordinary ink jet printer filled with savoury 'inks' to print the menu choices. The paper is then flavoured, and fried, baked or frozen.

A 'cigar' is served in a dish shaped like an ashtray for example – the cigar is filled with slow-braised meat, wrapped in greens, while the 'ash' is made from sesame seeds. A dish that looks like nachos served with cheese is actually a dessert, with kiwi salsa serving as guacamole and shredded mango as cheese.

Spiral handled cutlery is stuffed with aromatic herbs, in order to help flavour the food as it's being eaten, and Cantu's other inventions include the polymer box – a self contained oven which is heated



inside an ordinary oven before being delivered to the table where diners' fish is cooked before their eyes.

Liquid nitrogen, helium and industrial lasers are all used in the cooking at Moto, and Cantu is currently working on a plan to levitate food using superconductors. His food technology company Cantu Designs is also investigating the idea of growing microalgae for use in sushi and as a biofuel, and is working on

The Oil Spill sushi dish (above) uses squid ink to represent crude oil

a variety of energy saving technologies.

Heston Blumenthal is, of course, the poster boy for experimental cookery in the UK, while Spanish chef Ferran Adria – owner of the world-renowned El Bulli restaurant in Roses, Spain – is widely acknowledged as one of the world's most creative chefs.



Prisoners serve up to 1,000 meals a day at The Clink restaurant

THE CLINK
SURREY, UK

Criminally Tasty

At The Clink restaurant in Surrey, UK, the cutlery is plastic and diners require security clearance before they can sit down to eat their meal.

It's the first commercial in-prison restaurant, and it offers visitors an unusual dining experience while giving prisoners the chance to gain catering qualifications and work experience.

Located at Her Majesty's Prison High Down in Sutton, Surrey, The Clink opened in May 2009 and was inspired by the prison's catering services manager, chef Alberto Crisci.

The public can't reserve a table in the usual way; instead The Clink invites bookings from individuals and organisations with an interest in helping ex-offenders return to the community. Visitors enter through the prison gates, go through a secu-

urity check and cross the prison yard before being greeted by a prisoner-turned-waiter in the 80-cover restaurant. The contemporary, 39sq m restaurant was designed by Ishoka and features furniture hand made by prisoners as well as prisoner artwork.

The menu features locally sourced food, including vegetables grown in the prison garden, and is described as 'wholesome and healthy British fare'.

The restaurant employs nine trainee chefs and 10 waiters at any one time, while two of the prison's former inmates are employed as Maitre D' and Head Chef. Inmates work towards City & Guilds NVQ qualifications training, and it's hoped their experience will help them gain employment once they are released. The restaurant is self sustaining and non profit making.

HMP High Down's governor, Peter Dawson, said: "Every time a chef or waiter at The Clink serves a meal, they play their part in dispelling the prejudice and ignorance that gets in the way of successful resettlement."



Underground Dining

At the other end of the scale from upmarket, commercial restaurants is the recent underground trend of pop up restaurants – temporary restaurants usually run by non restaurateurs out of their own home kitchens. Diners hear about these underground restaurants through friends of friends, or via networking sites or online

blogs. Some of these restaurants ask for donations, others charge a fixed price. The recession seems to have driven this trend – it's typically a lot cheaper than eating in a restaurant.

Pop up restaurants are not all about cheap eating in front rooms though – Michelin starred chef Pierre Koffman recently ran a pop up restaurant on the roof of Selfridges in London for a four

Pierre Koffman (above) opened a temporary restaurant in London

week period, while Gordon Ramsay's pop up restaurant in a London Eye capsule was open for just one night. Both of these events were part of the London Restaurant Festival in October 2009, which also featured a pop up restaurant in Andaz Hotel's Masonic Temple.



Pie in the Sky

It's definitely not for those with a fear of heights: Dinner in the Sky offers a fine dining experience 50 metres in the air.

Up to 22 diners are strapped into padded seats around a table; this is attached to a platform and secured by metal cables to a glass roof. The whole contraption is attached to a large crane, which slowly lifts the diners up to 50m before their dinner is served. Chandaliers

DINNER IN THE SKY

VARIOUS LOCATIONS WORLDWIDE

hang from the glass roof and up to three chefs, waiters and/or entertainers can fit in the middle of the table.

The idea was the brainchild of Belgian entrepreneur David Ghysels, and was launched as a joint venture with The Fun Group in 2006. The company hires out the crane and the table for events, and also sells rights to partners worldwide to stage Dinner in the Sky events. Partners

buy the table and the rights to use the name, and are then trained to use the equipment safely.

The company doesn't actually provide the food – corporate clients tend to book the 'restaurant' and use their own external caterers. The company has now teamed up with a variety of partners to offer Marriage in the Sky and Meetings in the Sky using the same equipment.

HOSPITALIS

RIGA, LATVIA

Hospital Food with a Difference

In the Hospitalis restaurant in Riga, Latvia, 'patients' can choose to have their dinner in a room designed to look like an operating theatre, or even in a pseudo morgue, with screens broadcasting hospital-related scenes from films.

Hospitalis was founded by Maris Revalds, chairman of one of Riga's leading medical institutions, and its creation involved input from several of the city's hospitals as well as Riga's Medical History Museum, which donated a range of medical artefacts.

The two storey restaurant has sterile white walls, booths made from hospital beds and shelves stocked with medical literature. Depending on the menu and the experience they choose, diners could



find themselves being served soup by a 'nurse' while dressed in a straightjacket, sipping cocktails from test tubes and eating with surgical instruments.

For those after a more simple experi-

Hospitalis features medical equipment from the Soviet era

ence, there is a 'nostalgic hospital lunch', which is served on simple white plates. ●

In times of change, the leisure industry needs to ensure its importance continues to be recognised by government. In his first column as executive chairman, David Teasdale sets out the ambitions of BISL's new manifesto



THE START OF A NEW ERA



I write as the new chairman of BISL, which also has a new executive director in the shape of Andy Sutch. Former chair, Neil Goulden and CEO Brigid Simmonds have both moved on after many years' service and we wish them well.

We've spent recent weeks preparing and discussing a new manifesto with members. It picks out key themes that matter if we are to grow and continue to make major contributions to national and community life. We've taken it to Labour, Liberal Democrat and Conservative conferences, and have talked it through with prospective and present MPs and ministers.

CHANGE IS COMING

There's no doubt the UK is on the cusp of change. We're full of questions – will our economy ever be the same again? What kind of government will we get next in the wake of the expenses scandals and dwindling Labour support and what would Conservative and Liberal Democrat politicians really aim to do?

We're also wondering how all this change will affect sport and leisure. Our industry is weathering the recession better than most – as it did during the last downturn – while emerging facts like the increase in fitness memberships which have occurred over the last year are a strong statistic for us all to use.

MAKING THE CASE FOR LEISURE

So, what case should our industry be making to those in power? We must first look for a government that believes in us. We must expect ministers to recognise that the sport and leisure sector is a major employer – particularly of young people. It's also vital to the economy and to our national life. This will be especially true in the period up to and after the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games. The legacy of those events will be critical to the success of investment in the Games.

Any new government must also understand that people working in the sport and leisure industry share other concerns and

“ Are we being too ambitious? Surely not. Sport and leisure has grown leaps and bounds in national importance. No longer can government ignore us. No more will serious commentators and MPs dismiss the DCMS as ‘the Ministry for Fun’. We now have real weight, substance and power ”

BISL CONFERENCE 2009, LORD'S CRICKET GROUND

This year's BISL national conference, sponsored by Sky, attracted 200 delegates to Lord's Cricket Ground in St John's Wood, London.

The conference was launched by the Ernst & Young economic team briefing delegates on the latest economic statistics, while commentator Will Hutton gave some sound advice on working through a recession.

Delegates then listened to and questioned spokespeople from the main political parties. Sports minister Gerry Sutcliffe gave a briefing on current government policies, Liberal Democrat culture spokesman Don Foster gave an alternative view, and Sky's political editor Adam Boulton interviewed Conservative culture sec-

retary Jeremy Hunt.

This interview gave delegates an insight into the changes the industry might expect under a Conservative government. All in all, the audience learned quite a lot, but they were also frustrated by the questions which were left unanswered. BISL executive director Andy Sutch then gave a briefing on the BISL manifesto.

The afternoon saw an expert panel, under Peter Mann's chairmanship, discuss a decade of sport. Perhaps the



best entertainment came from tv star Magnus Scheving – best known as Sportacus – who invigorated the audience with his fitness messages.



PHOTO: DREAMTIME.COM © ANDRESER

commitments, like tackling obesity through health and fitness campaigns, building communities and improving sustainability.

The new BISL manifesto has specific goals. For example, we believe it's important to change the public debate in relation to gambling and alcohol: it's too easy for politicians to make negative statements and create restrictive policies, when in fact most people are responsible in the way they gamble and drink socially.

We want there to be public debate about sport and leisure provision being a statutory right so that we can achieve health and community goals. In addition, there needs to be a joined-up tax regime that encourages entrepreneurial growth and supports wider public policy objectives.

PLANNING CHANGES

BISL believes it's vital that we seek greater flexibility and speed in the planning process to reflect the needs of industry. There's also a need for the Better Regulation Executive to play a decisive role in preventing governments imposing more and more burdens on companies and organisations which are trying to stimulate and grow the economy and the industry.

Any new DCMS Secretary of State needs to change the ways that central and local government give out contracts – we all need better procurement procedures, making for fairer and

The BISL manifesto calls on government to recognise that the sport and leisure industry shares national concerns including tackling obesity and encouraging participation in sports and activity (above)

consistent decisions. Overall, there needs to be a stronger partnership effort between government and the various sectors of the industry, such as tourism. An excellent model is provided by the Physical Activity Alliance which is the joining together of industry bodies with the Department of Health and the DCMS to action programmes for better health and physical fitness.

So that's a shortlist from our manifesto and I'm already being asked: are we too ambitious? Surely not; sport and leisure has grown in leaps and bounds in national importance. No longer can government ignore us or serious commentators and MPs dismiss the DCMS as the 'Ministry for Fun'. We have real weight, substance and power. It's essential we flex our collective muscle and fight for better terms. ●

Business in Sport and Leisure (BISL) represents the interests of private sector companies in the sport and leisure industry. Its working groups cover liquor licensing, gambling, planning, tourism and sport. Details: +44 (0)20 8255 3782 www.bisl.org

Marcus Wareing has avoided the celebrity trap and stuck to what he does best, says Grahame Senior. In these difficult times, there are lessons to be learned from this customer-focused approach

How to be True to Yourself

In these challenging times, it's more important to focus on the people who matter most; your loyal customers

I was once accused by the editor of this magazine of being a little bit elitist in my choice of restaurants and hotels. That was long ago and I think this column has demonstrated over the years an involvement with a very wide range of establishments at every price level. Perhaps, therefore, I might be allowed to comment on a return visit to an establishment at the very top of its game and the very top of the market – and bring out some of the lessons they have learned in these tough times.

Above all, they demonstrate very clearly that, no matter what others do, it behoves each one of us to stick to our best game and deliver the quality and character that our loyal customers expect. Being distracted by fashion, competition or celebrity irrelevancies is a fool's game. Celebrity is vanity – exceeding customer expectations is sanity.

Don't be distracted by fool's gold

Marcus Wareing could be forgiven for having been slightly distracted over the past year or so. Having fought an extremely high profile duel with his 'previous best friend' Gordon Ramsay, he has wisely retreated to his kitchen at Marcus Wareing at the Berkeley (formerly Petrus)



in London's Knightsbridge and got on with doing what he does best – cooking.

Dear Gordon, meanwhile, has seen fit to create a restaurant in direct competition across the road in Kinnerton Street with a new offering under Wareing's original brand, Petrus. He even has the dashing Jean Philippe Susilovic as his champion (who was previously part of the Wareing team in the Berkeley).

All this sabre rattling has taken on the character of a melodrama. The latest

cliff-hanger is that the much vaunted opening of the new Petrus, due in September, has now been put off until January. Where will it all end?

If you follow the celebrity press, you could easily be forgiven for thinking that restaurant and hospitality management is all about big egos.

Hard lessons for hard times

Fortunately Marcus Wareing has not fallen into that trap. Petrus/Marcus Wareing has long been my favourite restaurant in London and I use it whenever I need to talk to somebody quietly and persuasively in a luxurious environment where I know that every aspect of the occasion will be faultlessly delivered.

I went there recently and for the first time in many a long year actually ate from the table d'hôte menu. It was Wareing at the top of his game – and it was Wareing in person at the top of his game, not some underchef. What was on the plate came directly from him.

I noticed that the restaurant was full but not frantic and had a long conversation with restaurant manager Giancarlo Princigalli about the current climate. This proved fascinating and demonstrated the kind of clear thinking that goes into getting the best out of difficult times.

SENIOR'S SEVEN – SEVEN STEPS TO SATISFIED GUESTS

1 Say yes. When someone rings to make a booking, don't insist on altering the time you can take them (it's very irritating and serves no real purpose – they'll turn up in their own time anyway).
2 Greet each guest personally and treat them as important. Make sure they know they're expected and seat them with a real sense of welcome.

3 Give them time to develop their own occasion. If people are in a hurry, they'll let you know. If they don't want to be hassled, don't hassle them.
4 Take time to find out what they want. Judge their expectations and react accordingly.
5 Genuinely welcome comment and criticism – don't react against it or be defensive. If they have a point to

make, let them make it and never say 'that's the way we do it here'.

6 Always offer extra coffee or other hot beverages, and don't charge for the second espresso – it's always resented.

7 Say goodbye as if you mean 'au revoir'. See them out with the same attention and courtesy as you saw them in. They'll remember you for it.



Marcus Wareing has limited the number of bookings he will take at lunchtime to 48

Putting customers first was clearly the key strategy. They have actually reduced the number of covers that they will take at lunchtime and given up the practice of 'turning' the tables. The reason for this is entirely customer focused and seems to me bang on the money.

Give every customer a good experience

Many restaurants will take every booking they can and in our more celebrated and 'collectable' establishments this can be a bad thing for the customer experience. It has long been the rule on busy nights and even at lunchtimes for top restaurants with more demand than they can satisfy to 'turn' the tables. This means in practice that the diner is hustled and inevitably somewhat less than pleased when the restaurant wants its table back for the next bookers.

In my experience, such a situation can be very distracting. Most importantly, it actually interferes with the 'contract' between the restaurant and the diner. The diner pays money to use the space and enjoy the food and drink in order to meet his/her objective of conversation, salesmanship or seduction. What the diner does not expect is that the restaurant curtails this process for its own purposes of cramming in extra covers.

Marcus Wareing has wisely worked out that lunchtimes are limited to a two-hour period, whereas the evening shift can be five or six hours. The kitchen and the restaurant are exactly the same size on both occasions. Trying to serve the same number of covers at lunchtime as

Listening to the customer

Putting the customer first is a rule I need to follow very carefully in our new venture at Howard's House. Over the past six months since we took over the business, we've done quite a bit of face-to-face research but also asked some local contacts to give us their view. We thought our dining room was cool and elegant. A group of Salisbury solicitors were rather more forthright and described it as 'dull and boring unless it's full'. We felt our menu was spot on in terms of target pricing but a recent article in *The Times* made it absolutely plain that in their view our à la carte was a little overpriced. We're fixing that by adding some extra value.

We were fortunate enough to receive the 'Britain's Most Romantic Hotel' Cesar Award from the Good Hotel



Unexpected feedback at Howard's House

Guide 2010, which is a good opportunity for some focused marketing. The starting point is finding out what customers want from a romantic hotel.

As every month goes by, I realise more and more that assumptions don't work. The only way to find out what our customers actually want is to ask them and listen carefully. If it's good enough for Marcus Wareing, it's certainly good enough for us.

in the evening puts huge pressure on the kitchen and the front of house team. That doesn't enhance the experience for the guests and it doesn't help the confidence and élan with which the front of house team deals with service.

Interestingly enough, Marcus Wareing has noticed that limiting bookings to 48 at lunchtime (down from 60-odd) has not actually made any appreciable difference to the revenue but they have seen a considerable reduction in stress on both sides of the service door.

With restaurants at this level (and this price) diners expect little sort of excellence. The only way any operation can deliver that consistently is to manage the timing to allow the team to deliver their best performance at the right pace.

In a quiet sort of a way, I think Giancarlo Principalli and Marcus Wareing have got it right, putting the customers first, and the relentless urge to satisfy every request for a booking a long way second. In this particular situation, less is definitely more. ●

STAYING CLOSE TO HOME

The recession has seen foreign travel drop down the list of priorities for consumers, according to research by PricewaterhouseCoopers. The outlook for 2010 remains bleak, but it could be good news for domestic tourism, reports PwC's head of research Liz Hall



The recession has left a deep mark on the travel and leisure industry in 2009 and it is set to leave a bad hangover well into 2010. Paying for long holidays was cited as a top priority for consumers when ranking their spend intentions back in 2008, despite low confidence levels.

Yet a year later, intentions and expectations have been shaped by the severity of the recession, with foreign holidays slipping in importance on household budgets, in exchange for debt repayment and building up savings.

Although it remains to be seen just what the UK's final tourism score card looks like in 2009, travel fundamentals are still weak and volumes are still reduced. Low cost options and value have been many travellers' watchwords. The depreciated pound has been buoyed up Britain's inbound travel numbers, especially in London, and hotels in visitor honey pots like Edinburgh have remained busy, albeit at the expense of lower rated business. Domestic holidays and day trips are reported receiving a well-needed boost too. Many low-cost options such as camping and caravan sites and holiday parks are also reported to be enjoying a renaissance. There were fewer outbound travellers, but although no one has emerged unscathed by the recession, some large operators have still done well.

PwC consumer research carried out in October 2009 and presented at the ABTA Conference in the same month suggests that consumer behaviour has continued to evolve during this recession. The research shows that a new breed of leisure consumer is set to emerge from the depths of the downturn and that some of their changes in purchasing behaviour are likely to stick after the recession ends. The very same consumer is often

willing to spend more on products and services that they perceive to have genuine value, while focusing ruthlessly on finding the lowest prices for more commoditised goods.

Nearly half of those polled for the ABTA research now spend more time looking for the right holiday than before, and around 40 per cent now use the internet for this. UK holidaymakers are evolving through the recession into price-savvy consumers who are investing more time finding the best deal.

Affluence or easily available credit drove speed of booking prior to the downturn, but as discretionary spend is squeezed, there is no longer a race to reserve, and the competition now lies in getting value. Some 35 per cent of those polled reported booking special offers only, and over a third admitted to taking fewer holidays altogether. Over 30 per cent said they stayed in the UK to holiday this summer and the same amount traded down in terms of flight options.

Consumers shop smart

Brand loyalty appears to have been discarded, which is impacting those leisure businesses that rely on their name only. It seems that a new breed of traveller now values price over convenience, and recognised or previously favoured brands.

In fact when asked: "Have you changed your flying habits since the recession began?", nearly 20 per cent of respondents confirmed that they are now less loyal to their favourite airline. The research showed that in the long-term, the traveller will prioritise seeking out promotions and using the internet to find the best deal. They will also spend more time checking prices, and will make cheaper flights and flexible packages a priority.



Due to the recession domestic, low-cost holiday options such as camping are enjoying a renaissance



In the long-term the traveller will prioritise seeking out promotions and using the internet to find the best flight deal... Operators can act smart too by rigorously cutting out unwanted services and costs and unbundling packages

Operators rise to the challenge

Operators have shown that they too can act smart and can deliver what the new consumer wants. Rigorously cutting out unwanted services and costs and unbundling packages is just one example of such a trend. With travellers shopping around online even more, winning operators can identify just which part of the holiday a customer values. As the various components of a trip become more separable, travel companies can reduce the selling cost of the holiday by pricing each element of the package according to how the consumer values it. Unbundling packages means the consumer can pick and mix whatever aspects of a holiday they want.

Successful operators were those that invested in dynamic packaging capabilities and focused on e-commerce operations. In 2009, cruises and all-inclusive holidays and mid-haul holidays increased in popularity, while luxury operators saw a rise in family and experimental holidays. Europe and the Caribbean's popularity are reported to have fallen, while Egypt and Turkey have picked up those seeking sun but not at euro prices. Africa, including Tunisia, is expected to have a strong 2010.

A tough year ahead

Consumer spending is expected to have declined in 2009 and remain subdued in 2010. Household budgets will still be under pressure and promotions and discounts are likely to remain important and to exert a downward pressure on prices, although capacity reductions will mitigate this. Indeed, industry-wide mainstream travel capacity cuts by UK operators are estimated at around 30 per cent over the last two years.

PwC research shows that consumer sentiment is starting to recover: households don't expect to be worse off over the next 12 months. Nevertheless, further investigation shows that consumer confidence reflects optimism surrounding the UK economy rather than an improvement in their personal financial situation with confidence in employment remaining low.

It remains hard to tick all the boxes on a recovery in travel and hotels – demand is likely to come back slowly and fortunes will be mixed for different operators. The insolvency rate acts as a barometer for the industry; to date the business failure rate was 13 per cent higher than in 2008. Despite some recent failures, travel companies have suffered the least compared to hospitality and leisure counterparts. While the weak pound and domestic holidaymaker benefitted many travel companies, there is also an element of lenders not wishing to add to the company casualty list and propping up loss-making business. Ski slopes may be quiet during the 2009/2010 winter season, as will early summer bookings, and this may mean a ticking time bomb for some struggling travel companies currently being valiantly assisted by financial stakeholders.

So, the sector faces a challenging 2010, with many operators knuckling down for a rocky ride for the next few months and hoping things pick up during the year. Thomas Cook research suggests an increase in the number of people planning a holiday abroad next year but there are many reasons to remain cautious. Much is riding on the global economic recovery. ●

PricewaterhouseCoopers first unveiled this research at the ABTA Conference in Barcelona in October 2009



Froch becomes Lonsdale ambassador

Boxing equipment and apparel brand Lonsdale has signed WBC Super-Middleweight champion Carl Froch as a brand ambassador.

As part of the deal, Froch is to fight in Lonsdale gloves and apparel, the first of which was his points-decision victory last month to retain his title.

Sunny Singh, sponsorship manager for Lonsdale said: "The team look forward to supporting Carl as he establishes himself as the best of the best at Super-Middleweight level."

leisure-kit.net keywords
lonsdale boxing



Organic beauty range launched by Thalgo

Marine-based skincare company Thalgo has unveiled a new organic facial skincare range.

Called Terre et Mer, the wholly-organic products are Ecocert-certified and the containers are made from recyclable glass and plastics.

Intended to be a reflection of the brand's dual sense of belonging – to the sea and to Mediterranean plant life – the range comprises a professional facial and eight products.

leisure-kit.net keyword
thalgo

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For more information, or to contact any of these companies, log on to www.leisure-kit.net and type the company name under 'keyword search'

Giant globes unveiled by Vivifeye modellers

Vivifeye has launched a range of giant globes, suitable for both inside and outdoor usage.

Available in two varieties – sealed-air and cold-air – and up to 32.8ft (10m) in diameter, the globes can be either stationary or rotating, depending on the client's needs.

Sealed-air globes have a printed and sewn external skin, with an inner airtight PVC bladder that seals the air inside, and are suitable for permanent installations.

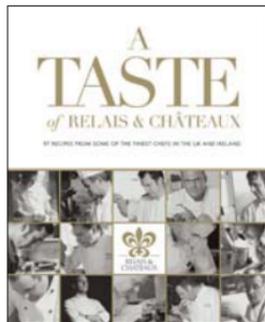
Cold-air globes contain a continuously running blower in order to maintain an optimum pressure and these globes can adapt to changes



leisure-kit.net keyword
vivifeye

in pressure and temperature.

Additionally, any internally illuminated globe must be constructed to the cold-air configuration.



leisure-kit.net keyword
relais

Relais & Châteaux releases cookbook

Luxury independent hotel group Relais & Châteaux has revealed a new cookbook with nearly 100 recipes from 29 establishments.

Chefs' recipes include Heston Blumenthal's 'Sound of the Sea' from the Fat Duck, which should ideally be eaten while listening to the sound of waves on an iPod.

Other participants include Raymond Blanc, Alain Roux and Michael Caines. Each dish is accompanied by a wine suggestion from Harrison Vintners.

BrightSign units installed at the London Aquarium

A total of 80 BrightSign HD110 units have been installed as part of a multi-million pound refurbishment at the Sea Life London Aquarium in the UK.

Each unit houses an HD LCD display built into a bespoke metal enclosure, with information on the animals in each tank rotating on a pre-set interval basis.

Playlists for the units are created with the BrightAuthor software application (included with the BrightSign controllers) and enable



full-screen and multi-zone playlists to be created. BrightSign units have also been installed at Legoland in Germany and Sea Life in Portugal.

leisure-kit.net keyword
brightsign

Matrix introduces KRANKcycle equipment

A stationary hand-cycle with independent crank arms called the KRANKcycle has debuted.

The latest innovation from the creator of spinning, Johnny G, the cross-training tool is said to provide an effective cardiovascular workout while building upper-body strength, addressing muscle imbalances and improving posture.

Either for use independently or as part of a group, the KRANKcycle is being launched in the UK by Matrix Fitness Systems.



leisure-kit.net keywords
matrix fitness



leisure-kit.net keyword
cannon

Cannon launches dual air hand dryer

The Cannon Air Jet is a dual air hand dryer, intended to dry hands in just 10 seconds, while also lowering energy costs.

Sensors provide touch-free operation as an anti-microbial finish helps to eliminate cross contamination. The dryer is said to save up to 66 per cent in energy costs while also using 75 per cent less energy than traditional dryers.

Cannon also provides a range of other hygiene-related products, including hand cleansers.



Martin's FlexDOT™ LEDs light the way

A custom-made wall of Martin FlexDOT™ LED stringlights has been installed within the Under nightclub in Malmö, Sweden.

Surrounding the Under dance floor on two sides, the LED wall is approximately 2m high and 10m long and is made up of 2,100 individually controllable FlexDOT pixels.

The individually-controllable lights also mean that a variety of shapes and patterns can be constructed to suit the ambience of the club night.

leisure-kit.net keywords
martin professional



Klafs design exclusive glass steam cabins

Leading manufacturer of sauna, spa and wellness installations, KLAFS, has completed the installation of two exclusively designed glass steam-rooms for a restored brine bath complex called the VitaSol Therme in Bad Salzuffen, Germany (above).

Designed in collaboration with the 4A Architekten group, both structures feature a glass-enclosed steambath with green and red coloured tessera seating benches.

leisure-kit.net keyword
klafs



Dogfight simulator takes off in health clubs

'Exergaming' company Instyle Fitness has launched Dogfight: a flight simulator that works in conjunction with a recumbent exercise bike.

Users propel the plane by pedalling, and control the simulator via spring-loaded handles, with environments including a tropical group of islands and a busy cityscape. There is a choice of aircraft in which to undertake missions, and riders can take part in airborne battles against other players in the gym.

leisure-kit.net keyword
instyle



DELL and OPI join forces for laptop range

Computer manufacturer Dell has introduced 26 exclusive colour choices for some of its laptops as part of an exclusive partnership with nail varnish company OPI.

The colour choices are available for the Dell Inspiron Mini, Inspiron and Studio laptops, and include some of OPI's most popular shades.

The OPI colour options has been available in the US from November 2009, and will be soon elsewhere.

leisure-kit.net keyword
opi

TOR Systems unveils Maxim Solution software

Leading provider of visitor engagement solutions, TOR Systems, has unveiled its latest scheme for use within the museums, heritage and visitor attractions sectors.

Called Maxim Solution, and operating on industry standard platforms, the scheme has been designed to combine stability, speed and resilience with cutting-edge technology. It includes integrated touchscreen PC-POS units as well as the option to integrate real-time internet sales via MaximWeb, which can then be linked to external retail, financial, catering and CRM software as required. Ticketstor offers further web sales capabilities for clients or organising temporary events.

leisure-kit.net keywords
tor systems



Blue Spa unveils range of eco-friendly seaweed

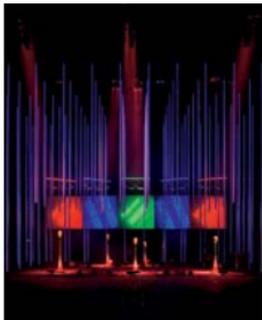
A range of environmentally-sourced seaweed from waters around Scotland is to be sold via suppliers Blue Spa and Leisure.

The seaweed is sourced from certified areas with good water and is quality tested by the Scottish Environmental Protection Agency.

Harvested by hand, so it will grow back, and then dried undercover, the seaweed is then packaged in its dry form. It is ideal for thalassotherapy treatments and can last up to 12 months.



leisure-kit.net keywords
blue spa



leisure-kit.net keywords
philips lighting

Green touring from Philips Lighting

LED-based lighting from Royal Philips Electronics has helped contribute to an overall reduction in energy consumption on Radiohead's latest tour.

The company's Color® Reach Powercore product was used, which has the capability to project up to 5,000 lumens of light over a distance of 500ft (152.4m). Five of the Color® Reach modules were specified for the South American leg of the *In Rainbows* tour and fitted to the front truss of the stage.



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Neil Brand is one of just a handful of silent film accompanists in the UK, bringing silent movies alive with his improvised piano playing. He tells Magali Robathan what makes his job so special

Silent film accompanist



What does your job involve?

My job is to turn up at the cinema where a silent film is being screened, sit down at the piano and improvise the music that goes with the movie.

I try and tailor the score so it's exactly right for the film – so that it matches all the moods, all the action and the spot effects [sound effects that are created live]. The music is completely unique to each screening. That's what makes it special; because I'm improvising, the music is only happening at that time, in that place, at that moment.

What do you bring to the movie?

It's the job of a silent film pianist to build a bridge between the age of the film and the modern audience. The music should make a movie that was made 80 or 100 years ago understandable for modern cinemagoers. Because the films were made so long ago, the music has to pull the audience immediately into the action.

The wrong music can kill a silent movie. I've seen a Buster Keaton comedy played alongside a really bad score and not get any laughs. It was heartbreaking.

How much does the music vary between different screenings of the same film?

A huge amount. The biggest influence is the audience; you have to tailor what you do to what you think the audience needs. There's a huge difference between playing to 50 school children and playing to a film society.

I started my career in theatre, and this job is very theatrical. You have to gauge what the audience is feeling and how the music is working as you go along. Even though I'm sitting with my back to the audience and staring at the film, the feeling in the room is absolutely palpable.

Has interest in silent movies grown recently?

Since I started doing this job 25 years ago I've seen interest in silent films skyrocket. There are so many cinemas and festivals showing silent movies now; it's just growing and growing.

I recently played at the Barbican in London, which is a 300-seater, and every single seat was filled. At the end of the screening people were cheering and clapping. That wouldn't have happened 15 years ago, let alone when I started.

Profile

Neil Brand has been accompanying silent films for over 25 years, playing regularly at the National Film Theatre on London's South Bank, throughout the UK and at film festivals and special events around the world

Training originally as an actor, Brand also works as a playwright, performer and composer. In 2007 he co-starred with comedian Paul Merton in Merton's *Silent Clowns* show – a performance celebrating silent comedies. He has also toured with his own show *The Silent Pianist Speaks*, in which he explores the role of music in silent movies.

What has driven this interest?

DVD has really helped; people who are interested in these films can get their own copies now. You can't reproduce that feeling of being in a theatre with music and an audience though, and that's what brings people out to the cinemas.

I also think the turn of the millennium drove interest in silent films. Before 2000, many people still saw them as museum pieces that you had to make a huge effort to enjoy. In a strange way, after 2000, many young people accepted the whole of the 20th century on the same terms, and silent films from the 1920s seemed no more distant than The Beatles. There is now a huge amount of interest from students and young people in these movies. It's one of the things I've been most delighted about in this job.

Are there any elements of your job that surprise people?

People tend to be surprised that I do this job at all. There are only around six or seven silent film accompanists in this country, and only around 50 or 60 in the whole world.

What's the most difficult part of your job?

The concentration is so intense that sometimes I get very emotionally affected by the film. I once accompanied a 1920s war movie called *The Big Parade* when I was going through a traumatic time in my own life. The movie is very painful and explores loss and grief, and during the film I sort of lost it. I felt almost like I'd had a breakdown in public. Afterwards my musician friends in the audience came up and gave me a big hug because they could hear the pain in my playing.

How do you prepare for a screening?

The best preparation is just to be as relaxed as possible. I look at the scene and work out the subtext of what's happening.

In a way the music is the character that you can't see. It's another interpretation of the film. ●

Diary Dates

19 JANUARY 2010

FSPA Sports Industry Think Tank

Soho Hotel, London, UK
Following successful industry think tanks in 2008 where speakers included representatives from LOCOG and Sport England, the Federation of Sports and Play Associations (FSPA) is holding a sports industry think tank dinner for members of its sporting goods (SGIA) and golf (BGIA) associations. The event will focus on the topic of retail and features guest speaker Brendon Dorian from the Global Retail Network.

Contact Milly Durrant
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Email milly@sportsandplay.com
Web www.sportsandplay.com

25 JAN 2010

LPF Seminar: 5-a-side Soccer

The offices of Cushman & Wakefield LLP, London, UK
LPF speakers give an overview of the 5-a-side market and take a look at the growth of the Goals brand and the component parts of its success.

Contact Michael Emmerson
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Web www.leisurepropertyforum.org

02-03 FEBRUARY 2010

Event Production Show

Grand Hall, Olympia, London, UK
The Event Production Show is for those involved in producing events including concerts, festivals, sporting events and corporate or private events. Speakers include Michael Eavis, founder of the Glastonbury Festival; Lee Bailey, senior sponsorship and events manager, Diageo GB; and Paul Samuels, executive director of sponsorship at AEG.

Contact Michelle Tayton
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03-05 FEBRUARY 2010

UKinbound Convention 2010

Yorkshire Racecourse, York, UK
Taking place in York, this convention will focus on preparing your business for the upturn in the economy and for the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games. Topics will include business recovery, e-com-

merce, rapidly developing overseas markets, ticketing, and accommodation and transport during the 2012 Games. Speakers include Lord Digby Jones and Rt Hon Margaret Hodge MP.

Contact Helen James
Tel +44 (0)207 395 7500
Email helenjames@ukinbound.org
Web www.ukinbound.org/convention2010.php

04 FEBRUARY 2010

The Tourism Society: Tourism and Transport

University of Wolverhampton, UK
This event will cover the highly complex and interdependent relationship between tourism and transport. It will cover the new international high speed rail links competing with domestic air travel as well as the controversial topic of airport expansion and airport 'hubs'. The future of low cost airlines, cruising and ferries will also be discussed.

Contact Daniel Morriss-Jeffery
Tel +44(0)286614636
Fax +44(0)286614637
Email daniel@tourismsociety.org
Web www.tourismsociety.org/events/tourism_amp_transport

10 FEBRUARY 2010

National Farm Attractions Network Annual Conference & Trade Exhibition 2010

Drayton Manor Park, UK
Annual conference from the National Farm Attraction Network – the only independent national co-operative organisation for leisure attraction businesses within the countryside.

Contact Sarah Althorpe
Tel 01536 513397
Email info@farmattractions.net
Web www.farmattractions.net

18 FEB 2010

Setting the Tone: Sending an Inclusive Marketing Message

Woking Leisure Centre, Woking, UK
This event will explore the key promotional messages that can be used to target different market segments. It will also cover social media and the creation of inclusive websites.

Contact Amy Smith
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25 FEBRUARY 2010

5th TiLEzone London

London Transport Museum, London, UK
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Contact Richard Curtis
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Email tile@andrigh.com
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25 FEB 2010

How Safe is Your Sport? Taking a Lead in Safeguarding Children in Sport Conference

Xcel Leisure Centre, Surrey, UK
This national conference is being hosted jointly by Coventry Sports Foundation and the Geese Theatre Company. It is aimed at those responsible for shaping and delivering the future of sport, as well as anyone with a professional interest in the issues associated with safeguarding children.

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Legacy Lives 2010

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