

1 Highcross Review

The evidence collated in this report by City Centre Director Sarah Harrison is from key stakeholders in the city centre, with specific comments from:-

Ian Borley	- KPMG
Tom Brucciani	- Brucciani's
Miguel D'Almeida	- The Lanes Retailer Association
Dean Law	- Marks & Spencer
Phil Toyne	- Haymarket Shopping Centre
Nick Rhodes	- The Market
Michael Lyons	- Holiday Inn
Aatin Anadkat	- Maiyango Hotel

- 1.1. There is an overwhelming opinion that the development of Highcross is undoubtedly positive for Leicester.

“Highcross was a necessary and good development for Leicester City Centre if it has the chance of competing with other regional retail offerings.”

Tom Brucciani

“Highcross has raised the profile of Leicester and done much to make it more likely to draw trade in from outlying areas.

The development also provided the impetus for other improvements across the city and is a catalyst for the development of a long term strategy for the city centre, which was something that was lacking in the past.

Importantly, the improvements to the public realm and pedestrianisation are seen as equally important to the overall city offer and customer perception.”

Ian Borley, KPMG

- 1.2 However, it is important that the challenges are addressed in future to ensure that the city centre retail offering is balanced and trade being pulled to the High Street area does not compromise businesses in other parts of the city.
- 1.3 Highcross has raised the bar on the standard of development and operation and other businesses in the city centre should do likewise to remain competitive and attractive to customers.

2 Positive Impact of Highcross Development

- 2.1 Highcross represents the catalyst for transformational change to Leicester City Centre
- 2.2 Attractive architecture
- 2.3 Excellent concentration of bars & restaurants
- 2.4 New retailers attracted to Leicester for the first time
- 2.5 Environment seen as clean, safe and secure, also at night
- 2.6 State of the art car parking facilities are welcomed
- 2.7 Showcase Cinema De Lux is seen as a significant attractor
- 2.8 New visitors attracted to Leicester
- 2.9 Public realm works are seen as being equally as important to the impact Highcross has on the perception of the city centre
- 2.10 Highcross has raised Leicester's profile
- 2.11 Stores such as John Lewis, Carluccios and the Apple Store have lured the more affluent customer
- 2.12 Highcross has provided the impetus for other improvements across the city and is a catalyst for helping develop a long-term strategy for the city centre.
- 2.13 Leicester is seen as a more desirable leisure destination
- 2.14 People working in the city centre see Highcross as a 'plus'
- 2.15 2% uplift in footfall to Haymarket Shopping Centre ascribed to opening of Highcross
- 2.16 High Street is seen to be establishing itself as a quirky, upmarket, independent retailing area
- 2.17 Marks & Spencer has seen a more affluent customer mid week into the weekend with average basket spend higher
- 2.18 Development of 'islands of excellence' (Highcross, The Curve, Phoenix Square) has started to create a sense of civic pride, particularly amongst the younger generation
- 2.19 Local employment opportunities
- 2.20 Marketing budget committed by Hammerson to promote Highcross, and through this action, Leicester.
- 2.21 Willingness of Hammerson to contribute to the future success of Leicester City Centre by supporting initiatives such as the formation of City Centre Management.
- 2.22 Setting an example for future private development.

3 Future Challenges

- 3.1 Visitors to Highcross are not seen to be using the other retailing areas in the city centre
- 3.2 Initial attraction of new shoppers to Leicester appears to have levelled out
- 3.3 Neighbouring retail areas perceived as being 'grotty'. Planning regulations to be imposed to control the quality of shop fronts
- 3.4 Highcross has pulled trade away from other areas, particularly Gallowtree Gate, The Lanes and Cultural Quarter
- 3.5 The incomplete public realm works in The Lanes area has been disappointing for The Lanes retailers as they feel the completion of improvement plans would have helped them to reduce the negative impact Highcross has had on their trading levels.

- 3.6 Working with agents and landlords to let the void units in the city centre
- 3.7 Strengthen the city's retail offer by re-looking at the opportunity to create a 'retail circuit' ie the 3rd anchor store
- 3.8 Understanding the reasons why the residential element at Highcross does not appear to be fully occupied
- 3.9 Creating improved connectivity between areas within the city centre through better lighting, signage, planting, traffic planning, etc.
- 3.10 Ensuring that Highcross does not fragment the city centre
- 3.11 Monopoly of one landlord and influence on the direction and strategy for Leicester City Centre
- 3.12 Local retailers need to respond to the competition Highcross brings to continue to win customers
- 3.13 City Council needs to respond to the 'lop-sided' nature of the retail space by offering attractive car parks and streets
- 3.14 Gateways into the city are unattractive and look derelict creating a poor first impression of the city.
- 3.15 The railway station is a prime gateway for commuters and visitors to the city centre and the poor customer experience needs addressing
- 3.16 Public realm development has impacted on shoppers to the market as they now have to walk further to catch a bus and this has affected the elderly.
- 3.17 Threat of Marks & Spencer and/or Boots relocating from Gallowtree Gate in the future
- 3.18 Achieving consistency in car park standards and reliable public transport
- 3.19 The need for a co-ordinated strategic marketing plan for the city centre.

4 Empty Shop Initiative 2009/2010– Outline Summary

4.1 DCLG Funding

- 4.1.1 The current economic conditions have contributed to a higher retail vacancy ratio in the city centre. The condition the empty shops are left in varies from landlord to landlord but these vacant units having a bearing on the visitor's perception of Leicester and we want to promote the city as a thriving and safe place to visit.
- 4.1.2 The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, John Denham announced on 13 August 2009 that a £3 million funding package to support town centres would be available to more deprived areas that may be less able to absorb the impact of shop closures and where the recession may be exacerbating existing conditions. Leicester City Council has now received a grant of £52,631.58 from Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG).
- 4.1.3 There is potential additional funding from the Arts Council of £500,000 for "Arts in Empty Spaces" – turning vacant high street shops into artistic and vibrant places. This programme will run in partnership with the DCLG scheme.

4.2 The Strategy

4.2.1 City Centre Management conducted an audit of the city centre vacant shops and selected those in the most prominent, visible positions in the city centre. Having discussed this opportunity with the agents and landlords, it is recommended that this initiative be executed in three phases to gain maximum benefit for the city centre and efficient use of the funding received.

4.2.2 Phase One: Use the opportunity to create awareness of venues and events taking place in the city over the Christmas period and beyond.

4.2.3 Permission has been given by the agents/landlords for vinyl graphics to be placed on the shop windows of the following empty shops

6- 8 St Martin's Square

Promoting A Journey Out of Darkness, an exhibition of German Expressionist art running February 28 2010.

7-9 Market Place

Promoting heritage

31-33 Gallowtree Gate (ex HSBC)

Promotion of Christmas shows at The Curve, De Montfort Hall and Little Theatre

1/3 Rutland Street (corner unit)

Promotion of Phoenix Square

4.3 Summary of Phase One process

4.3.1 Identify empty and available retail units and their letting agents. Those under offer or up for temporary lease over the Christmas period are not considered suitable for the initiative at the present time

4.3.2 In consultation with the Council's marketing team, decide which graphics are most suitable for which shopping area and which individual retail unit

4.3.3 Marketing team to supply mock-ups of artwork, Prospect Leicestershire then forward to the letting agents for approval. Deadline set by Prospect, if no contact from landlord then consent is assumed by default

4.3.4 Obtain measurements of window space and quotations from Smart City Dressing, the company recommended by the marketing team for fitting the displays

4.3.5 Obtain approval from the Licensing department

4.3.6 Send briefing note to Cllr Kitterick

- 4.3.7 Marketing team to supply artwork perhaps with input from outside companies
- 4.3.8 Smart City Dressing install graphic vinyls onto shop windows

4.4 Phase Two

- 4.4.1 This phase is being coordinated with the Arts Department to secure additional funding from the Arts Council. Artists have been contacted through Creative Leicestershire to produce original artwork to be used on vinyl graphics installed on empty shop windows across the city.
- 4.4.2 It is proposed that this is packaged as 'Art in the City' and will form a walking exhibition of art around the city. We are speaking to Leicester Sound to produce an audio tour of 'Art in the City' which will explain the inspiration behind each piece and provide details on the artist.
- 4.4.3 Also, we are reviewing the cost of using the inside of one of the empty units for a creative shop that would display different types of arts and sculpture. The viability of this idea will depend on the amount of additional budget required to cover the cost of rates, utilities and insurance.
- 4.4.4 We are working with DMU to explore the possibility of using an empty shop to display the student work.

4.5 Phase Three

- 4.5.1 An art group wishes to set up the 'Smallest Theatre' in an empty unit and we already have agreement from the agent acting for the landlord of a shop in St Martin's Square
- 4.5.2 We are looking at another proposal from Age Concern to set up an advice centre for people aged 60 and over giving advice on pensions, health care, insurance etc. Part of the unit would be used to sell to raise funds for the refurbishment of Catherine House
- 4.5.3 It is also proposed that an empty unit is used as a community information point, providing the opportunity to create awareness of the efforts from the environment team to delivery a clean city; provide advice on safe cycling, bus routes, Park and Ride and other services provided to the community
- 4.5.4 The timing for Phase Two and Three is programmed for February 2010 when we will have a clearer picture of which units are vacant.

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