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ISSUE 3 2011

VOLUME 31 NUMBER 3



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IMSPA IS BORN

In the end, the announcement was so low-key it could almost have been missed. After 30 years locked in mortal combat, ILAM/ISPA and ISRM had ceased to exist and in their place was the new Chartered Institute for Sport and Physical Activity – IMSPA.

For everyone who's been following, supporting or working to resolve the endless wranglings of these institutes as they tried (and failed) to put their differences behind them and create a merged body, this moment was one of great relief and excitement. But it was also one of anticlimax, as they'd burned so much energy and time with their useless battling, leaving a great deal of rebuilding to do and fences to mend.

So we have a new institute, and its Royal Charter – which has already been granted by the Privy Council – has come about far more quickly than anyone imagined possible, thanks to the good judgement of those involved. Now a large and important slice of our industry can start to build higher standards, generate new energy and leadership and have a flag to rally round.

The new institute will represent the active sector, leaving elements of the original membership, such as arts and culture, out of the mix. It had become obvious that no organisation would be capable of stretching to accommodate all members of both founding organisations, leaving the only way forward being to focus on the interests of the majority.

The move of the parks members of ILAM/ISPA to form the excellent Greenspace in 1999 marked the end of hopes that the chartered institute could be a cross-leisure entity and from thereon in, sport was the focus.



A large and important slice of our industry can start to build higher standards, generate new energy and leadership and have a flag to rally round.

The idea for a merged institute was first mooted 30 years ago – the year *Leisure Management* was first published – so we've tracked the issues involved through every twist and turn since our founding.

We warmly welcome the new organisation and hope very much that it will live up to its promise of uniting this important part of the industry and raising standards for managers and decision-makers within the sector.

There are many exciting synergies to explore – we're at least 20 years late making this move as an industry, so have some serious catching up to do and many challenges to tackle – not least our seeming inability to increase sports participation to justify both Olympic investment and the generous funding the industry has benefitted from.

IMSPA has already begun building bridges by announcing links with SkillsActive and the Skills Protocol Employer Leadership Group for the creation of – among other things – a skills passport for the industry. It's exciting to see skills and training are a major priority for IMSPA as it leads the industry forwards.

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www.leisuremanagement.co.uk/digital

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Buyers' guide:

For suppliers of products and services in the leisure markets, turn to p104

Green light for New South Wales aquatic centre plans

The Sydney West Joint Regional Planning Panel has approved plans for a new AU\$12.9m (£8.6m) leisure complex in West Pymble, New South Wales, Australia.

Ku-ring-gai Council mayor Ian Cross said the decision was a "major milestone" in efforts to secure a new facility for the region. Work is due to start in early 2012.

To be built on the site of an existing outdoor 50m pool, the Indoor Aquatic and Leisure Centre will include a 25m indoor swimming pool; a toddlers' pool; a gym; and multi-purpose group fitness rooms.



A Legoland Discovery Centre is to open in 2012

Merlin to enter Japanese market for the first time

Attraction operator Merlin Entertainments is to open its first two sites in Japan.

Madame Tussauds Tokyo will launch at the Decks Tokyo Beach Mall in Odaiba this October – the fourth such attraction to open in the Asia-Pacific region.

A ¥1.2bn (£9.3m) Legoland Discovery Centre will also be developed the same location and is due to open in June 2012.

Madame Tussauds Tokyo will begin as a temporary exhibition on the 3rd floor of the Mall, but if successful, Merlin plans to make it a permanent feature.

Six Senses contract is terminated

Six Senses has announced that its management agreement for the Six Senses Sanctuary resort in Phuket, Thailand, will terminate on 31 July.

The resort, on the island of Naka Yai, is owned by Thai property company Erawan, which has 13 three to five-star hotel and resort properties in South-East Asia.

A Six Senses spokesperson, told *Leisure Management*: "Six Senses Resorts & Spas and the owner of Six Senses Sanctuary in Phuket have ended the management agreement relating to Six Senses Sanctuary."

US\$43m boost for Ark Encounter

Ark Encounter, a US\$150m (£93.6m) Creationist-themed amusement park planned for Kentucky, US, has secured a tax boost from the Kentucky Tourism Development Finance Authority.

The state tourism authority has approved proposals to grant the project up to US\$43m (£26.8m) worth of sales tax incentives towards its creation, after analysis produced by Hunden Strategic Partners (HSP) found that the development met the criteria set out in the Kentucky Tourism Development Act.

Due to open in 2014, the attraction will be built by The Troyer Group and will be owned by a private limited liability company that is investing US\$125m (£78m).

Patrick Marsh, the design director of the Creation Museum, will lead the theming of



Kentucky's Ark Encounter attraction is planned by Answers in Genesis

planned attractions at the park – such as a 30m (98.4ft)-tall Tower of Babel.

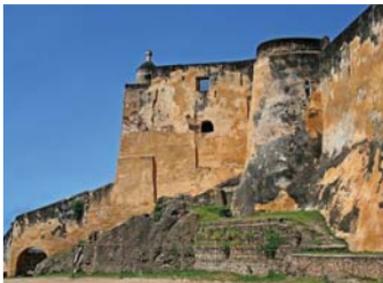
Mike Zovath, the senior vice-president of Answers in Genesis, said: "I am satisfied with the HSP analysis because it confirms what we have believed for some time: the Ark Encounter is a viable and worthwhile project."

UNESCO reveals new World Heritage Sites

Wadi Rum Protected Area in Jordan; and Fort Jesus in Mombasa, Kenya are among 25 new World Heritage Sites to be announced by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO).

The sites were picked from an initial list of 35 nominees during the World Heritage Convention (WHC) session at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris, France, in late June.

New World Heritage Sites also include Historic Bridgetown and its Garrison in Barbados; and Selimiye Mosque Social Complex at Edirne, Turkey. The additions comprise three natural properties, 21 cultural and one mixed site. The World Heritage List now numbers 936 properties.



Mombasa's Fort Jesus, Kenya, is one of the 25 new World Heritage Sites

Jordan's Queen Rania told her followers on the micro-blogging website Twitter: "So proud Wadi Rum has joined UNESCO World Heritage List! That tallies Jordan's total of World Heritage Sites to four!"

Second site for Bonga gym in Mexico

Bonga Gym, Mexico's first low-cost gym chain, has unveiled its second club in Mexico City – following the March opening of its inaugural site, also located in the capital.

The 1,200sq m (12,197 sq ft) facility offers free weights, resistance and CV equipment

from Matrix, as well as lounge areas, lockers, showers and changing rooms.

A gym-only membership costs around US\$35 (£22) a month, while unlimited access to the gym and group exercise classes is around US\$50 (£31) a month.

New Delhi hotel launches spa

The Imperial Hotel in New Delhi, India, has announced the launch of a 16,000sq ft (1,486sq m) spa located amid landscaped gardens, which is available to guests only.

Featuring architecture influenced by the Moghul era, the Imperial Spa aims to provide a range of services that it believes are "essential elements" to a healthy lifestyle.

Facilities feature Imperial Hydrotherapy suites for pre and post treatment and the Kerala Suite – offering Ayurvedic therapies and the availability of a doctor's consultation.

The Kerala Suite also boasts two rooms with oils and herbal remedies for "ancient healing", while the Moghul Suite is the spa's private facility for couples or families. Elsewhere, the Kabir Room offers Thai massage, yoga and meditation and Rumi's Relaxation Room and five



One of the Hydrotherapy suites at the Imperial Hotel's new spa facility

other rooms offering spa therapies are also among the facilities.

Vijay Wanchoo, senior vice president and general manager of The Imperial Hotel, said: "The Imperial Spa is designed to purely de-stress and rejuvenate your senses, inspired by India's rich spiritual wisdom and heritage."

Riptide Bay launches at Six Flags park

Six Flags Great America in Gurnee, Illinois, US, has announced the launch of its new 4-acre (1.6-hectare) water park expansion – Riptide Bay at Hurricane Harbor.

Hurricane Harbor, which was first launched at the theme park in 2005, has now expanded

to cover 20 acres (8.1 hectares) with the addition of the Riptide Bay development.

New slides installed as part of the extension include Mega Wedgie and Dive Bomber, which both feature a Skybox launching capsule that sees the floor open underneath riders.

Sporting Kansas City unveils new stadium

LIVESTRONG Sporting Park, a new 18,467-capacity home stadium for Sporting Kansas City, has officially opened.

Populous were behind the design of the venue, which was built by Turner Construction and can increase its capacity to 25,000 for concerts.

Built at a cost of US\$200m (£124.6m), LIVESTRONG Sporting Park incorporates a 75-yard x 120-yard natural grass surface with a SubAir under-soil heating and cooling systems – larger than English Premier League pitches.

The stadium is named as the result of a partnership between the football club and LIVESTRONG – a brand of the Lance Armstrong Foundation, which was established in 1997 by the cyclist and cancer survivor.



A portion of venue revenues will fund LIVESTRONG's advocacy work

The deal will see a portion of all stadium revenues – including ticket sales and concessions – used to help fund the charity's advocacy work. Local cancer survivorship services will also be developed for Kansas City residents.

Saudi Arabian Al-Marina project advances

Injaz Development Company has appointed Jacobs Engineering Group to provide infrastructure and construction supervision services for its US\$2.7bn (£1.7bn) Al-Marina project in Saudi Arabia.

Scheduled to be completed by 2015, the project will link the cities of Dammam and Al-Khobar and extends over an area of 3.3 million sq m (36 million sq ft).

When complete, the development will include luxury villas, hotels, tourist facilities, attractions and multi-use towers, as well as schools and mosques.



International tourism is key to Egypt's recovery

PM: Tourism 'crucial' to Egypt's recovery

Egyptian Prime Minister Essam Sharraf has underlined the importance of the tourism sector in driving forward the country's economic recovery over the coming months.

Sharraf said the industry – one of Egypt's foremost foreign exchange earners and accounting for one in seven jobs – had a key role to play in the country's transition.

Egyptian minister of tourism Mounir Fakhri Abdel-Nour said: "The sector is a lifeline for our economy and in 2010 accounted for 11.5 per cent of our GDP and US\$13bn (£8.1bn) in revenues."

AU\$700m stadium to be developed in Perth

Premier Colin Barnett, minister for state development in Western Australia, has said a new AU\$700m (£463.4m) stadium is to be built on Perth's Burswood Peninsula.

The 60,000-seat venue – due to be completed in 2018 – will be the third largest in Australia and the second largest Australian Football League home stadium.

Western Australia's 2011-12 state budget will allow for AU\$13m (£8.6m) over a two-year period towards the planning of the venue, with the final cost of the scheme to be determined once designs are finalised.

Glasgow arena to open in 2013

The Scottish Exhibition and Conference Centre (SECC) has announced that a new 12,000-seat entertainment arena being developed in Glasgow is scheduled to open in spring 2013.

Energy supplier Scottish Hydro has been announced as the naming rights partner for the new Foster and Partners-designed venue, which is expected to host around 140 events and attract up to 1 million visitors each year.

The Hydro – as it is colloquially now known – is set to be one of the world's busiest arenas and generate £131m for the local economy. SECC has secured the deal with Scottish Hydro with the help of the operator and owner of some of the world's leading venues, AEG Worldwide.

AEG Global Partnerships senior vice president Europe Paul Samuels said: "Working



The Hydro is poised to attract up to 1 million visitors on an annual basis

with the SECC, we were able to create a unique proposition with Scottish Hydro."

SECC chief executive John Sharkey added: "We look forward to working with Scottish Hydro to deliver an unrivalled programme of world class events, providing Scottish audiences with access to iconic, global acts."

Proposed NEC complex nets casino licence

Plans for a new casino as part of a wider leisure and entertainment complex to be developed on the outskirts of Birmingham have been handed a boost by local councillors.

Genting UK, which is working alongside the NEC Group on the Resorts World at the NEC

proposals - has landed a large casino premises licence from Solihull Council.

The council's licensing committee granted the permit to Genting, which was the only bidder to proceed to the second stage of a licensing process that concluded on 31 January.

Betfred to acquire Tote for £265m

Betfred has won the race to buy state-owned bookmaker, the Horserace Totalisator Board (Tote) from the government in a £265m deal.

It is thought that the horse racing sector will benefit from payments of more than £155m as part of the deal, which will allow the business to develop as part of a larger group.

Deferred amounts - including accrued interest - of £115m will then be paid, with more than £90m to be retained by the taxpayer as a 50 per cent share of the net proceeds.

Betfred will also receive an exclusive seven-year licence to operate pool betting operations at all UK racing venues.

John Penrose, minister for gambling and racing, said: "Most people can't understand



Betfred will receive an exclusive licence to operate at UK racing venues

why, in the modern world, the government should be even a part owner of a bookie.

"So we pledged last year to end years of dithering and resolve the future of the Tote, and today we have done just that."

All Star Lanes signs up to Westfield Stratford City

Westfield Stratford City, a new retail-led scheme at the gateway to the Olympic Park, has signed up All Star Lanes to operate a bowling alley, restaurant and cocktail bar.

The boutique operator first launched in 2005 and will unveil its fourth site in the capital with this latest venture, following All Star Lanes Brick Lane - opened in 2008.

All Star Lanes is set to join an Aspers casino, three hotels, and an events and entertainment space as part of the Westfield Stratford City scheme, along with a 17-screen Vue cinema.



Playboy icon Hugh Hefner (centre) at the launch

Playboy Club makes London return

A gala event has helped mark the official opening of a new Playboy Club on Old Park Lane, Mayfair - 35 years after Hugh Hefner's brand first made its London debut.

London-based Jestic + Whites are behind the design of the 17,000sq ft (1,579sq m) venue - developed by London Clubs International and Playboy Enterprises.

Facilities at the new Playboy Club London venue feature a Gentlemen's Tonic salon; high-limit salon privé gaming rooms; a restaurant; a lounge; and table games, as well as a members' club.

Noble Group to offload Brighton's historic pier

GVA Humberts Leisure has announced that Noble Group, the owner of Brighton's historic pier, has put the attraction up for sale for the first time in more than 25 years.

Noble Group has owned the Grade II*-listed pier since 1984 and helped transform its commercial fortunes, with 18 themed attractions and rides currently on offer.

The disposal of Brighton Pier will include the sale of the entire issued share capital of the Brighton Marine Palace and Pier Company, which was established by Act of Parliament in 1888 to run the attraction.



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Continuum seeks consent for chocolate attraction

Continuum is in discussions with the landlords of York House, Kings Square, York, as part of plans to create a new confectionary-themed visitor attraction in the city.

Oakgate Group is applying to York City Council for 'change of use' planning permission for the premises for use as a visitor attraction and associated uses.

The 6,400sq ft (595sq m) space is spread across three floors and according to Continuum, the new attraction would "reflect the fascinating story of the city's trading and manufacturing past".



Porth Teigr is set to be the attraction's new home

Doctor Who Experience plans Cardiff relocation

Cardiff Council is to bring the Doctor Who Experience to the Welsh capital after the attraction leaves its current home at London's Olympia next year.

The council hopes to establish Cardiff as the attraction's permanent home and has sought planning permission for a 3,000sq m (32,292sq ft) building in Porth Teigr.

Working closely in partnership with BBC Worldwide – the owner of the intellectual property of the Doctor Who franchise – the council is currently drawing up a feasibility study for the attraction.

£11m Roman attraction planned for Cumbria

Hadrian's Wall Heritage Limited has submitted plans for a 'world class' Roman visitor attraction in Maryport, Cumbria.

The plans received by Allerdale Borough Council outline a £10.7m Roman Maryport development at Camp Farm with attractions including a Victorian model farm including a Roman fort and civilian settlement.

The plans also include a new museum building to house the Netherhall Collection – a selection of Roman Army religious dedications – and the redevelopment of the existing museum in the battery building.

Bristol's £27m M Shed unveiled

M Shed – a new £27m waterfront heritage museum housed in the iconic 1950s transit sheds – has opened its doors to the public at Bristol's Prince's Wharf.

Bristol City Council has part-funded the creation of the attraction, which also received a £11.6m grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund and will be at the hub of the city's new cultural quarter.

LAB Architecture Studio and BAM Construction worked on the creation of M Shed, which features 3,000 exhibits from the city's collection and incorporates three permanent galleries and a temporary exhibition space, plus a glazed rooftop extension offering views across the harbour, workshops and a train shed.

Items on show include models and props from Wallace and Gromit: Curse of the Were



The new attraction is housed within the city's iconic 1950s transit sheds

Rabbit and a spray-painted pink record desk used by Bristol band Massive Attack.

Bristol Museums and Archives head Julie Finch said: "[M Shed] builds on Bristol's great heritage to bring experts and the community together in the joint endeavour of building a new narrative for the city."

£74m Riverside Museum opens in Glasgow

Glasgow's £74m Riverside Museum – the new Zaha Hadid-designed home of the city's Museum of Transport – has opened to the public.

The attraction is operated on behalf of owner Glasgow City Council by Glasgow Life and is home to more than 3,000 exhibits across 150 displays. It is Museum of Transport's third home since opening in the 1960s.

Funding for the museum came from a number of sources, with the local authority investing more than £51m and a further £4.5m coming from private donations. The Heritage Lottery Fund also awarded more than £18m towards the project.

BAM Construction commenced construction work on site in 2007, with interiors and



BAM Construction delivered the Zaha Hadid-designed £74m museum

theming company Mivan appointed to deliver the fit-out of the new attraction.

Glasgow Life hopes the new building will increase the number of visitors to the collection from 500,000 a year to around 800,000.

Local authority moves to secure Dreamland site

Thanet District Council (TDC) has moved to acquire Margate's Dreamland theme park site in Kent after it confirmed that a compulsory purchase order had been served.

Working in partnership with The Dreamland Trust, the council is planning to regenerate the

and help establish a new tourist attraction for the seaside resort.

The site is owned by Margate Town Centre Regeneration Company, but TDC said that its efforts to acquire the site had been unsuccessful and had prompted its latest move.



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New participation deal signed

Sport England and the Fitness Industry Association (FIA) have announced the signing of a new Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to boost sporting participation.

The agreement is designed to recognise that, as well as national governing bodies, operators have the capability and knowledge to help encourage more people to take part in sport.

Both Sport England and the FIA will collaborate on a range of areas, including the support for operators to build mutually beneficial relationships with national governing bodies. The development of projects with commercial partners and to meet the strategic aims of both organisations also feature in the MoU.

Meanwhile, other areas include the creation of new benchmarking tools and a contribution



The MoU recognises the capability of operators to boost participation

to the digital legacy from the 2012 Games by creating online resources to allow, for example, people to find their nearest sports facilities.

Sport England's Charles Johnston said: "This agreement further strengthens our relationship with the FIA as we deepen the links between operators and the rest of the sport sector."

Record revenues for Premier League clubs

English Premier League clubs reported record revenues of more than £2bn during the 2009-10 season, according to new research published by Deloitte's Sports Business Group.

The latest Annual Review of Football Finance has revealed that collective revenues

of the top 20 clubs increased by 2 per cent, with broadcast revenue up 7 per cent to £1.04bn.

Total combined revenues for the top 92 English football clubs – including sides in the three Football League divisions – grew by 5 per cent in the 2009-10 season to nearly £2.7bn.

University unveils £30m Sport Central

A new £30m sports centre that offers facilities for fitness, sport development, research and the staging of events has been officially unveiled by Northumbria University (NU) in Newcastle.

Sir Robert McAlpine started construction work on the Atkins-designed Sport Central venue in 2008, with Gardiner and Theobald acting as project manager.

Sport Central incorporates a 3,000-capacity main arena to stage sporting events and to provide a home court for the Newcastle Eagles basketball team.

Elsewhere, dedicated lab space for physiology, biomechanics, gait and nutrition and a performance analysis suite have been created, along with a 60m, four-lane sprint track.



Sport Central includes facilities for performance analysis and lab space

NU vice-chancellor and chief executive Professor Andrew Wathey said: "Sport Central is a beacon for this university's contribution to the region – a state of the art facility and centre of sporting excellence."

Extra pool lanes for new St Albans leisure centre

St Albans City and District Council has confirmed that two additional swimming pool lanes will be added as part of the new £24m Westminster Lodge Leisure Centre.

In June, councillors agreed to move forward with the S&P Architects-designed project after considering the findings of a review of its business case.

The local authority has now announced that it has agreed savings with main contractor Willmott Dixon to provide the extra swimming capacity – adding an extra 100sq m (1,076sq ft) of pool space.



S&P Architects designed the club's new stadium

Work starts on Rotherham United stadium scheme

A groundbreaking ceremony has taken place to mark the start of work on a £17.3m stadium that is to provide a new home for Rotherham United Football Club.

The 12,000-seat stadium development – designed by S&P Architects – will be delivered on the site of the South Yorkshire town's former Guest and Chimes foundry site by GMI Construction.

Goals is project managing the scheme, which will see the north and south stands to boast a polycarbonate edge to the roof to enable light to reach the playing surface.

Murray family launches new Set4Sport initiative

Tennis players Andy and Jamie Murray have teamed up with mother Judy to launch a scheme designed to help parents develop their children's skills through sport.

Set4Sport, which also features the Royal Bank of Scotland (RBS) as a partner, is based on a book of activities, ball skills and exercises to enable young people to acquire basic skills.

The initiative is inspired by the games that Judy played with Andy and Jamie when they were growing up and is designed to support local communities.

The Pods opens in Scunthorpe

North Lincolnshire Council (NLC) has unveiled The Pods – a new multi-million pound leisure and sports development in Scunthorpe.

A split-level, 85-station Life Fitness gym occupying one of the five pod-like structures was among the first of the new facilities to open on 4 July at the venue, which was built by Bowmer and Kirkland.

Andrew Wright was behind the design of The Pods, with S&P Architects acting as the delivery architects. A six-court sports hall, two exercise studios, a sauna, a spa bath and a steamroom were also among the first facilities to open. The swimming pool area – occupying one of the largest domes – was unveiled on 11 July.

Buro Happold has also been involved with the creation of The Pods, which is designed to blend into the surrounding landscape.



One of the largest domes at The Pods is home to the swimming facilities

NLC deputy leader John Briggs said: “We made a commitment to provide an iconic, contemporary sport and leisure complex for the people of North Lincolnshire.

“The building is impressive – it is built to a very high standard and it really stands out, but without being too imposing.”

Fitness Industry Association unveils research institute

The Fitness Industry Association (FIA) has launched its Research Institute at London's University of Greenwich.

FIA chief medical officer Dr John Searle and the university's Professor Alfonso Jimenez head up the institute, which aims to re-balance

the current focus of research more towards structured forms of exercise.

The first programme is set to be the FIA Structured Exercise Research Study, which is an evidence-based, dose-response 12-week intervention study.

DLL unveils plans for £12m Farnham club

David Lloyd Leisure (DLL) has announced plans for a new 6,000sq m (64,583sq ft) sports, health and fitness facility in Farnham, Surrey, which feature the group's largest Amida Spa.

Located next to Farnham Rugby Club, the £12m venue will incorporate a 1,013sq m (10,904sq ft) spa area with six treatment rooms offering therapies and massages.

Other Amida Spa facilities at the Farnham development will include four sauna rooms; a relaxation area; a nail studio; a spray tanning salon; experience rooms; outdoor sauna cabins; and a spa pool.

Elsewhere, the new DLL club in Farnham will comprise eight outdoor tennis courts and an on-site physiotherapy and osteopathy clinic,



The £12m scheme will include David Lloyd Leisure's largest Amida Spa

as well as a multi-purpose sports hall. A 25m swimming pool and separate children's pool; a 470sq m (5,059sq ft) DL Kids area; and a 1,337sq m (14,391sq ft) gym with cv and resistance machines are also planned.

Fitness First opens club at Arsenal's former stadium

Arsenal Football Club's former Highbury stadium in north London has become the home of Fitness First's latest club.

The £2.2m club – part of the Highbury Square Development – boasts 20,000sq ft (1,900sq m) of work out space and has been equipped by Life Fitness and Technogym.

Group exercise studio and separate group cycling studios will offer a wide range of classes, while the club also houses a freestyle area to allow members to take advantage of the latest developments in fitness equipment and techniques.



Fit4Less Hartlepool launched three months ago

Énergie increases roll out target for Fit4Less chain

Health club operator énergie has launched its 13th Fit4Less-branded budget gym in Chesham and revealed that it has increased the pace of the chain's expansion strategy.

A 14th club will open shortly in Stockport and énergie has now imposed a target of 45 openings in the next two years.

According to énergie, an average Fit4Less club achieves around 700 members in pre-sales prior to each launch.

Brand director David Beattie said the no contract model used by the chain worked for attracting the clubs' target market.

Right Directions to deliver new FIA code

Health and safety management company Right Directions has been awarded a two-year contract to deliver the Fitness Industry Association's (FIA) new Code of Practice.

Each assessed venue will receive a full report under the new Code of Practice, with non-compliant sites given a comprehensive action plan to help address issues.

Right Directions, which also delivers Sport England's Quest accreditation scheme, also said that the agreement will enable operators to achieve the FIA code as part of the Quest process.

Tax boost for Irish tourism sector

Ireland's tourism industry is to receive a boost from the government, after plans to reduce the tax burden on the sector were revealed by finance minister Michael Noonan.

Between 2007-2010, Ireland has reported a 25 per cent cumulative decline in the number of overseas visitor numbers, with tourism and travel-related earnings for the same period falling by around 30 per cent.

In his speech, Noonan announced a raft of measures that are designed to reverse the decline in inbound numbers and "capitalize on the potential" of the Irish tourism sector to encourage economic growth.

VAT rates on tourism products, including theatres, cinemas, amusement parks and sporting facilities, have been reduced by Noonan from 13.5 per cent to 9 per cent.



The measures confirmed by Noonan are designed to encourage tourism

Elsewhere, the €3 (£2.71) air travel tax is to be abolished, subject to an agreement with airlines to bring in additional passenger numbers to the country, while visitors looking to travel to Ireland and holding a visa allowing entry to the UK will not have to apply to the Irish government for a separate visa.

Attwood reopens NI listed building grant scheme

Northern Ireland environment minister Alex Attwood has lifted the temporary suspension of the historic buildings grant-aid scheme, which was implemented in December 2010.

The programme was halted due to the high demand for grant-aid but funding worth

£50,000 is now available for projects to restore and preserve the country's oldest properties.

Attwood said: "This will be a boost, not just for our built heritage and owners of properties, but also for our construction industry, creating and sustaining jobs."

Sportivate legacy programme launches

A new £32m project has been launched to allow 300,000 young people to receive six-to-eight weeks of coaching in a sport of their choice.

Sport England is behind the Sportivate scheme, which will be funded by the National Lottery and will target 14-to-25-year olds.

The initiative will specifically focus on those who aren't playing sport in their own time and will be delivered by the network of county sports partnerships, local providers and sports clubs.

To help inspire and motivate the participants, our Sporting Champions – a team of current and retired elite athletes – will visit Sportivate sessions to share their experiences and enthusiasm for sport.



The £32m Sportivate initiative is specifically targeted at 14-25-year-olds

Sport England chief executive Jennie Price said: "Lots of young people think sport isn't for them. I would like them to have the chance to discover whether there is a sport they really enjoy. This programme is all about choice."

New volunteering plan for London arts sector

London mayor Boris Johnson is to work in partnership with arts and cultural groups across the capital to enhance the status of volunteers working within the sector.

The mayor has proposed the development of a city-wide framework for the arts and cultural sector, with 82 per cent of groups expecting demand for volunteers to increase by 2013.

It follows a survey of 90 not-for-profit arts organisations by Greater London Authority and London Cultural Quarters, a representative group for the sector.



A 2-mile stretch is set to benefit from a makeover

£4m makeover for London's South Bank

London's South Bank is to benefit from a £4m makeover ahead of the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games to enhance access to its cultural attractions and eateries.

Mayor Boris Johnson will work with Lambeth and Southwark councils, as well as residents' groups and local businesses, to upgrade a 2-mile (3.2km) section.

The stretch of the South Bank between Tower and Westminster Bridges will be enhanced – including locations such as the Globe Theatre, the Oxo Tower and Southwark Cathedral.

Assembly to probe 2012 venue legacy

An investigation has been launched by the London Assembly's economy, culture and sport (ECS) committee to examine the legacy plans for the Olympic Park venues.

The probe will focus on how the Aquatics Centre; the Handball Arena; the VeloPark; Eton Manor; and the Hockey Centre will pay for themselves over a long-term period. A full report is due this autumn.

Members of the ECS committee will also explore whether each of the facilities has struck a balance between the cost to the taxpayer, community access and elite use.

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White Paper to 'protect' nature

A White Paper – *The Natural Choice* – has been compiled by the government to highlight plans for the protection, restoration and improvements of the natural environment.

It is the first White Paper covering the natural environment for around two decades and sets out a programme of action to repair damage to the UK's nature in the past.

The Natural Choice comes after the UK National Ecosystem Assessment found that nature was worth billions of pounds to the economy.

Recommendations from Professor John Lawton in his September 2010 report *Making Space for Nature* are also acted upon. Plans include a £7.5m fund to create an initial 12 Nature Improvement Areas, while support for parks, gardens and tree planting in urban areas is also proposed.



The new White Paper includes plans for 12 Nature Improvement Areas

Environment secretary Caroline Spelman said: "Nature belongs to us all, and we've all got a vested interest in protecting it. That's why the true value of nature should be built in to the decisions we make so that we become the first generation to leave the environment in a better condition than we found it."

Report highlights 'value' of UK's nature

The health benefits of living with a view of green space are worth up to £300 per person per year, according to a new report examining the value of the UK's natural environment.

New approaches have been used in the UK National Ecosystem Assessment (UK NEA)

to investigate the economic, health and social benefits from trees, parks and waterways.

It is believed that the natural environment is worth billions of pounds to the economy, and it is anticipated that the report's findings will be used by the government to shape policy.

£60m London River Park plans unveiled

London mayor Boris Johnson has secured up to £60m of funding towards the creation of a new 1km (0.6-mile) floating promenade along the north bank of the Thames.

Gensler have drawn up designs for the London River Park scheme, which is to be financed by Venus Group of Singapore. A Memorandum of Understanding has now been signed between Gensler and the mayor that will see the city benefit from 30 per cent of the project's net revenues.

The 12m (39.4ft)-wide pontoon is earmarked to run parallel to the existing pathways that border the City of London between Blackfriars Bridge and Customs House. Eight themed pavilions will be situated along the route to showcase London and host



The London River Park project is scheduled to be opened next summer

events, with the promenade to be completed by next summer. Mace is also involved.

Johnson said: "The sheer beauty and design brilliance of this structure will provide yet another amazing and unique attraction."

£3.5m Chester park proposals to go on show

A public exhibition is to be launched by Cheshire West and Chester Council to allow residents to explore plans for a £3.5m revamp of Chester's Grosvenor Park.

Proposals, which aim to restore the park's original landscape and secure Green Flag status, went on display at Chester Library on 9 June as part of the consultation.

Grosvenor Park has already made it through the first stage of the application process for a Heritage Lottery Fund grant, with a detailed submission for a full award due to be made in the autumn.



The visitor centre features eco-friendly measures

£1.5m National Forest Cycle Centre to open

The National Forest Company (NFC) and the Forestry Commission have opened the £1.5m National Forest Cycle Centre is to open at Hicks Lodge, Leicestershire.

Purple Mountain has been appointed to run the complex, which features a visitor centre and 8 miles (12.9km) of off-road cycling trails. A café and a play area have also been created as part of the scheme.

Pick Everard provided architectural, engineering, quantity surveying and BREEM and CDM consultancy services on the development.

Trustees for new waterways charity named

Founding trustees have been appointed to a new charity, which is to take over the management of canals, rivers and docks across England and Wales from April 2012.

British Waterways (BW) chair Tony Hales will chair the charity, following recommendations made by the Advisory Panel on First Appointments and Transition.

Other trustees put forward by the panel to waterways minister Richard Benyon include current BW vice chair John Bridgeman and the chief executive of English Heritage, Dr Simon Thurley.

New spa opens at historic Ellenborough Park estate

A luxury spa has launched on the grounds of the historic 16th century Ellenborough Park estate near Cheltenham.

The spa has been influenced by Indian themes and boasts seven single treatment rooms and a couples' spa suite; spa pool; sauna; steamroom; tropical experience showers and relaxation area as well as a juice bar serving healthy snacks.

Treatments at the new Ellenborough Park spa use Babor products and include a range of facials, body wraps and scrubs, massages and signature 'journey' treatments.



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New travel spa opens at Gatwick Airport

A travel spa with shower suites and offering salon and spa services has opened as part of No.1 Traveller's latest 'super-lounge' at Gatwick Airport's North Terminal.

Services at the facility comprise hair-dressing; massages; manicures and facials, with the 'super-lounge' located outside for departing and transferring passengers.

The spa has been designed and developed in conjunction with Debi Green, the former group spa director of The Sanctuary. Products are supplied by Aromatherapy Associates, Rodial and Jessica.

Center Parcs introduces new spa accommodation

Holiday park operator Center Parcs is to add a new form of accommodation to its Elveden Forest park in Suffolk.

Adjacent to the park's Aqua Sana spa, guests staying at the Spa Suites will enjoy private access to the spa. The accommodation has a large open-plan living space and features a fireplace, twin beds or double bed and private balcony or terrace.

To fit in with its woodland surroundings, the interior of the new accommodation will have natural forest tones throughout, with large windows and a terrace or balcony.

New vision for The Malvern

Huw Watson and Helen Rogers, the new owners of The Malvern hotel, spa and health club in Worcestershire, have announced plans to further grow the business.

The pair had been overseeing the running of The Malvern since September 2010 and have introduced new spa treatments, branding initiatives and special events.

A second swimming pool and 30 additional rooms are to be added over the next three years as part of plans for The Malvern's redevelopment.

"We want to take The Malvern to a higher level in both the facilities and the service we currently offer," said Watson. "We are intent on making this a leading spa hotel which will offer excellent benefits to our members and attract visitors to our award winning spa and restaurant from far and wide."



The redevelopment of The Malvern is to be carried out over three years

The Malvern currently features a spa with four heat experiences – a salt grotto, a herb sauna, a crystal steam room and a kelo sauna, as well as a 20m hydrotherapy pool.

Relaxation areas and a bucket shower are also on offer at the spa, which uses ESPA, REN, Jessica Nails and CACI products.

ESPA Life spa debuts at Corinthia Hotel

Spa management and skincare company ESPA has unveiled its new ESPA Life spa concept, at the five-star, 294-bedroom Corinthia Hotel London.

ESPA Life is billed as 'a leading voice in the next generation of spa' and is designed to offer a fully integrated wellness approach alongside a luxury spa experience.

The wellness menu includes lifestyle programmes that focus on detox, sleep, weight-loss, pregnancy and general vitality. It also offers complementary and alternative medicine, alongside targeted fitness and rehabilitation services to counter-act the effects of modern lifestyles and optimise health.

In addition, there is a full spa menu, featuring ESPA's new and upgraded product lines



The ESPA Life spa occupies four floors at the Corinthia Hotel London

and a number of targeted and specially-created signature treatments, plus Rush Hour Beauty – a service where those pressed for time can hire two or more therapists to work on their hands, feet, face and body within an hour.

Naturist spa retreat opens in Birmingham

Clover Spa and Hotel, a retreat for naturists and those looking to "try the lifestyle for the first time", has opened in Birmingham.

The 1920s building has been converted into a boutique naturist resort and comprises seven individually-designed guest rooms.

Spa facilities - open to day and overnight guests - comprise an Aspen sauna, a steam-room and an outdoor hot tub.

A cold plunge pool; heated and head stone loungers; and a foot spa are also on offer at the new Clover Spa and Hotel.

Travelodge to launch new Metro concept

Travelodge has announced plans to develop properties offering 20-40 rooms under its new Metro concept, which will help accelerate the group's growth plans.

The Metro concept will see smaller hotels built in highly-priced, prestigious locations such as the City of London and cities including Oxford and Bath.

Popular destinations such as Cornwall and the Lake District will also be targeted as part of the new project, which will enable Travelodge to open sites where larger opportunities are not available.



The apps' launch continues IHG's mobile strategy

IHG launches iPhone booking applications

InterContinental Hotels Group (IHG) has announced the launch of new iPhone applications to allow guests to find and book rooms across each of its seven brands.

The launch marks the continuation of the company's mobile strategy and follows December 2010's unveiling of the InterContinental Concierge Insider Guides for the iPad.

Each of the apps have booking and management reservation features, such as quick access to contact details and maps and secure storage of credit card information.

Sir Robert McAlpine lands Butlins hotel contract

Hertfordshire-based construction group Sir Robert McAlpine has secured a deal to design and build a new 244-bedroom hotel at Butlins' resort in Bognor Regis.

Butlins Skyline is behind the eight-storey development, which is set to feature an L-shaped design and its upper levels reducing in footprint to create a stepped effect.

Located on the western side of the resort, the new development has also been designed to feature white render, curves and balconies to help ensure a nautical theme and to complement the seaside setting.

BHA highlights VAT concerns

The British Hospitality Association (BHA) has underlined concerns that high levels of VAT on UK tourism businesses is acting as a deterrent to visitors and 'staycationers'.

The organisation's annual report – published on 6 June – said the rate of VAT is having a negative effect on the Prime Minister's bid to boost domestic tourism to 50 per cent.

According to the BHA report, "the present level of VAT in the UK is one of the most pressing issues facing the industry today, making UK tourism uncompetitive with most European competitor countries."

Research commissioned by Bourne Leisure and Merlin Entertainments and undertaken by Deloitte will now be used to help lobby the government and bring about a reduction in the VAT levied on hotel accommodation.



The BHA warned that current VAT levels are hindering tourism growth

The BHA will also compile a study to look into the potential effect of a reduction in VAT on the restaurants and eating out sector.

Elsewhere in the report, the association has called for support for the tourism industry through the Regional Growth Fund after VisitEngland's bid for £29m was rejected.

New hotel and spa for London Golf Club

London Golf Club in Ash, Kent, is planning to develop a new hotel and spa complex as part of its ambition to establish a 'world-class' golf resort in south east England.

The club – host venue of the 2008 and 2009 European Open – has already received consent from Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council for the £35m scheme.

Designed by MacKenzie Wheeler, the new development will include a 2,000sq m (21,528sq ft) with 12 treatment rooms; relaxation areas; a sauna; a steamroom; and a spa café.

Facilities will also boast a gym; a studio and a pool, as well as associated thermal suites and hydrotherapy provision. Product suppliers for the spa are yet to be confirmed.



MacKenzie Wheeler have drawn up the designs for the hotel/spa project

The 130-room hotel will boast a variety of dining options and meeting accommodation, while European Tour chief executive George O'Grady has said a European Tour Regional Office will form part of the development.

Waldorf Astoria to enter Scottish market

Hilton Worldwide has revealed that its Waldorf Astoria Hotels and Resorts luxury brand is to debut in Scotland next summer, with the opening of a new property in Edinburgh.

A deal has been signed with the owner of The Caledonian Hilton Edinburgh for the

£24m conversion of the property into The Caledonian, A Waldorf Astoria Hotel.

The hotel has already benefited from £10m worth of enhancements, with an additional £14m to be spent as part of the conversion process to add and upgrade the facilities.

British Land acquires Maidenhead scheme

British Land has confirmed the £74m acquisition of a 198,000sq ft (18,395sq m) scheme in Maidenhead – featuring 85,000sq ft (7,897sq m) of leisure space.

The leisure component of the Grenfell Island development is anchored by a 10-screen Odeon cinema and a health club, while the remaining floorspace is currently occupied by office units.

British Land said that the weighted average lease length for the entire property is 10.7 years, while the acquisition is to generate a net initial yield of 7.5 per cent.



A new community is planned for East Greenwich

Hadley Mace to lead East Greenwich project

Hadley Mace – a joint venture which includes Hadley Property Group and Mace – has been appointed as preferred development partner for London's Heart of Greenwich scheme.

Plans include leisure facilities alongside 645 homes; an NHS health centre and a Greenwich Council service centre on the former Greenwich District Hospital site.

Centred around the Greenwich Centre, work will be carried out in partnership with the Homes and Community Agency; NHS Greenwich; and Greenwich Council.

Plans for Spanish City site put on display

North Tyneside Council's (NTC) preferred bidder for the redevelopment of Whitley Bay's Spanish City, Robertson, has put its proposals on public display.

Two events were held in June at the Playhouse to unveil the plans, which then went on show at the town's library ahead of an update and feedback session on 7 July.

Robertson is proposing to deliver a new family entertainment, cultural and leisure centre in the historic Dome building and ballroom, while the proposals also include a boutique hotel and new public spaces.

Green light for Chelsea Barracks

Qatari Diar's masterplan for the multi-million pound transformation of the Chelsea Barracks site has been given the green light by Westminster City Council (WCC).

The local authority's planning and city development committee has backed outline plans for a 12.8-acre (5.2-hectare) mixed-use scheme, which will feature a sports centre.

Public art; retail space; and a medical centre are also earmarked as part of the proposals that have been drawn up by Dixon Jones; Squire and Partners; and Kim Wilkie Associates.

The Grade II-listed former Garrison Chapel will also be retained to form a "beating heart" to the development, which will now be referred to mayor Boris Johnson for approval.

Alistair Moss, chair of WCC's planning and city development committee, said: "Chelsea



Project Blue, the property arm of Qatari Diar, will lead the development

Barracks is the most significant residential development we have seen in Westminster in recent years.

"We should be proud of this scheme and the effort put into it by all parties. The masterplan has widespread support among local residents, community groups and businesses."

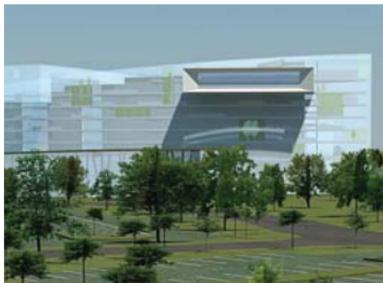
EUR460m Tipperary Venue plans approved

The development of a EUR460m (£405.4m) sports and leisure venue in County Tipperary, Ireland, has been approved by state planning authority, An Bord Pleanála.

North Tipperary County Council awarded Richard Quirke planning permission for the proposals last November, although objections were submitted by An Taisce and local residents.

An oral hearing into the development has now cleared the scheme, which is to include a 500-room hotel with resort-style casino; an 18-hole golf course; and a greyhound track.

An all-weather racecourse with a National Hunt track and sprint track are also among plans. However, permission for a 15,000-



A 500-room hotel with resort-style casino is at the centre of the project

seat arena has been rejected by the planning authority, which said in its ruling that the proposed entertainment venue would be located in an "inappropriate location because of the pattern and volume of traffic generated".

McLaren to build Weston's £19m mixed-use scheme

Construction group McLaren has been appointed to build a £19m leisure and retail element in Weston-super-Mare, Somerset.

The leisure aspect will form part of a £35m, 250,000sq ft (23,226sq m) development in the heart of the town centre.

Work is due for completion in June 2012 and will include a 116-room Premier Inn hotel, and an eight screen multiplex Vue Cinema.

A 20-lane indoor bowling centre operated by First Bowl and an Anytime Fitness Club will also form part of the development.

PIERS SLATER

In April, London's Soho became the first site in a proposed chain of commuter clubs – H2 Bike Run – which aims to release people from London Underground hell. Founder Piers Slater talks to Kath Hudson



What's your background?

My background is in property development. I was a commercial property agent and worked as an agent for clients including Virgin Active in the 90s. In 2002 I set up my own property company, Reef Estates. We develop in the retail, leisure, supermarket, residential and hotel sectors.

Where did you get the inspiration for H2 Bike Run?

I've been a cyclist commuter for a number of years. It's a brilliant way to get a workout, switch off from the office and make the commute a memorable part of the day, rather than finding your face in someone's armpit on the Tube!

The downside was that it was always a problem getting a decent shower. I even joined a gym in order to solve this problem, but that didn't really provide everything I needed. I've had two bikes stolen when parked on the street, so I also felt there was a need for secure bike parking.

We want to create a 'cycle and run' community in London and support an active commute. Our ethos is that we're a normal gym, except we've thrown the treadmills outside.

How did you get the idea off the ground?

I initially had the idea in 2004, which in hindsight was a bit early. Then the property boom took off, so it was put on a

back burner. With the crash in 2008, we dusted down the plans and started looking for sites. We looked at funding it externally, but decided that we wanted to keep control of the concept, so there are only five investors and no bank debt. Currently we've invested around £1.9m.

What does the H2 concept offer?

The 1,400sq m (13,000sq ft) club is open from 6.00am to 9.30pm and encompasses a Spinning® and core conditioning studio – there's no other CV equipment. The Star Trac-equipped Spin® studio, H2 Ride, will be the heart and soul of the club, offering six classes a day.

There are fantastic showers, vanity bays and lockers. For bike commuters, we have secure parking for 260 bikes and 220 nearby. We offer bike servicing and we've teamed up with Polaroid and Gore to sell apparel.

We're also planning to hold cycle confidence training, specialist triathlon training and a running club. The aim is to use the club and social media to build a running and cycling community. Additional services include personal training, sports therapy and massage, and dry cleaning and laundry.

Are you running the additional services yourselves?

No, we've partnered with other companies: Sarah and



The club offers core conditioning equipment (left) and 260 on-site stations for bike parking (right)



Bicycle servicing and cycle-related apparel will be offered to H2 members

CYCLING STATISTICS

In 2005, the Labour government launched the Cycle to Work scheme, through which employees can save almost half the cost of a bike and the equipment needed for cycling to work. The employer buys the bike from an approved supplier, claims back the VAT and deducts the rest, over a period of time, from the employee's pay.

Nevertheless, cycling commuting in London remains low compared to other European cities: just 3 per cent, com-

pared to 36 per cent in Copenhagen it's and 25 per cent in the Netherlands. The government wants to change this: Transport for London aims to boost London cycling by 400 per cent by 2025.

However, cycling in general is already increasing in popularity, perhaps in part down to the GB Cycling team's success at the Beijing Olympics. A 2009 TGI survey of around 25,000 adults found that running was the sport that had shown the strongest growth in popularity, but

with cycling a close second – 17.4 per cent of respondents said they cycled, up 4.1 per cent from 2005.

According to a 2010 Mintel report, 545,000 daily bicycle journeys were made in London in 2009, up 9 per cent on the previous year and up for the 17th year running - a 91 per cent increase since 2000. And a study by Sport England shows 4.46 per cent of the UK population cycle at least once a week, up from 4.26 per cent in 2008/09.

Sandro Morelli will run H2 Ride – Sarah is also education and development manager for Star Trac, responsible for the Spinning® programme; personal training is offered as 'H2 powered by Lomax Personal Training'; and Osteon takes care of the sports massage offering under the banner of H2 Osteon Sports Therapy.

How much is membership?

It's our aim to be as honest and transparent with the customer as possible, so there's a standard price and no discounts. We offer no contract as standard, but you can sign for 12 months and achieve a cheaper rate. We've invested heavily in the membership system and website, so that people can manage their memberships online. These have been developed bespoke for H2 using our own web development company and Ansador for the access control system. The cheapest monthly membership is £27.99, which offers bike parking, showers, a locker and use of the

gym area from 10.00am onwards, as we have classes during our peak hours of 6.00am–10.00am.

Who is the target market?

We think lots of people who join will already walk, run or cycle to work, but we also think there will be a lot of 'nudgers' – people who can be encouraged into action. We believe women will be our secret weapon: helmet hair is a key reason for women not cycling to work, second only to the health and safety aspect of cycling in the city. So we've provided great vanity areas with lots of hair straighteners.

People who live or work locally might join just for the gym or Spin® classes, and lunchtime joggers could be interested in using the showers and core conditioning equipment.

Who designed the club?

It was designed by our in-house design team, Urban Reef, with the help of interior design company Creative Switch.



The colour orange was chosen for being positive and "reminiscent of the sunrise"

"Unless you've had the experience of running or cycling to work, you don't understand how exhilarating it is, and how you can start the day in such a good frame of mind"

The fit-out specification of the facility is really top-end.

Primarily the aim was to make it feel light, airy and clean. We wanted to create a luxurious and salubrious environment. Cleanliness is of utmost importance, and we've paid great attention to how the water drains away, as well as minimising the corners, so it's easier to clean.

We chose the colour orange for the brand, because it's reminiscent of the sunrise and is a positive colour symbolising the start of the day.

What is the membership capacity?

We think it's 2,500, but will close the door if it exceeds what we feel is a comfortable operating level. We're going to monitor it, make sure we're offering a good experience at value for money, and create a club we're proud of and that makes a difference.

Will you push the 'green' angle of running or cycling to work?

We have a carbon footprint calculator on our website so members can calculate the impact/saving they're making by cycling or running to work. This is a sustainable way of commuting, and running outdoors as opposed to on a treadmill will bring about further energy savings. We estimate that an H2 member could reduce their carbon footprint by between five and 10 per cent.

The club also uses heat exchangers to transfer heat - from air and water leaving the building - back into the building. It also has energy-efficient showers, sustainable building solutions, and we use recycled water and low carbon energy systems.

What's been the biggest challenge?

Everything! There have been a number of technical challenges, such as how to deal with the amount of water we need to heat. Getting the concept to market without having a brand or backing of a big company has also been difficult.

Re-educating the consumer has been another challenge. People are happy to pay £3.50 for a pint of lager, but will quibble about paying £1 a day for a shower and to have somewhere safe for their cycling gear.

Also, unless you've had the experience of running or cycling to work, you don't understand how exhilarating it is and how you can start the day in such a good frame of mind. Trying to get that across to people has sometimes been frustrating.

How have you marketed it?

With the website, business-to-business marketing and consumer marketing. We're offering a promotion to founder members whereby their first month's membership is free.

What are your aims for the next 12 months?

To get the second site, at London Wall, up and running. We'd also like to get two or three more clubs in the pipeline to open next year, also in London.

What about longer-term aims?

We want to be the solution for running and cycling in central London, and to build a brand that we're genuinely proud of: a business that makes exercise fun and accessible and commuting a pleasurable experience that's good for you.

What about expansion plans?

Our target is for 10 sites in London. However, although this is primarily a London business model, we are considering other cities including Newcastle, Manchester, Brighton and Leeds. It might be that we have a public sector involvement in other cities. I would like to take it overseas too: New York is high on the list.

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

You only ever learn from failure, not your success. Failing teaches you how to become more successful. ●

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Design news

Folkestone gets a new-build fish restaurant and two leisure parks are planned for Nigeria

Project	Northumberland House
Design	Pierce Design International
Location	London, UK

Restored Northumberland House opens

The restoration of the Grade II listed Northumberland House near London's Trafalgar Square is now complete.

The historic building, once a 19th century 'Grand Hotel' and more latterly inhabited by the MOD, now offers two luxury hotels, a private members business club, banqueting rooms and dining options that include Boyd's restaurant.

Pierce Design International created several of the new spaces, including Boyd's, which reflects the glory of the former Marble Hall and features spectacular chandeliers.



Boyd's: The space has a black granite bar and antique mirrors



The first phase of the project is due to open in late 2013

Project	Delta Leisure Resorts
Design	Sarner UK/Sarner PFM (Africa)
Location	Delta State Nigeria

Leisure resorts planned for Nigeria

Work has begun on the £167.4m Delta Leisure Resorts - an extensive new tourist facility based in the cities of Warri and Asaba in Nigeria's Delta State.

Sarner UK and Sarner PFM (Africa) are collaborating on the design which will cover over 150 hectares in each of the west African cities.

The main park in Warri will include a waterpark, selection of three to five-star hotels, luxury chalets, casino, golf course, sports facilities, spa, historical attractions and retail stores.



The yacht village will overlook Abu Dhabi's cornice skyline

Project	Destination Village
Design	Tourism Development & Investment Company
Location	Abu Dhabi, UAE

Abu Dhabi builds village for yacht race

A purpose-built Destination Village is being created on Abu Dhabi's cornice to host the Volvo Ocean Race Yachting fleet when it stops over for two weeks in the UAE capital at the end of the year.

The 55,000sq m site is being overseen by the Tourism Development & Investment company and will be used as a sailing centre once the stopover has ended. The village will be designed around a maritime theme, and will offer exhibitions, shows, simulators, hospitality, game zones and retail.



Project	Rocksalt
Design	Guy Holloway Architects
Location	Folkestone, Kent, UK

Fish offer for Folkestone

The new-build Rocksalt restaurant and bar has opened in Folkestone - the first building to be realised in architect Sir Terry Farrell's masterplan for the Kent resort's harbour area.

Guy Holloway Architects won a national competition to design the building, which features curved exterior walls clad in black larch. Large glass sliding doors lead onto a cantilevered balcony, giving panoramic views of the sea and fishing boats. Interior walls also have dark larch strips, which contrast with a light marble floor.

The 86-cover seafood restaurant is the first venture by former Claridges head chef, Mark Sergeant.

The seafood restaurant will benefit from Folkestone's working fishing fleet



Designer/contractor partnerships are recognised by the awards

Project	Z1 Social
Design	Soon Interiors/Marcon Fitout
Location	Belfast, Northern Ireland

National design award for Belfast venue

Belfast-based Soon Interiors and shopfitters Marcon Fitout have won the NAS Design Partnership Award 2011 in the leisure category for their work on Z1 Social - a boutique bar and restaurant in the city's Cathedral quarter.

The venue is spread over three floors - one level featuring oak and marble, and another featuring leather booths to give the feel of a 1920s speakeasy. Central to the whole design is a pink glass wrap-around staircase. Judges said of the interior: "No surface has been denied a touch of glamour."



The centre's design references the area's industrial heritage

Project	Ravenscraig Sports Centre
Design	Populous
Location	North Lanarkshire, Scotland

Praise for Lanarkshire leisure design

Ravenscraig Sports Centre has been highly commended in the RICS Scotland Award's Community Benefit category.

The new facility, which sits on a former industrial site, was designed by architects Populous on behalf of North Lanarkshire Council, SportScotland and Ravenscraig Ltd.

Principal of Populous, John Barrow, described it as a "beacon building" designed to serve both elite athletes and the whole community. The site will be one of the training bases for the 2014 Commonwealth Games in Glasgow. ●

BENNETT'S ASSOCIATES

An epic six-year process has transformed the home of the Royal Shakespeare Company into a contemporary theatre attraction that recently scooped a RIBA award. Director Simon Erridge talks to Julie Cramer about the project



PHOTOS: © PETER COOK

The new auditorium fits within the original shell (left) while the tower (right) introduces a new element to the familiar 1930s facade

How did you get involved with the RSC project?

We had just finished work on the Hampstead Theatre in London and it was a last-minute decision to enter the RSC's competition to redevelop their Stratford-Upon-Avon site. We were shortlisted in 2004 and there was a rigorous series of workshops as part of the selection process. The RSC knew it was going to be a long build process and wanted to find a firm they would be very comfortable with. It helped to create a strong working partnership from the outset.

What was your brief?

To retain the character and essence of the original 1930s building, but to also create a contemporary theatre space and public areas that would attract a newer, younger audience, as well as the many national and international tourists who flock to the town each year.

The RSC theatre is an iconic building recognised around the world and there is a very loyal, core audience of theatre-goers who had strong views about the site. We also had to consider how the new design would help create a new relationship with this small market town.

What were the main design elements?

The Royal Shakespeare Company wanted to reduce the capacity of its main auditorium from 1,400 to 1,000 seats, making sure all new seats offered the highest quality theatre-going experience.

Around this, we needed to create a true visitor experience that would be open from early morning to late evening, with a new restaurant, shop, exhibition areas and communal spaces, plus improved facilities for the actors.

How did you fuse the old with the new?

The theatre was designed by Elizabeth Scott in 1932 and was Grade II* listed, which inevitably meant there were restrictions with what we could change. However, the RSC had already forged a good relationship with English Heritage and there was an agreement in principal that the site required a major intervention in order to enable it to perform as a contemporary theatre site.

From the 1930s to the 1970s, the auditorium has already been remodelled many times, and much of the original fabric of the space has been either tinkered with or ripped out, so that made it easier to start again.

However some areas were sacrosanct – like the original Art Deco foyers which featured some highly-crafted and ornate architectural details. These elements, including the Fountain staircase, have been carefully preserved in the new design.

Where did the inspiration for the tower come from?

We came up with the idea of a 36m-high (118ft) glass and brick tower because we wanted to introduce a clear, new element to the site to draw visitors. The theatre was already a dominant feature in the town – like a cathedral – so there was never really an issue in introducing a tall structure.

It was partly inspired by an original tower on the site that was gutted by a fire in 1926. It may also be likened to an Italian-style tower you might expect to see in the landscape of Shakespeare's 'Two Gentlemen of Verona'.

Practically, it connects all the auditorium levels and acts as a main circulation space between floors. On top is a watchtower, with floor-to-ceiling glass walls on four sides



The auditorium has reduced seating and actors play on a thrust stage, allowing theatre-goers to be much closer to the action

RSC CELEBRATES HALF A CENTURY

In April 2011, the RSC celebrated 50 years at the RST in Stratford and is marking the anniversary with a series of events through the year. The first RSC production in the new theatre was *Macbeth*, directed by Michael Boyd. Other events include:

- A series of readings from key plays commissioned by the RSC over the last 50 years, including *Bond* and *Pinter*

- *Folio* - an exhibition of print-making by artists from the Royal College of Art celebrating the past 50 years (Apr-Oct)
- *A History of the RSC in 50 Objects* - key items from the RSC's history will be on show in the theatre buildings (Apr-Dec)
- *Sweet Celebrations* - Artist Shane Waltener transforms the Swan Room into a large birthday cake using sugar decorations - engaging the public in designing and making the installation (Apr-Jul)

giving panoramic views of Stratford-upon-Avon, including Shakespeare's birthplace, school and where he is buried. Tower-top visitors are clearly visible on the ground which creates even more demand - it's a destination in its own right.

What aspects of the design are you most proud of?

We are pleased with the way the whole building has been received, but above all are delighted with the new auditorium, which was one of the most challenging aspects of the design. The old theatre witnessed many acclaimed performances but was not user-friendly, with some people up to 27 metres from the action.

The new auditorium dispenses with the proscenium arch and creates a thrust stage surrounded on three sides by three tiers of narrow balconies. It puts the actors in the centre and ensures no member of the audience is more than 15 metres from the action. Acoustics and sightlines are vastly improved.

It now works as a 3D space with diagonal walkways allowing actors to enter from all corners - the type of theatre performance space that Shakespeare himself would have been used to.

What challenges did you face with the project?

The auditorium was a challenge but as the RSC had already built a temporary theatre nearby for performances to continue we had a perfect live test bed for experimentation. So our final auditorium space was about version 49!

The new auditorium also accommodated much more scenic and technical capability - so this involved digging out a basement area 7m deep right next to the River Avon, which was quite a tricky technical feat for the contractors.

What eco-principles did you apply to the design?

We have recycled all the best features of the old theatre. For example original teak boards from the old stage have



The theatre's new top floor restaurant space offers diners views over the River Avon

been laid in the public areas so people can walk in the footsteps of Lord Olivier and Vivien Leigh. There were also some amazing marquetry doors – one is now the quirky entrance to a cleaning cupboard, while others have been used as decorative back panels in the bar.

In most new-build areas we used composite timber floor slabs which are both lightweight and low in embodied carbon, thus avoiding the need to reinforce existing foundations.

As the building is a mixture of old and new structures we have over-specified the insulating properties of the new materials to make up the shortcomings of the existing fabric. There is a plant in place to service a ground source heat system in the neighbouring gardens, subject to it being approved by planning.

How has the theatre been received in the local area?

People have been very involved from the start with the RSC leading a robust public consultation process and open days – so people have been on board all the way.

One side of the theatre used to be called the Jam Factory by locals because of its unappealing facade. But with a radical facelift, new entrances, public areas and outdoor performance spaces, the theatre no longer turns its back on the town.

The demolition of the old restaurant has favoured the public, as this allows for a continuous riverside walk which was previously blocked. The new restaurant occupies the space where the cheap school party seats once were, far from the action. Now there are river views.

Why does the design work?

It works because it welcomes everyone to the space, from the very top of the tower through connecting glass bridges

TRANSFORMING THE RST

The RST was recognised with a prestigious RIBA award in May 2011. The new facility first opened its doors in late November 2010 – on time, and slightly under its £57m budget. The project team were:

- Client - Royal Shakespeare Company
- Architect - Bennetts Associates
- Theatre Consultant - Charcoalblue
- Engineer & Transport Consultants - Buro Happold
- Construction Management - Mace
- Acoustic Consultant - Acoustic Dimensions
- Project Management & Strategic Planning Advisors - Drivers Jonas Deloitte
- Quantity Surveyor & Planning Supervisors - Gardiner & Theobald



The RST scheme: New components blend sympathetically with the old

RSC/SHAKESPEARE THEATRE

THEATRE ADDITIONS

NEW FACILITIES INCLUDE:

- A 1040-seat thrust stage auditorium
- A 7m deep stage basement, allowing actors, scenery and props to rise from beneath the stage
- 15 new dressing rooms with balconies overlooking the River Avon.
- Four theatre bars, riverside café and terrace, and rooftop restaurant
- Three lifts, two platform lifts for disabled access, and new toilet facilities
- An exhibition space adjacent to the Upper Circle Bar
- A new foyer for the Royal Shakespeare and Swan Theatres that links the two theatres together for the first time and houses the box office, ticket collection machines and shop.
- New outdoor space for year-round events and entertainment

down to the large open public foyers and courtyards. And at the same time the design pays respect to what RSC director Michael Boyd calls "the ghosts of the past". For example, part of the wall of the old auditorium is now free-standing in the middle of the new restaurant – a ruin from the past that is now a striking design feature.

And the new auditorium has been hailed as "the best place in the world to see Shakespeare" – which is exactly how it should be. ●

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Simon Naudi

Corinthia Hotel London is the latest offering in the capital's five-star market. The group's director tells Julie Cramer how the flagship site will shape the Maltese company's global expansion

For a brief spell in an earlier career, Simon Naudi's job took him to war zones, and allowed him to meet famous figures such as George Bush Senior, President Gorbachev and the Pope. "I was a young man working as a journalist for the *Times of Malta* and because it was such a small island you got to meet everyone," he says.

More than two decades on, Naudi's passion is now five-star hotels – and his task is to take a flavour of Malta out into the world. For the past 15 years he has been at the right-hand of Alfred Pisani, the creator of Corinthia Hotels – a family-founded Maltese hotel group

that has flourished in fledgling markets and is now poised to take its place on the wider international stage.

With the spring 2011 opening of the £305m Corinthia Hotel London – the company's first flagship hotel in a major western European capital outside Malta – Naudi knows the eyes of the hotel world will be upon them.

"Until now we have mainly sought out opportunities in emerging markets and our brand is very well regarded in countries like Russia, Hungary and the Czech Republic. But London will give us a different platform of visibility – it will put us on the global map," says Naudi, who went from journalism to the govern-

ment's investment arm before moving to Corinthia, where he has spent most of his working life.

LIBYA LINK

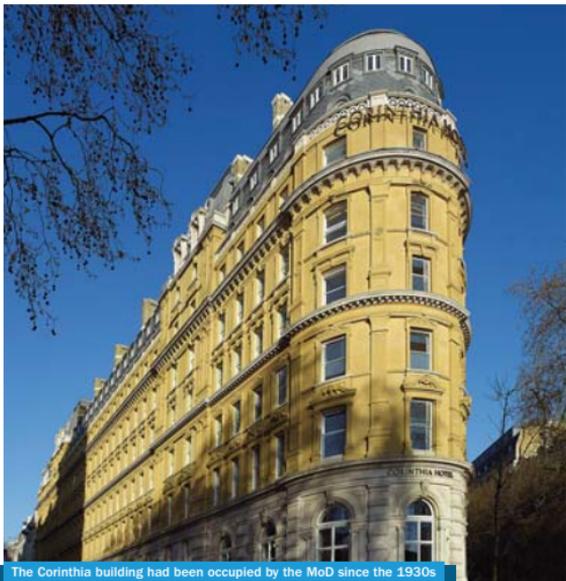
The London opening, however, has not been without its hitches. One investor in the Corinthia group is the Libyan Foreign Investment Company (Lfico) which is owned by the Libyan government and has been a non-controlling shareholder in Corinthia since 1974, now owning a third of its holding company, International Hotel Investments (IHI). There are 3,100 other shareholders including the founding Pisani family, who still control and run the business, and Isthmar Hotels of Dubai.

With Libya in turmoil and the Gaddafi regime subject to economic sanctions, there was press speculation that Corinthia London would not be able to open because of its investment links. Prior to the launch, the company says it obtained all necessary approvals from the UK Treasury to continue trading normally and to reassure its customers.

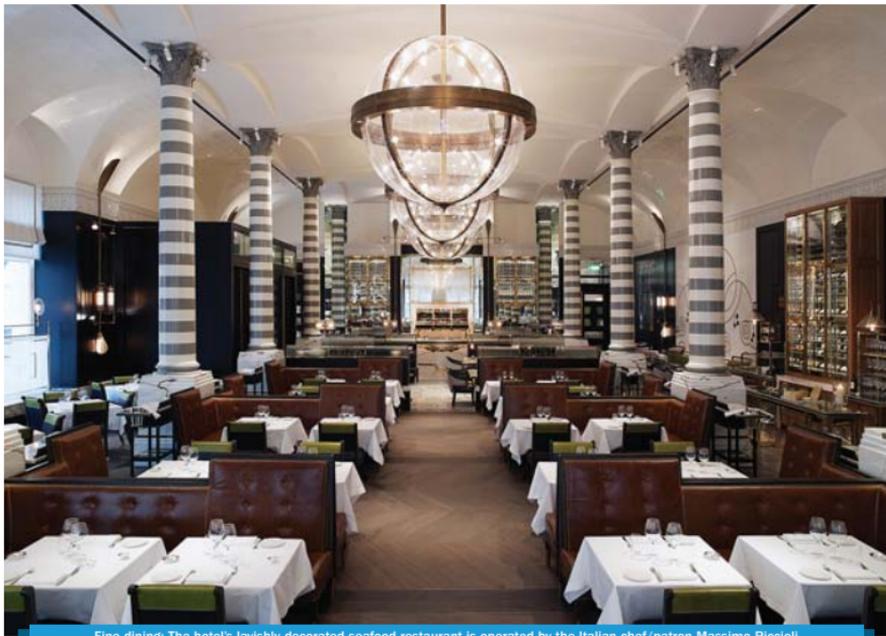
Corinthia issued a statement saying the running of its business will not be affected as it does "not involve making available any funds to a designated entity prohibited by sanctions". Naudi says simply: "We do not get involved in politics, we are hotel operators."

He adds that the company's hotel in Tripoli (opened in 2003) is currently semi-operational and mostly accommodating foreign journalists. "It was very important for us to keep the hotel going for the sake of our staff," he says.

There will no doubt be high hopes for the performance of Corinthia's London site. It is a lavish renovation of a former 19th century 'grand hotel' (Hotel Metropole), which had been occupied for the past 80 years by the Ministry



The Corinthia building had been occupied by the MoD since the 1930s



Fine dining: The hotel's lavishly decorated seafood restaurant is operated by the Italian chef/patron Massimo Riccioli

of Defence. The location is also enviable, with sweeping views over the River Thames and a stone's throw from the bustle of Trafalgar Square.

The five-star hotel has 294 guest rooms (the original had around 500 rooms), including 43 suites. The reduced accommodation means room sizes average a spacious 45 sq m, among the largest in London's luxury hotel category. Corinthia Hotel London also houses a 3300sq m flagship spa from ESPA, meeting spaces, restored ballroom and two signature restaurants.

GLOBAL INTEREST

Naudi is particularly pleased with the London acquisition, given that the company fought off stiff global competition to get it. When the Crown Estate put out a tender for the building – which had been used by the MoD since the 1930s – it attracted 29 bids from some of the biggest developers around the world.

"It wasn't just a question of writing down a number – the site came with certain planning requirements and we had to present very detailed architectural information," says Naudi.

Of the 42,000sq m, 16,000sq m had to be for hotel development. While other

CORINTHIA PORTFOLIO

Corinthia has three luxury facilities in Malta – its original Palace Hotel & Spa, St George's Bay, and the Marina Hotel. There are also hotels in St Petersburg, Budapest, Tripoli, Lisbon and Prague. The Corinthia Taormina Golf Resort in Sicily opens in 2012.

bids proposed mixed-use schemes, Corinthia perhaps surprised with its plan to develop the whole site as a hotel, and 12 exclusive residential apartments.

"From a planning perspective we were the least controversial and our track record over the years spoke of an effective development organisation. We won the bid and got through planning in just 10 weeks, which is virtually unheard of in the commercial world," says Naudi. "Corinthia London is an extraordinary achievement in terms of how we bought it, what we bought it for and how we have developed it in terms of its relative value in the market."

The pursuit of a good deal is clearly close to Corinthia's heart, and seems to have informed the company's site acquisitions policy as it branched out from

a small Mediterranean island. "We are always on the look out for a good deal. We buy for 'one', spend another 'one', and want a site to be worth two but three, even before we start," he says.

As Corinthia expands more into western economies – with Paris and New York next on the hit list – Naudi acknowledges such deals will be rarer, and the company's focus must change as a result. "In the early days Mr Pisani followed the real estate opportunities – such as in central Europe or Russia – and our brand followed the real estate. As we grow, we are becoming more brand driven to drive occupancies and especially to drive the rate," he says.

The company's expansion may well be aided by the fact that it has three strong divisions – for hotel investment, development and operations. IHI (of which Naudi is an executive board member) is the investment arm, which went public in Malta in 2000 (there are plans to be listed on the London Stock Exchange in the near future). CHI Ltd is IHI's operational arm for Corinthia in partnership with Wyndham Hotels in the US, and IHI also has a shareholding in Quality Project Management Ltd which manages the facility development.

INSIDE CORINTHIA LONDON

Corinthia wanted the restaurants at its new London hotel "to have soul", says Naudi. Seafood restaurant Massimo Restaurant and Oyster bar, is headed by Italian chef/patron Massimo Riccioli (Corinthia's Alfred Pisani used to dine at his celebrated restaurant when in Rome). At Corinthia London, Massimo also has a private dining room with open kitchen where he entertains small groups.

The British-inspired restaurant is run by chef Garry Hollishead, winner of Michelin

stars at three previous establishments, where the focus is on artisanal produce and provenance.

Corinthia's interior has a subtle modern colour palette that includes browns, soft greens and mauves. It is a mix of understated elegance with flashes of opulence, such as the unmissable Full Moon chandelier in the main Lobby Lounge – a space created by GA Design.

As the fashionable Hotel Metropole (1880s-1930s) the site became associ-

ated with Anglo-Italian conductor Paolo Mantovani, who performed with his popular orchestra in the hotel's grand ballroom. A musical theme has been applied to the décor in the Bassoon bar, designed by David Collins Studio, which has a dark, cosy atmosphere.

Tucked high in the original turrets of this Belle Epoque building are seven, two-storey hotel suites with lofty interiors and terraces with spectacular views of key London landmarks.

DESIGN DETAILS

With this formidable skillset, the flagship Corinthia London has been rather impressively developed in a little over two years. Working through the recession has had some advantages, says Naudi, as the company has had preferential access to some top craftsmen and designers at short notice.

Bespoke pieces are a hallmark of Corinthia properties. In London, design-

ers Based Upon were commissioned to make a 9sq m bronze artwork of the Thames, and bronze elevator doors.

Another unavoidable talking point is the extravagant Full Moon chandelier in the main lobby comprising 1001 crystal baubles, created by French designer Chafik Gasmî and made by Baccarat. At two-tonnes, hotel designers had to add a new glass atrium to accommodate it, and Naudi declines to disclose its cost.

The hotel is home to several 'firsts' – mostly notably the launch of spa operator ESPA's new brand, ESPA Life, which is a holistic wellness facility, offering naturopathic treatments, acupuncture, osteopathy and functional medicine alongside regular spa and offers.

"We knew the spa had to be very special," says Naudi, who seems delighted with their choice of ESPA as partners. "We were very impressed, not only with their knowledge of how to create a five-star spa, but also how to make that spa work as a business."

Another luxury brand, Harrod's, will open its very first hotel retail space at Corinthia London.

The hotel's 12 'Sky Mansion' apartments have yet to be finished, but will be the height of super-chic design, some occupying well over 1,200sq m of space with views of Westminster and the London Eye. Each residence has a private lift that links to the hotel's own service area, private access to the spa and underground car-parking.

When finished, they will not be widely marketed – rather Corinthia will focus on identifying the most suitable buyers. With suggested values at the top of the market in London, it is no wonder Naudi is beaming about Corinthia's £305m overall investment.

The quest for design quality and craftsmanship seems to be at the core of Corinthia's philosophy, and this seems to emanate from the company's founder Alfred Pisani who still plays a very hands-on role in the company today.

"Everybody in the company has met the chairman and had a conversation with him. He is a very inspirational character who built his business from a very small island with little money and limited human resources," says Naudi.



Glory days: The ballroom pays homage to its 'Grand Hotel' past



Corinthia's standard hotel rooms are said to be among the largest in London, and bathrooms are fitted with Carrera marble from Italy

As a young man in the 60s, an inexperienced but passionate Pisani obtained one of the government loans being offered to promote development on the small island, which had recently gained independence from Britain. But he couldn't find anyone to build his hotel, so he became the builder himself.

These early, perhaps reluctant steps into hotel construction have now transformed into a fully fledged business arm for Corinthia, that makes for top quality interiors at competitive prices.

'SPIRIT OF CORINTHIA'

Naudi says that because the company has evolved as a tight-knit, family inspired business, everybody feels a strong sense of ownership.

"I love the way I can be involved in every aspect of hotel creation, from the purchasing of the site right through to deciding how breakfast is laid out. I could even tell you the price of that chair [he points to a meeting room chair] because we have sat down and had a discussion about it," says Naudi.

He acknowledges that the challenge will be to keep and engender that feeling of pride and "spirit of Corinthia" among all hotel staff as they open in new coun-

ESPA LIFE AT CORINTHIA

Corinthia Hotel London sees the launch of ESPA's new flagship wellness brand - ESPA Life. Styled by ESPA and GA Design in a 'Chanel' colour palette of mainly blacks and creams, the 3,300sq m facility has been spread dramatically over four floors.

Facilities include an extensive heat treatment/wet area, 15 treatment pods, a 9m steel swimming pool, gym, Daniel Galvin hair salon, and a trendy all-white spa lounge serving nutritional cuisine.

The £20m facility will offer all the usual luxury spa and beauty offerings, but with

much more emphasis placed on "integrated wellness". The ESPA Life concept has been three years in development, and tailored programmes will draw on the skills of naturopaths, nutritionists, acupuncturists, physiotherapists and osteopaths.

ESPA founder and CEO Susan Harmsworth says: "The main thing...was choosing therapies that are proven to work. Efficacy is hugely important and we'll be recording results through functional medicine testing." For more in-depth detail on ESPA Life, go to www.spabusiness.com/digital

tries. "As much as we put importance on the size of hotel bedrooms and quality of bathrooms - the human side of hotel-iering has to remain the most important part of our business," says Naudi.

The company has taken half a century to expand its portfolio to nine Corinthia branded luxury facilities and several non-branded hotels. Naudi says growth, which will focus mainly on the Corinthia brand, will be measured, and "no-one is pushing us to open 100 hotels".

A new golf resort being built in Sicily will be the first Corinthia hotel where

the company will just be the operator, not the investor. Naudi believes that as Corinthia becomes known for its multi-skill, more of these ventures will follow.

He is also confident the expanding company will retain its Maltese charm. "I think we have the best of all cultures - the warmth of the Mediterranean people, structure inherited from the British and the trading instincts of the Arabs."

Corinthia appears to uphold these values in its company culture, and in the competitive world of hotels, they sound like a recipe for success. ●

LOCAL LUXURY

Bargain prices and a strong local following have ensured that a public sector spa in a deprived area is enjoying great success. Three of the team involved in Inside Spa tell Julie Cramer how the concept has grown

As one of England's most deprived areas, Pendle in Lancashire has more than its fair share of socio-economic challenges, including widespread health inequalities, inferior housing, high unemployment and low educational attainment.

It may not be an obvious choice as the place to open a high quality spa aimed at attracting a wide range of residents. Yet this was the ambitious vision of Pendle leisure chiefs and in July 2007 the Inside Spa and fitness complex opened at the Pendle Wavelengths leisure centre in Nelson with £1m of Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) funding from Pendle Council and £2m from operational partners Alliance Leisure.

From the outset, the facility was marketed as "a luxury experience at pocket money prices" with a two-hour spa experience including lunch priced at just £22.50 and aromatherapy massages starting at £25. As business has grown, prices have been kept com-

petitively low to make the facility accessible to lower income groups.

The public response has been so great that Pendle Leisure Trust has just spearheaded a £220,000 spa extension to meet customer demand. The expansion, which opened in March 2011, includes four new treatment rooms which replace a former meeting room at the leisure centre, relaxation room, new manicure and pedicure bays in the reception and increased seating areas.

The additions build on the existing facilities which consist of a sauna and steam room, salt inhalation, sanarium, aromatherapy room, hydrotherapy pool, monsoon shower, ice fountain and rasul mud bath.

Spa revenues have shown healthy growth. From April 2008 to March 2009, Inside Spa generated an

income of £245,000, which rose by 28 per cent in the following year to £315,000. From April 2010 to March 2011 revenues grew at a slower rate of 9 per cent, achieving £344,000. The Trust puts this slower growth down to the overall economic climate but is confident that its new expansion will continue to attract new customers and drive business well into the future.

Here three key players in Inside Spa's success discuss their role in the progression of the project.

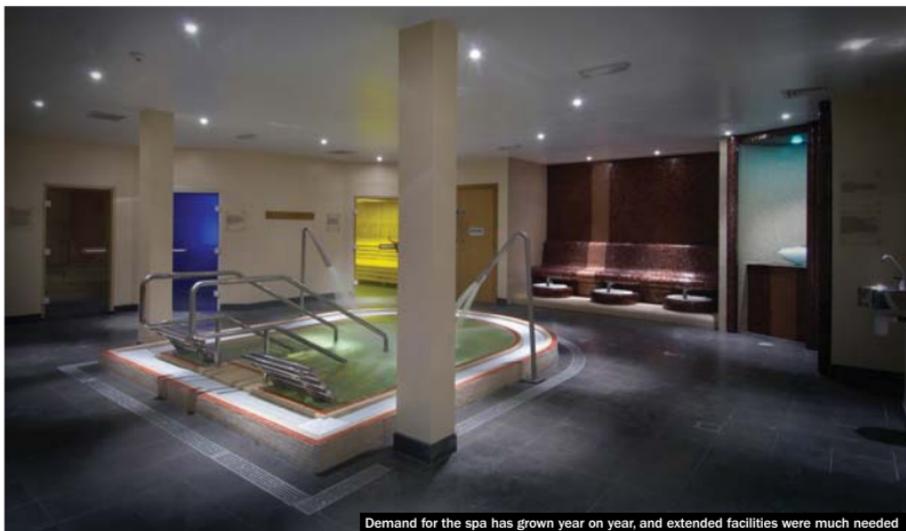


Individual footbaths feature in the extensive wet area



Housed behind a traditional leisure centre facade, Inside Spa says first-time clients are often surprised by the quality of facilities on offer





Demand for the spa has grown year on year, and extended facilities were much needed

Inside Spa provides a very good business model, which in turn is helping to reduce the overall leisure costs in Pendle

As chief executive of the not-for-profit Pendle Leisure Trust, Phil Storey worked with Alliance Leisure to create the spa.

Why have you decided to expand the spa?

The Trust sees Inside Spa as an investment opportunity and wants to maximise its potential as both a local and regional facility of note. Throughout 2010 demand for Inside Spa services rose to a level that indicated the need for capital investment to extend the facilities, which were completed in March 2011. The spa is now in its fourth year of operation and the demand is incredible.

How would you describe your achievement so far?

The Trust's efforts are unique in that the spa brings something to the public that is normally a private sector venture, and specifically targets people from a wider variety of backgrounds.

The management and therapy team have established a community asset that not only caters for Pendle but also attracts customers from beyond the borough – a notable achievement given that the facility is in a deprived ward.



Phil Storey
Chief executive
Pendle Leisure Trust

How did you create the business model for Inside Spa?

The concept came about as part of the extension of Pendle Wavelengths leisure pool with both the Trust and Pendle Council deciding to move away from building a traditional sports hall facility and opting instead for a spa and fitness complex to rival anything the private sector could offer. Stress is a major health concern in the area, so a holistic spa helped meet this need.

What challenges have you faced?

Getting people to believe that anything so good could exist Nelson was a challenge, and lots of people were unsure about what we meant by a spa! Some had experienced one on holiday, but it wasn't a regular activity of most Pendle residents. So the initial challenge was getting people to see the facility at first hand, and having done so they were converted.

What lessons have you learned?

Inside Spa has shown that top quality facilities and services of this type are not the prerogative of more affluent areas. With a dedicated management team, creative marketing, partner support and community endorsement there is no reason why these facilities should not be able to flourish.

The spa now attracts customers from 50 miles away, from across the North West - as a result of our marketing strategy and also word of mouth. This in turn has had additional benefits for the local economy and tourism as people explore the Pendle area.

What about future plans?

Nelson is undergoing a programme of regeneration after years of under investment and stagnation. Inside Spa has a strategic role to play within this regeneration, and within the health agenda locally and nationally.

Inside Spa provides a very good business model, which in turn is helping to reduce the overall costs of leisure in Pendle. We are now considering taking the brand to neighbouring boroughs and setting up satellite treatment rooms in other facilities.

Identifying Pendle's demographic

SRB funding required Inside Spa to target traditionally hard-to-reach groups such as low earners and ethnic minority groups and tailor pricing and marketing strategies to be more inclusive to those users. Leisure chiefs used the Mosaic Segmentation System

by Experian - a demographic profiling system to generate a detailed profile of prospective customers. From a sample total of 22,000 customers it identified the three largest groups as:

■ **Terraced Melting Pot** (23 per cent) - lower income workers, mostly young, living in tightly-packed inner urban terraces, in areas of high diversity

■ **Industrial Heritage** (16 per cent) - families and couples who own affordable older-style housing in communities that have historically been dependent on manufacturing

■ **Suburban Mindsets** (13 per cent) - maturing families on mid-range incomes living a moderate lifestyle in suburban semis.

■ Spa customers living within 10 miles of the facility - 76 per cent
 ■ Clients are 77 per cent female, 23 per cent male

Mosaic age profiles:
 Under 20s - 3 per cent
 20-30 year-olds - 30 per cent
 30-40 year-olds - 24 per cent
 40-50 year-olds - 20 per cent
 Over 50s - 23 per cent

Promoting the spa has been the hardest challenge given its location, but once people have tried the facility they tend to be loyal customers

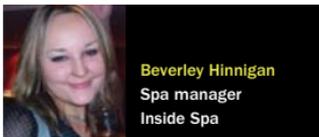
Beverly Hinnigan was a senior therapist when Inside Spa launched in 2007 and since March 2010 has headed up the team as spa manager.

Can you describe your role at Inside Spa?

My role is to ensure that the customer experience is nothing short of a private spa standard. I manage a team of 15 therapists and three senior therapists who work to ensure a consistently high standard is met at all times.

How have you been involved with the expansion?

I was able to assist with decisions on the design, décor, equipment and furniture for our new treatment rooms, relaxation room, juice bar and nail and pedicure bays. It is so motivational to



Beverly Hinnigan
Spa manager
Inside Spa

see how far the spa has come from the early days.

What are the day-to-day challenges of the facility?

Promoting the spa has been the hardest challenge given its location. However once people have tried the facility they tend to be loyal customers who use it on a regular basis. We now have people travelling from all over Manchester, Birmingham and even as far as Scotland to use our facility.

We have been known to have a few

VIP actresses attend in the past and our local football team Burnley attend on a regular basis.

What makes the spa stand out from other facilities?

We offer affordable prices but our main USP is the friendliness and professionalism of all our staff. The facilities and therapists are the main reasons why clients keep coming back. We are looking to increase staffing hours to meet current demand.

What can clients expect?

We provide a towel and robe and those having treatments get a reward card. They receive a free back neck and shoulder massage or express facial after six visits. New clients are given a spa induction and full tour. They can use the relaxation room before being collected by their therapist.

We have a full range of luxury offers, including Declor face and body treatments, Jessica Manicures, Geleration nails, reflexology, Indian head massage, St Tropez tan, teeth whitening and treatments for teen skin.

What are your plans for the spa?

To keep up to date with new treatments and innovations. We are considering offering body and facial electrical treatments, and want to ensure all spa facilities work at full capacity every day. We plan to achieve and exceed financial targets, and with the support from management and my loyal and ambitious team I am confident business will grow day by day.

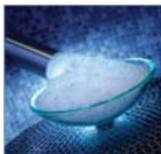




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New manicure bays (below left) were included in the new extension to meet demand, and elsewhere the fit-out is of a private spa standard



The lesson is that spas can be for the public sector. We can do it well and create facilities that compete in quality while remaining accessible

- ▶ Sarah Watts is the managing director of Alliance Leisure and a key player in the development of Inside Spa.

What does your position at Alliance Leisure involve?

Part of my role is to work with our local authority and trust partners to develop and deliver new concepts and innovation within the public sector leisure market. This is the most exciting element of my role is creating new and different facilities that deliver on both social and commercial objectives.

What has been your involvement in the spa project?

Alliance Leisure's role was working with Phil Storey on the initial spa concept, supporting the non-user research and identifying the affordability of the project. We also funded and built the original development under contract to Pendle Leisure Trust and are the operational partners.



Sarah Watts
Managing director
Alliance Leisure

How would you describe the concept?

The model is very simple - great service and facilities at affordable prices. We wanted it to be used regularly – and not to be seen as a day spa just for birthdays and Mother's Day.

Along with the other areas of the original development such as the fitness studios, we have transformed a dated standalone leisure pool into a family focused leisure facility. The way the community has embraced it has been remarkable.

Did you have any doubts at the outset of the project?

At the start, I did say to Phil Storey: "If we can make it work in Nelson, we can

make it work anywhere".

The biggest challenge was educating local people that this type of facility was for them, not just the rich and famous - and it actually existed on their doorstep, not just in a brochure.

However, the usage levels and revenue generation have far exceeded expectations. It shows that a well-priced, accessible spa can work in every community.

What can other leisure operators learn from your experience?

The lesson that is that spas CAN be for the public sector, we can do it well and can create facilities that compete in quality while remaining accessible.

What about future plans?

Alliance Leisure are currently building two further facilities in Thanet and Flintshire, and these are purely the result of the confidence created by the success of Pendle. ●

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- physical site constraints and opportunities,
- report on latent demand,
- analysis of other private leisure facilities in the locality to gauge competition,
- development of concept and business plans for new developments (including full assessment of capital costs and profiled income projection),
- finalise (and fix) development cost, provide capital funding and deliver the scheme.

The foundations of each development plan are set in economic sustainability, maximising the project's long term success.

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UNLOCKING THE PORTAL

'Procurement e-portals' are designed to be a time-efficient way of matching local authority projects with the right suppliers. The concept sounds straightforward, but in reality the process is far from satisfactory, says Capita Symonds' Chris Marriott

Local authorities really seem to be embracing 'procurement e-portals' – I read somewhere that they provide a simple, secure and efficient means for managing tendering activities, reducing the time and effort required for both buyers and suppliers.

A local authority uses an online portal to advertise an opportunity to the market – such as a feasibility study for a new leisure centre. Potential suppliers who are signed up to the portal can express an interest in the opportunity and read the procurement brief.

Excellent concept, but how do they work in practice? Well, technically speaking they are fairly intuitive and easy to use. In almost every other respect, they work very badly indeed.

The problem lies in the fact that they tend to be used not as a portal at all. My dictionary defines a portal as an entrance or doorway leading into something, which would suggest that we can pass through it. Unfortunately, in the case of far too many local authority portals, despite having a welcome banner over the doorway, the door is usually firmly closed – guarded by a procurement officer gatekeeper who peers suspiciously through the spy-hole at anyone outside ringing the bell.

When considering bidding through a portal, if we as a firm don't already know the client, we ask ourselves the question: will they speak to us before we submit a proposal? If the answer is no, we tend not to bid, and we would guess our counterparts in competing organisations would do the same.

The problem for the council is that this leads to a situation where they are likely to have very few good quality suppliers to choose from and their prospects of achieving best value are

reduced. If they won't speak to us, the suspicion will be that the council already has a supplier lined up and they are just going through the motions, to appear to be a running a competitive tendering process. If this is not the case (and we would hope it's not) the council needs to demonstrate that it's not – making itself available to speak to potential suppliers to start a proper conversation.

Of course, as suppliers we have to speak to the right person – the owner of the project. That is the per-

"Councils rarely tell suppliers how much support they are likely to need, and certainly never give any indication of their budget. This is misguided and counter-productive"

son within the local authority who will be taking responsibility for the project over the coming months, to whom we as leisure consultants will be reporting. It can't all be contained in the project brief – there will be crucial pieces of information and parts of the story that can only be prised out through proper debate. Some of these missing pieces are important to help us create an appropriate proposition.

The project owner should seize control from procurement officers, who have no ownership of the project and often little knowledge of it. If the project goes wrong due to bad advice, the project owner is held accountable, not the procurement officer.

There is a reason why a council (or any organisation come to that) decides

to find a solution from somewhere else – it's because they do not have the expertise in-house. An early dialogue with external specialists can save a lot of time and (taxpayers') money. Some councils seem to think that once they have written the brief and advertised the opportunity to the market, it's too late to change it – but it's not. You can always change direction if it becomes clear that it's the right thing to do.

As a potential supplier to councils (typically of leisure-related advice), perhaps the single most frustrating thing about responding to a council's brief is the uncertainty around how much time and support the client actually needs. This informs how we price it. Councils rarely, if ever, tell suppliers how much support they are likely to need and they certainly never give away any indication of their budget. This is misguided and counter-productive.

When you're looking to buy a new car, you would not put out an ad to all local dealers saying: "Car required. Dealers should deliver a car to my house...then I'll make up my mind which one I want." You'd give a clue about your budget, without revealing what's been set aside.

If you didn't tell the dealers that you actually wanted a new estate car, you shouldn't be disappointed when a Porsche, Volvo Estate and fair-ground dodgem all arrive on the drive. You may have a choice of three, but there's only one you could seriously consider. This sort of thing happens all the time in public procurement and is one of its most serious failings, particularly in the leisure advisory market.

Portals are doing nothing to help correct this or other public procurement failings. Please open your doors and let us in – you can always ask us to leave again. ●

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SCALING NEW HEIGHTS

A sleepy little ski resort favoured by the Swiss Army for training is set for a grand scale redevelopment, to create a year-round destination with high environment credentials. Kath Hudson reports



Samih Sawiris is chair and CEO of Orascom, Andermatt's developer

Set in the beautiful Usern Valley, at the intersection of three mountain passes, Andermatt has managed to remain something of a secret. The town used to be reliant on the Swiss Army, but following cutbacks to the armed forces, hotel trade has fallen off and the resort has suffered as a result.

This looks set to change, now this untouched area has caught the eye of Samih Sawiris, chair and CEO of Orascom Development Holdings, who plans to add a ski resort to his growing empire of developments. ODH purchased the land in 2009, after being granted exemption from Lex Koller Federal Law regulations, relating to the restriction of non-residents owning land in Switzerland.

Building work is already underway and the first elements are slated to open in 2013. The plans for Andermatt

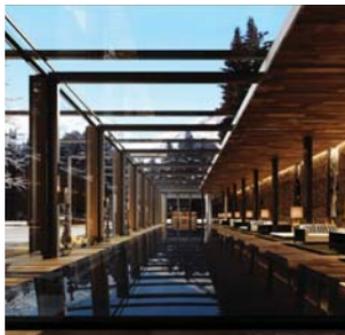
include a mix of accommodation, from two and three-star hotels, up to a flagship five star hotel. The original village will remain, but 1.45 million sq m of adjacent land will be developed. Gerard Jenni, managing director of Andermatt Swiss Alps, the local subsidiary of ODH, says the vision is to create a sustainable, eco-friendly resort, with a mix of modern and traditional architecture.

OUT OF HIBERNATION

The skiing infrastructure will be improved, linking it to the neighbouring area of Sedrun to provide 130km of skiable piste. Although at 1300m, the resort is high enough to have reliable snowfall, recent seasons in Europe has shown the need for ski resorts to become perennial destinations. With this in mind, other leisure facilities are being added, including a sports centre and an 18-hole golf course.



An apartment interior (above left) and the beautiful Ursen valley as it looks in summer (above right). One of Andermatt's flagship developments will be the Chedi hotel (bottom left and right), a 426-room facility with high-end interiors and landscaping



"We saw great potential in this village and felt that it had been neglected for too long, we want to bring it to life," says Jenni. "One of Orascom's key beliefs is to take care of the community in which we are building around. We are investing considerable money in Andermatt and the village will benefit significantly from the project, which will become apparent over time. The resort needed to be stepped up a level in luxury terms to see an increase in visitors and that is what we are here to do."

Although some avid skiers might roll their eyes about their secret destination being so decisively put on the map, the scheme is supported locally, with 96 per cent of local inhabitants saying they were in favour. Swiss Tourism also believes this is what the town needs. Executive vice president, Urs Eberhard, says this is a positive development for the region:

ORASCOM BACKGROUND

Egyptian company, Orascom Development Holdings (ODH) is a specialist in planning, building and operating integrated, self-sufficient tourist and residential towns. Its first project in Egypt, El Guona on the Red Sea is now a mature town. It has established Taba Heights in Egypt and another in the United Arab Emirates. Five further sites are under progress in Morocco, Oman and Egypt, while another is in the planning process in Cornwall.

"Andermatt has once been very popular, due to its great location, the many options for alpine adventure and outdoor sports and some exceptional skiing. For various reasons it went into hibernation and became a transit stop on the way from north to

south and a secret spot for avid skiers. The effects on the hotel industry were obvious: fewer and fewer hotels and little investment in renovation and new offers. With the development by Orascom, Andermatt has the opportunity to become a resort and create a more sustainable form of tourism."

ALPINE CHIC

There are around 30 architects involved, all of whom will bring their own style, while being briefed to reflect and complement the surroundings. Natural materials, such as wood and stone, will be combined with glass to blend traditional and modern in an Alpine chic style, which retains the character of a Swiss mountain village.

There will be six four-star and five-star hotels, around 490 apartments and 25 villas, as well as 35,000sq m of commercial space. Kuala Lumpur-based, Denniston International



PHOTOS: VINCENT HOFBUJAN/MARC PULSSE

Whitepod wonderland: The eco-chic resort's one-to-two person domed tents feature wood-burning stoves as a heat source

OTHER ECO-FRIENDLY ALPINE SITES

■ Winner of the World Prize for Sustainable Tourism in 2005, the Whitepod resort near Villars in Switzerland aims to be a model for sustainable tourism. It consists of five geodesic dome tents perched at 1,700m and is only accessible by foot or on skis. The development of insulated tents are anchored to wooden platforms and designed to leave no trace when they are pulled up in the spring.

They have no plumbing or electricity, but an efficient wood burning stove and the

furniture is made from recycled materials, or sustainable Swiss wood. Tents are based around a 19th century farmhouse, which has a solar shower and generator-powered electricity for a few hours a day.

■ Last summer the Berghotel Muottas Muragl in St Moritz was renovated to make it the first plus-energy hotel in the Alps, producing more energy than it actually needs. Even though the hotel was extended from 1,700sq m to 2,700sq m, it uses less

energy since the building is insulated in line with modern standards, which reduces energy consumption by a third.

Hot water is obtained by solar energy from 60sq m of glass solar collectors in the window panes of the basement. Oil heating has been replaced by heat pumps. Sixteen thermal loops, totalling 3,200m, supply the building with geothermal energy and the electricity is generated a photovoltaic system. Excess of solar energy is stored in the ground via the thermal loops.

Architects and Planners are master-planners and the flagship hotel, the 426-room Chedi Andermatt, a joint venture between them and ODH.

Denniston's Jean Michel Gathy is charged with the design and says it will be special: "The Chedi Andermatt will be vivacious and chic, with intentional citations of the 50s and 60s, to maintain the connection with this resort's Golden Age." At the heart of the hotel will be a swimming pool water lounge, with large fireplace.

For sale will be 119 apartments, six penthouses, seven lofts and a suite, with prices from CHF 1.8m (£1.3m).

GREEN GROWTH

Eco-friendly and skiing don't really go together: many visitors flying to their destination, an increasing use of artificial snow is bad for Alpine vegetation and ski resorts are huge consumers of energy to keep the accommodation toasty in extremely cold conditions and run ski lifts all day. Andermatt Swiss Alps goes some way towards minimis-

Andermatt architects

Golf: Rossknecht Golf GmbH, Lindau
Golfclubhouse: ARB Architekten, Bern
Appartements: Marazzi and Paul Architekten, Zurich
Villas: ARGE Matti Ragaz Hitz Architekten/Baserga Mozetti Architeti

Two residential buildings and a

boutique hotel: Zucchi & Cavalli
Cino Zucchi Architetti, Milan
Hotel Radisson Blu:
Burkhalter Sumi, Zurich
Soliman Zurkirchen Architekten, Zurich
Devanthery & Lamuniere, Genf

ing its impact with plans to make the heating carbon neutral. Electricity will be generated from hydroelectricity and wind, heat energy from geothermal probes and district heating - a way of distributing heat in a central location.

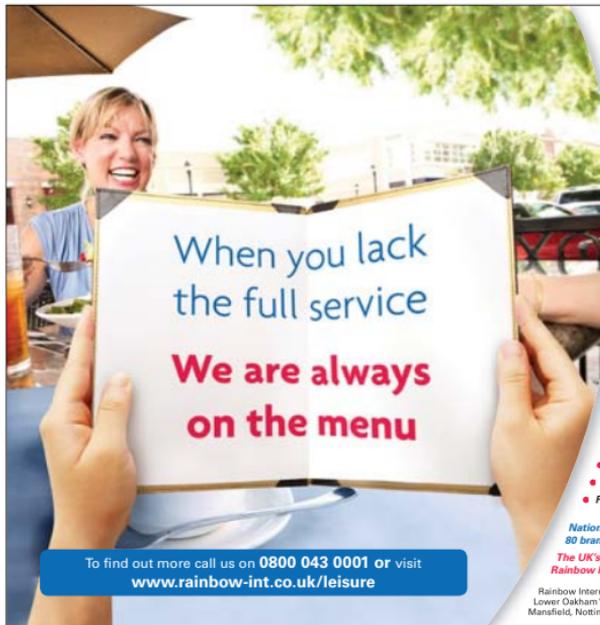
"By using district heating, we will have higher efficiencies and better pollution control than localised boilers. It uses the lowest carbon footprint of all fossil generation plants," says Jenni.

Apartments and hotels will be built to meet MINERGIE guidelines, which is a sustainability brand for new and refurbished buildings, supported by the Swiss Confederation, the Swiss Cantons and trade and industry.

Global warming is a problem for the skiing industry. Europe is suffering from a lack of snowfall and becoming increasingly reliant on snowmaking. The Alpine conservation society, Cipra, estimates all resorts below 1,200m will go out of business within 50 years, as the snowline gets higher.

At 1,300m Andermatt appears to be out of the danger zone, plus it has a glacier. However, putting more emphasis on the summer season and attracting visitors to the resort for purposes other than skiing seems a prudent move. ●

Kath Hudson is a freelance journalist





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Edgbaston Priory Tennis Club plays host to the pre-Wimbledon ladies tournament, the AEGON Classic

Joining the club



Leisure Management Solutions company XN Leisure reviews its recent installation at the soon-to-be expanded Edgbaston Priory Tennis Club

Edgbaston Priory Club in Birmingham is a leading racquet and leisure members club with a history stretching back 130 years. It promotes racquet sports at all levels and has a vibrant social events calendar.

The club is about to enter an exciting new phase, as it embarks on a multi-million pound redevelopment of its sporting facilities. The Lawn Tennis Association (LTA), Britain's national governing body for tennis, has committed £5m towards the construction of a new permanent grass show court and a six-court indoor tennis centre. The extension of the club will include new squash, gym and leisure facilities and a major refurbishment of the clubhouse.

Oxfordshire-based XN Leisure has been working closely with the team at the club for the past few months, implementing its Dimension leisure management system at the facility, which incorporates membership management, court bookings and access control.

The company's on-line bookings application, Horizons, will enable Edgbaston members to book their courts from their home or office, while the integrated Hospitality software manages all the dining options, and is designed to cater for the club as it expands its food and beverage elements.

XN Leisure says it takes a partnership approach to the supply and installation of all its systems for operators. According to the company, it carries out comprehensive consultation and implementation processes to ensure that before it starts to build the system, there is a full understanding of the requirements, not only from the current position but also for future operations.

Business development manager, Chris Phillips, says: "It is essential to the project and our ability to work in partnership with our customers, that we are part of their team and have a clear understanding of their strategic plans.

"The majority of our team have extensive experience in operations and can provide specialist advice to customers."

The company has been able to work with the club from the inception of the new project, recommending products and procedures to both enhance the customer experience, and give its management the information and analysis tools necessary to operate in a competitive environment.

The club currently has 29 tennis courts, 10 squash courts, indoor and outdoor swimming pools and an outdoor spa (open all year round), gym facilities and a licensed bar and restaurant. There is a full programme of coaching courses for all ages and abilities in tennis, squash and racquetball, with plenty of competitive and social tournaments.

Investment in the new facilities will form a central part of the LTA's commitment to help grow community access to tennis in Birmingham and across the region. They further enhance the club's status as an LTA High Performance Centre, providing advanced coaching to talented junior players from across the region, many of whom are ranked in the top 25 in the UK for their age group.

The range of products installed by XN Leisure at the pre new-build stage have been configured to allow for the growth of the business. The new build will provide additional challenges for access control to the numerous new areas being constructed, and this will be managed by XN Leisure's self service range of products. At the same time, its Kiosk interface will capture the different activities of members.

The Cascade reporting tool ensures that the data gathered through the various interfaces, either at point of sale or online, can be used to provide accurate and timely information to the senior management team at the club. XN Leisure is also assisting in the management and creation of the club's marketing campaigns using the data and smart tools within the newly-installed system.

So Edgbaston, which has hosted great tennis players like Martina Navratilova, is all set for an expanded future. For details visit www.xnleisure.com or call 0870 80 30 700 ●

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Black glass toilet cubicles were installed at Waterford (left, middle) and St David's centre (right) also chose a high-spec finish

Clean lines

Venesta

From football stadia to high-end retail environments, Venesta has washroom products to suit the needs of any leisure facility

Venesta has over 75 years experience in the commercial washroom industry, with products that are well recognised in both prestigious venues and the most demanding of leisure environments.

The company's design team is continually developing washroom systems that will enhance any new leisure facility, as well as provide customers with the widest possible choice of ranges and styles. Each component of the washroom is considered in detail, both in terms of its visual appearance, the right selection of materials, its suitability for the designated environment, as well as its functionality.

While durability is a key component in any washroom specification, Venesta also recognises the importance of colour and design. The company is a market leader in colour predictions, offering a five-year outlook on trends. It works alongside colour specialists to create a palette that will meet the design requirements across all market sectors.

Venesta says it takes its responsibility to the environment seriously, and across product sourcing, waste management and packaging reduction, is working to improve its impact on the environment. It supplies a wide range of industry sectors, including education, offices, sport, leisure, entertainment, health and transport.

DESIGN AND DURABILITY

In the sport and leisure sector, the company has a number of wash and changing room systems suitable for both wet and dry environments. The product choice includes a freestanding family changing cubicle and conventional unframed system - both in solid grade laminate, plus a high-end glass wash and shower system created for more exclusive projects. A range of lockers, solid wood leisure bench systems and accessories enable total leisure solutions to be specified.

Venesta also has a strong track record in the retail sector and offers a range of solutions to meet retailer needs. Such installations often receive very high use and may be subject to casual abuse or vandalism. By using materials such

as solid grade laminate and aluminium fittings, its systems offer the right performance and safety.

A recent high-end installation for Venesta was Waterford Crystal's new manufacturing facility, retail outlet and visitor centre in Waterford, Ireland. The centre is part of a €25m redevelopment of the city's historic area.

Venesta supplied its prestigious Oxygen washroom range, fitting black glass cubicles in the male and female washrooms. The fit-out featured stainless steel fittings and pivot door systems, while Venesta's pre-plumbed system, IPS, was chosen for its quick and easy installation.

HIGH TRAFFIC AREAS

Another recent large-scale project in the leisure retail sector was the supply of a washroom solution for the new extension to the St David's Shopping Centre in Cardiff. The centre has more than 100,000sq m of new retail space, including upmarket and iconic brands such as Apple, Hugo Boss, LK Bennett and Kurt Geiger.

The facility needed a washroom facility that would be in line with its high-end shopping appeal - but also one that was extremely durable and able to cope with the high footfall of shoppers (over one million shoppers visited the centre in its first week of opening alone).

Venesta was approached by Maria Cannovina, from the centre's architect Benoy, who was looking for a contemporary, streamlined washroom solution to complement the centre's modern aesthetic.

The company recommended its Equinox range for its look and durability. The client opted for the product in Iceberg laminate with polished, elliptical pilasters for the shopping centre washrooms and the management suite.

St David's Shopping Centre director, Steven Madeley said: "I was delighted with the choice and quality of the product, and from a practical point of view, extremely impressed with the ease in which it has been maintained. The traffic within the first year has been phenomenal, but you wouldn't think so by looking at our washrooms." ●

We know sports and leisure.



Stadia

Highly adaptable, this free-standing cubicle system delivers maximum stability, whatever the situation or level of usage. For wet or dry environments, Stadia can accommodate family, individual and universal access changing facilities.



We're passionate about raising the bar for sports and leisure. Your need for practicality has prompted us to create a versatile range of safe, durable and innovative solutions, whatever your budget. Contact us to order our new brochure. Call 01474 353333. www.venesta.co.uk

We know sports and leisure.

Venesta

PAUL LORIMER-WING

The joint CEO of easyGym talks to Kate Cracknell about its 'premium low-cost' model

It's a high-profile start-up, so there's lots to do and get right," says Paul Lorimer-Wing, apologising for the fact that his joint CEO at easyGym, Keith Burnet, is unable to join us.

That's something of an understatement: the launch of easyGym is one of the more anticipated events in the fitness industry over recent years. So how did the whole thing come about?

Formerly an aspiring pro-golfer, Zimbabwe-born Lorimer-Wing then moved into accountancy, training for five years at Deloitte: "Not because I'd dreamed of being an accountant, but for the understanding it gives you of business. You get to see a lot of industries, their processes, what makes them work or not work, the controls they put in place."

Moving to the UK seven years ago, Lorimer-Wing initially joined a privately

owned property company before moving into private equity. "It was here I really started to see business for what it was. Seeing that model work – having a good idea, raising the necessary capital, investing it properly, watching it closely – gave me the impetus and courage to do something myself.

"I linked up with some people I trusted and respected professionally and we decided to do something together, although at that stage we didn't have any specific thoughts as to what it might be." And so Fore Capital Partners was born (see p52).

FORAY INTO FITNESS

One idea to come out of the brainstorming sessions was budget fitness. Although all the founding partners were physically active, none had specific expertise in fitness. But Lorimer-Wing had observed the trend towards low-cost gyms in other countries and felt it was a market with significant potential. "We also liked the fact that fitness is a quite a noble industry in many ways. For us, it was important that we weren't just setting up in business, but that we were doing so in an industry that appealed to all of our senses – something we could live by. When we came up with this idea, we immediately felt it was where we wanted to be," he says.

Fore Fitness was therefore set up as the first operating division of Fore Capital Partners, to drive forward the new business idea. "We'd usually appoint a separate team to manage each investment, reporting in to us, but with this first project we wanted to run it ourselves on a full-time basis."

Although the budget model was on the table from the word go, Lorimer-Wing explains: "The easyGym idea only formulated in our minds months later. We were chatting through the concept, trying to come up with a name for it, and someone said: 'This feels like an easyGym'. We immediately



Lorimer-Wing has global aspirations for the brand



The distinctive 'easy' branding is instantly familiar

started looking at how we could make that happen, but it was a long process – it was six months before we could meet Sir Stelios [Haji-Ioannou, founder and head of the easyGroup] and talk about the concept in person.

"It was a battle, but we felt that – given the number of other players in the low-cost sector – if we wanted to stand out we needed to be a bit different, a bit more powerful than the rest.

And we felt we wouldn't be able to do that without a brand, so we persisted and wouldn't move forward until we'd signed with the easyGroup."

EASYGYM DEAL

The deal consists of a brand licence agreement to use the easyGym name "so long as we strictly follow the brand manual". This is in line with the way the rest of the easyGroup now works – even the original product, easyJet, is now operated on a licence deal.

So will Haji-Ioannou have any involvement in the day-to-day running



Design company, StudiolanSherman, is responsible for the easyGym interiors

of easyGym? "He has an incredible wealth of experience and provides very valuable guidance. There's a very clear voice and we like that. He also makes himself available whenever he can, for club openings and so on, and we meet often. But the business decisions are entirely ours."

The easyGym agreement is a pure licensing deal with no financial stake held by Haji-Ioannou, but Lorimer-Wing stresses: "I would argue that he has

an amazing stake in the business because his brand is so important to him, and that's what we must protect at all times."

The 'easy' brand affords trust and immediate recognition among consumers, as Lorimer-Wing explains: "I think having such a strong brand behind us has been vital in raising funds – particularly given the economic climate when we were setting out – and it also serves

us well with potential landlords, as they're keen to work with recognised brands that enhance their portfolios.

"It's been helpful in attracting the big names too. For example, I don't think Keith [Burnet, former VP of global fitness and spa at Hilton Hotels, and prior to that MD at LivingWell – now joint CEO of easyGym alongside Lorimer-Wing] would have joined us if we hadn't had the easyGym name."

However, Lorimer-Wing is the first to recognise that the brand alone isn't enough: "We still have to do our job well. We have to deliver."

FORE CAPITAL PARTNERS

Founded in 2009, Fore Capital Partners (FORE) is a venture capital firm set up by Paul Lorimer-Wing, his former Deloitte colleague Allan Casten, great friend Malcolm Levy and Hong Kong-based Jonathan Bond, a former colleague of Levy's.

FORE's focus is on identifying investment opportunities in growing markets, raising deal-specific equity and managing teams to deliver shareholder value. Fore Fitness – over-seeing the deal with the easyGym to create an easyGym chain – is the first offshoot of FORE. Further offshoots will be established as new opportunities are identified.

As the first project under the FORE banner, Lorimer-Wing and Casten remain hands-on with the easyGym project – as joint CEO and CFO respectively – while Bond and Levy continue to look for new ventures.



Top team: easyGym's joint CEOs Keith Burnet (left) and Paul Lorimer-Wing (right) and the CFO Allan Casten (centre)

PREMIUM LOW-COST

The joint CEOs are now working closely together to do exactly that, as Lorimer-Wing explains: "I have overall charge of the business, setting the strategy and vision of the organisation, managing the relationship with Sir Stelios and the investors, monitoring the overall investment, new business development and capital allocation. Keith implements the strategy from an operational perspective, and Allan [Casten, financial director] is in charge of all things financial and IT."

At the time of going to press, the first club was scheduled to open late last month, in Slough, with a second due to open this month in Wood Green, Greater London. So how has 'easy' been translated into the fitness arena?

"We like to think of easyGym as a 'core-plus' model. A premium low-cost offering. It's still no frills – no pools, sauna or steam – and our prices, although they will vary by area, start at £15 a month. However, in addition to the core offering – the gym – there's also an element of choice, not present in the majority of low-cost clubs, in that you can pay extra to attend group exercise classes.

"We're going to make sure the classes are really top-quality, with excellent instructors. You can't charge for something unless it's really special. At first they'll be pay as you go – £4 a time – but ultimately, once we have a programme in place that's working, we may structure membership pack-

"It won't be all-inclusive, as we want members to feel they're in control of their monthly expenditure"

ages so regular class-goers can opt for monthly 'gym plus 15 classes' or 'gym plus 20 classes' deals. Or they can continue with pay-as-you-go.

"It won't be all-inclusive though, as we want members to feel they're in control of their monthly expenditure. Being honest, being transparent, with no hidden costs – that's really important. The whole point of the easy brand is that we should be clear and simple at all times.

"We're also very flexible. We'll hold people's data for six months, so they can leave for a few months and then come back without having to pay another joining fee (£25 post-opening). And there are no contracts.

"At the heart of this whole concept is a genuine desire to be accessible to everyone, helping people become healthier by making gym membership less of a discretionary spend – pricing it at a level whereby they won't immediately drop off when times are tough," says Lorimer-Wing.

"But it's still very early days and the details will evolve over time. We'll keep looking at how to add value for the consumer. We're not trying to do everything at once though – for now, it's about keeping things simple and getting the core proposition right. That'll probably take us until club number three or four. I think it's important for the proposition to allow itself to be born – to settle in and give people a chance to appreciate what it stands for," he says.

"And from our perspective, everything has to be accountable: we need to be sure of what works and what doesn't. We can only provide low-cost so long as we're in business!"

EDUCATIONAL APPROACH

The easyGym design project has been led by StudiolanSherman, with Peter Evans Contract Interiors taking on the building work and fit-out. "We've created a zonal gym concept – cardio area, circuit area, resistance by muscle group – to make it easy for members to find their way around," says Lorimer-Wing.

"Education is very important, and we'll have lots of information on our website – and eventually video tutorials too – so members can put together effective workout programmes." The simplicity of the gym layout is designed to make the transition from education to application in the gym as self-explanatory as possible.

"There'll also be iPads around the



The company will spend around £1m on each fit-out

gym floor, again offering advice and information. It's in the little detail like that that we're trying to be a bit different. The model must never feel cheap.

"You'll walk in to one of our clubs and there'll be nothing cheap about it. It will look like a high-end gym, from the equipment to the chill-out areas – it won't just be an 'in and out' gym. We'll spend around £1m per club on fit-out, although we may spend it in a different way from other operators."

In spite of easyGym's investment in technology, the gym floor will be staffed at all times - opening hours are 6.00am–10.00pm weekdays, and 8.00am–8.00pm at the weekend.

"We want to create a sense of community, with a human touch," says Lorimer-Wing. "We won't be as highly staffed as the top-end clubs, but we want to find a way of using the man hours we do have so members genuinely feel we're supporting them. People's health is at the heart of our concept, and we will continually strive to deliver on our members' needs."

ROLLOUT PLANS

Although the first two sites are overhauls of existing clubs, acquired from

Virgin Active, this was primarily to get quickly to market, he says. "We're now primarily looking for shells. Going forward, fewer than 20 per cent of sites we take on will be acquisitions."

The model currently requires sites measuring 1,620–1,860sq m (17,500–20,000sq ft) in high footfall areas. But as Lorimer-Wing explains: "We will in time roll out different models. We're in it for the long haul, with a seven- to 10-year plan starting in the UK and then heading to Europe.

"We see easyGym as a global chain, possibly operating on a franchise basis in other markets. We've had enquiries from the US, Australia, New Zealand, the Far East, India... everyone wants to be part of this."

easyGym plans to open five UK clubs in its first year. From there, the aim is to roll out six to 10 clubs a year. So is there space in the relatively saturated UK market for this? "If you look at markets where penetration levels are in the high teens, you'll see they're markets with a full complement of club types," he says. "If we can grow the market from 12, to say 16 per cent, I think there's plenty of scope for everyone."

"However, although the low-cost clubs are attracting new consumers to the fitness market, you still have to do something to keep members there beyond the price tag alone. You have to engage with them, talk to them, try to be helpful – otherwise they'll leave.

"I don't think anyone's got retention right yet. Across the industry, there's a lot of promise but a lack of delivery on those promises. A lack of personal contact. Top-end operators who have the staff may need to start looking at using that manpower in different ways.

"As for the other sectors, I think the mid-market will survive, although there may be some consolidation. And the budget sector will get tougher as it starts stabilising. New entrants will find it harder to come in as landlords opt for brands with an established trading history.

"But there is scope for everyone, as well as for other non gym-based activities. We will consider introducing running and cycling clubs at our sites in the longer term, for example, as we see ourselves – the gym – as only part of the solution. Ultimately, we want to act as a conduit to help people become healthier." ●

TURNING TIDES



As a teenager growing up in east Kent, Margate had a magnetic pull. Every summer, my friends and I would visit Dreamland (or Bombom Brothers Theme Park as it was known in the 80s). After we'd had our fill of roller-coasters, we'd wander out onto the beach, Mr Whippies in hand, and dip our toes in the north sea.

Yet even then I was aware of the seediness and sadness mixed in with Margate's charm. Both the sea-front and the town centre were rough around the edges, much of the beautiful Georgian and Victorian architecture was dilapidated or derelict, and we weren't allowed to stay there after dark. This once-glorious Victorian seaside resort, beloved of painter JMW Turner, was in serious economic and

social decline, and it only got worse as the turn of the century approached.

Turner Contemporary – a £17.4m art gallery that's been 10 years in the making – has a lot riding on it. Not just a visitor attraction, it is seen as the driving force of a multi-layered plan to regenerate the town.

PUSHING BOUNDARIES

It was from a grass-roots desire to reverse Margate's downward trajectory that the idea for Turner Contemporary was born. "One man, John Crofts, is credited with the idea," says director Victoria Pomery, a former senior curator at Tate Liverpool who joined the fledgling project in 2002. "John was a member of the Margate Civic Partnership, a group that was very concerned about what was happening to the town. He came up with the idea

[for the gallery] in the 90s and did a lot of research into Turner, and his relationship with Margate and Kent."

More than 100 of Turner's paintings, including many of his famous seascapes, were inspired by the east Kent coast. The idea, though, was never to create a gallery dedicated only to Turner. The Victorian art critic John Ruskin called the controversial painter "the father of modern art", and it's this legacy of pushing boundaries (think the Turner Prize) that has informed the direction of Turner Contemporary since day one.

Sadly, Crofts died in 2009. But what began as his personal dream gained momentum when Kent County Council (KCC) and the national Arts Council bought into the idea. "KCC was very interested in culture-led regeneration," says Pomery. "And the Arts Council

Margate's new art gallery, Turner Contemporary, is at the heart of plans to regenerate the depressed Kent coastal resort where JMW Turner once painted his famous seascapes. Rhianon Howells reports



The gallery has sweeping views of Margate's sands (above). Its second exhibition in September 2011 will show a dozen Turner works, including this self-portrait, circa 1790 (below left)



COURTESY OF THE NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY

was interested in improving the cultural infrastructure of the south-east, particularly Kent, which has always suffered from its proximity to London – the argument being that people could get their cultural fix in London, even though until recently it was two hours away on the train. So various things came together at the same time.”

As a result, in 2001, KCC commissioned a feasibility study, before immediately launching an international architectural competition. The winners, Norwegian architects Snøhetta and British collaborator Stephen Spence, came up with a design that would have

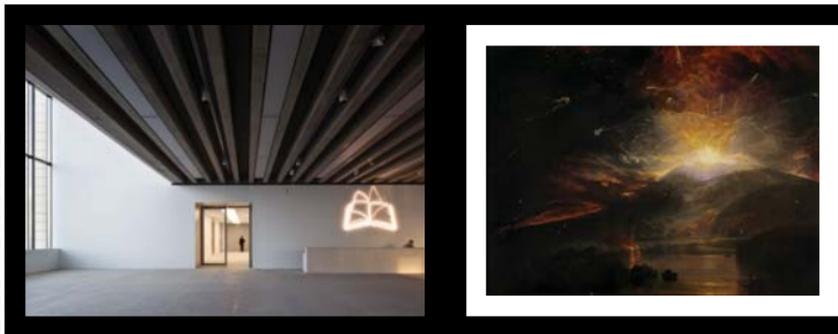
put the gallery at the far end of the town's harbour mouth, where it would have been prey to the full force of the sea. A romantic vision, but not a realistic one, and when the costs of delivering it rose from £7m to £55m, Snøhetta and Spence were sacked.

It was a serious setback for a project that Pomery and her team had already spent years generating popular support for, by hosting small-scale exhibitions and events in the town, and working closely with local schools and groups. “It's no secret that when I arrived in Margate in 2002 a lot of people were asking, ‘Why do we need

an art gallery? How's it going to help us?’” she says. “We worked hard to change people's minds by working within the community and saying, ‘This is relevant to you and your families - and it can also do other things, like bring new visitors to the area.’”

Luckily, their efforts paid off. “After the first scheme was abandoned in 2006, we had a big public meeting and [this time] people were saying, ‘we want a gallery now, we just want to know when it's going to happen.’ So that was a real change.”

The project also benefitted early on from some high-profile support – from Nicholas Serota at the Tate (the gallery is one of 18 Plus Tate partners nationwide) and also from Turner prize-winner Tracey Emin, who grew up in Margate and came back to open the gallery, with Kent resident Jools Holland, on



© RICHARD BRYANT



▶ 16 April. "Tracey has been an amazing ambassador for us over the years," says Pomery. "She gave us a work last year [a pink neon sign reading "I never stopped loving you"] which we were able to auction, and she talks about Margate and Turner Contemporary wherever she goes." An exhibition of Emin's work is scheduled for 2011.

ACCESSIBLE ART

Following the Snøhetta and Spence debacle, Pomery worked closely with KCC to find another firm to deliver a visionary design that was also within budget. David Chipperfield Architects was, she says, a unanimous choice.

The resulting building has been funded by KCC (£6.4m), Arts Council England (£4.1) and South East England Development Agency (£4m), with the remainder raised by the non-profit Turner Contemporary Trust from a variety of private and public sources. As befits a public gallery, it's a lot more modest than the earlier scheme, but still only a stone's throw from the sea.

The two-storey building comprises a series of interconnecting, shed-like structures with sloping roofs, meant to evoke artists' studios. Outside,

▲ The inaugural exhibition features the work of Conrad Shawcross (top left), Ellen Harvey (bottom left), Russell Crotty (bottom right), Daniel Buren (opposite, top) and one work from Turner (top right)

it's sheathed in white, opaque glass which changes colour with the light. Inside, it's all polished concrete and white walls, with sunlight flooding in through the huge lobby window facing the sea, as well as through numerous windows and skylights in the study rooms and first-floor galleries (there are mechanical shutters in place for when works need to be displayed artificial light). "It's very fortunate that the gallery faces due north, as of course does Margate, which is not often the case of holiday resorts in the northern hemisphere," Chipperfield told the Guardian. "But this means we get the light that works best for artists and the artworks."

Another of Chipperfield's aims was to make the art as accessible as possible, and the positioning of the amenities reflects this: the shop is within the lobby and, while it can't be missed, it can be easily by-passed, while the café and its terrace sit just

outside the gallery's main entrance, overlooking the Margate sands. Somehow, the whole design manages to be bold yet unpretentious, minimalist yet inviting.

Of course, it is not only the building, but what's inside it, on which the success of Turner Contemporary depends – and the challenge of ensuring the gallery has high-quality content is not made easier by the fact there's no permanent collection. "We don't have a budget for collecting, we don't have a policy for collecting and, actually, the building hasn't been designed with the large-scale storage necessary," says Pomery. "Obviously getting the loans is a time-consuming process... but for me, temporary exhibitions allow one to think about different audiences, different themes and different artists."

Pomery also defends her decision not to open the gallery with an exhibition dedicated solely to its namesake's works – instead choosing to delay plans for a big Turner show (Turner and the Elements) until January 2012. "We're not the Turner Gallery, we're Turner Contemporary, and it's really important to set out what we're here to do, which is to



TURNER - 'THE PAINTER OF LIGHT'

Joseph Mallord William Turner was born in London in April 1775 and died in December 1851, aged 76. As a young boy Turner attended school in Margate, and was to return to the Kent seaside resort throughout his life – attracted by its beautiful skies. He once claimed that Thanet had “the loveliest skies in Europe” and many of his most celebrated seascapes

were inspired by this area of coast. This love of the sea stayed with him all his life.

Turner was also attracted by the charms of one Mrs Sophia Booth, the landlady of the guesthouse where he stayed and with whom he had a life-long affair. Fittingly, Turner Contemporary is built on the site once occupied by his lover’s establishment.

demonstrate Turner’s influence on contemporary practice” she says. “But we are committed to making sure there’s always a Turner present.”

In line with this, there is one Turner painting in the opening exhibition, *Revealed: Turner Contemporary Opens*, and there will be up to a dozen in the next show, *Nothing in the World but Youth*, which opens in September.

HEART OF THE COMMUNITY

The Turner in the opening exhibition, which also features the work of six contemporary artists, is *The Eruption of the Souffrier Mountains, in the Island of St. Vincent, at Midnight, on the 30th April, 1812*, an extraordinarily vivid depiction

of a volcanic eruption. In fact, Turner had never even seen a volcano.

One criticism directed at the gallery by some reviewers is that, based on this first exhibition, there’s not enough in it to warrant the train journey from London. But Pomery disputes this: “You need to spend time with these works,” she says. “They’re not easy works by any stretch of the imagination, and they’re multi-faceted. More isn’t necessarily better; it’s not about filling up the spaces with as much as we can possibly jam in.”

“Personally, I find it refreshing not to experience the sense of “too much art, too little time” that often overwhelms me in art galleries.”

Pomery is also keen to stress that although showcasing great art is a key aim for the new gallery, it’s not the only one. “Learning is absolutely central,” she says. “The gallery has to be at the heart of the community... and without the learning element, it isn’t going to work.”

Thus, much of the space is using for running workshops and courses for local people of all ages and backgrounds; Pomery is particularly proud of the Cultural Ambassadors scheme, which, in association with the University for the Creative Arts, is enabling people with very little education to access art foundation and even degree courses.



PHOTOS: REDSWAP.BIZ



Margate's Old Town is gradually filling up with trendy boutiques, cafes and galleries

Like those of many seaside towns, Margate's problems can be dated back to the decline of UK tourism in the 70s, when holiday-makers started seeking sun and sand in European resorts. Hotels and guest-houses were converted into cheap bedsits and small flats, changing the demographic profile of the town as a more transient, poorer population moved in, and Margate became a location chosen by external agencies and local authorities to house homeless people, ex-offenders and children in care.

The Margate Renewal Partnership was set up in 2005 to spearhead plans for regenerating the town following the launch of the Turner Contemporary

ART & LIFE:

A new vision for Margate

project. Comprising representatives from all key stakeholders including Thanet District Council, Kent County Council and South East England Development Agency, as well as English Heritage and the Heritage Lottery Fund, the partnership has worked to maximise the positive impact of the gallery project on the town, as well as looking at some of the wider regeneration issues.

One focus has been on improving the town's infrastructure, especially in the Old Town, which was once full of run-down and derelict buildings, and is now a thriving maze of fashionable boutiques, cafés, small art galleries and workshops. Initiatives include a scheme to turn iconic concrete tower block Arlington

House into a mixed-use residential, commercial and retail development and the renovation of the long-derelict Fort Road Hotel, a Victorian pub thought to be one of Turner's haunts.

But the jewel in the crown is the planned reopening of funfair Dreamland (which closed after a fire in 2008) as a heritage amusement park. Thanet District Council recently issued a compulsory purchase order for the site and, if successful, work could start in 2012.

"We understand very acutely here the importance of tackling the social aspects of regeneration, that it's not just about creating visitor attractions," says Partnership director Madeline Homer. That said, the partnership is delighted with the gallery's impact so far. "It's got us noticed in a way we've never been noticed before," she says.

▶ Another aim is to support regeneration of the town, raising its profile and attracting investment, but according to Pomery, it's also about winning hearts and minds: "Regeneration is not just about improvements in the urban environment, it's about engendering civic pride. On the opening weekend, there was a palpable sense of excitement that something was happening here, that Margate had turned a corner."

Nor does this enthusiasm appear to be dying down. In the first six weeks of opening, Turner Contemporary drew 100,000 visitors – almost a third of the gallery's forecast of 156,000. Of these, 24 per cent came from Margate and a further 24 per cent from the Thanet area, and 80 per cent of visitors have said they are likely to return.

Pomery knows there are challenges ahead, not least due to the current climate of cuts. Gallery running costs are around £2.2m a year, of which 85 per cent is being provided by KCC and Arts Council England, with the remainder to be raised by the Turner Contemporary Trust and the gallery itself.

"It's our job – mine, the staff's and the trustees' – to make sure we're sustainable, and we're thinking of ways to be more entrepreneurial," says Pomery. "Some of the spaces have been designed to be used not only for lectures and musical events, but also for corporate events, weddings and parties," she says.

The other challenge is ensuring the quality of the art remains consistently high, so visitors keep coming. It was

recently confirmed that Rodin's *The Kiss*, on loan from the Tate, will be installed at the gallery from October this year until September 2012, and there's a programme in place through to the end of 2013 – after that, Pomery admits, it still needs work.

She's in no doubt, however, that it's worth the effort. "It's amazing what's been achieved in this community," she says. "Margate is an absolutely magical place, it's got so much potential, and it's so tragic what's happened to it over time... it's such a delight that people are really enjoying this gallery, and if it can change things in a small way, I'm thrilled."

Rhianon Howells is a freelance journalist

The annual gathering of chief leisure and culture officers was a chance to consider the path ahead in a changing public landscape, says honorary secretary John Bell



BRAVE NEW WORLD

Members and guests gathered in the splendid surroundings of Blenheim Palace in Oxfordshire for the Chief Leisure and Culture Officers' Association AGM 2011. It was a chance to discuss the challenges that lie ahead for our sector, and look back at the achievements we have made in influencing key policy decisions in culture and leisure.

Chief executive of Blenheim Palace, John Hoy, spoke of transformation of the palace offer since he and his team were appointed in 2003. Visitor numbers had increased and new innovations across the board had reversed a downward trend in the business operated by the trust. In particular, they had introduced a 'pay for a day visit and get a year free' offer; this simple offer not only increased visitor numbers but also allowed significant reductions in the marketing budget.

Picking up the theme of business transformation, Martyn Allison, Local Government Improvement and Development (LGID – formerly IDEA) advisor on culture and sport, gave a presentation on culture and sport and the 'Big Society'. He said that a new policy context of increased localisation, a stronger civic society, and shrinking of the state meant that we in the culture and leisure sector needed to find new ways of delivering services effectively. Increasingly we will have to rationalise, work across boundaries and collaborate with new partners.

Allison reminded us that culture and sport are already "big". Sport volunteering stands at 5.8 million, there are over 400,000 heritage volunteers and 39,000 art groups with 5.9 million members. Culture and recreation organisations are the second largest in number, after social care.



Blenheim Palace, the conference venue, has successfully grown visitor numbers

We needed to harness some of this capacity in order to deliver on the transformational agenda, he said.

Allison set out the challenges ahead as: the leadership vacuum; skills and competencies needed to operate in the new world; our case for investment; our track record on self improvement; our ability to support a 'Big Society' and our ability to work together. He concluded by posing a question for CLOA – "What will your role be in the new landscape?"

Other presentations made were by John Fuller (Herts 2012 ambassador); Duncan Wood-Allum on lessons from New York and Paul Collings of Timberplay on how to cut costs and increase revenue in play provision.

Nigel Lynn, chair of CLOA was standing down after a hectic two years and he referred to the achievements of CLOA during that time. He reminded us of how much we as an organisation have developed and influenced culture over this period by working with the DCMS, Arts Council, Sport England, the Sport and Recreation Alliance, Skills Active and the Local Government Association (LGA). Lynn described CLOA as an "essential ear

to the ground" and advisor to the LGA, advising on free swimming, the library review, school sport and the health bill.

Lynn has spoken on training seminars for councillors involved in culture and sport at the Member Leadership academies, met Ed Vaizey, Minister for the Arts, on the library review and Arts Council restructure on two occasions to give a CLOA perspective. Our association has worked with Allison on many key issues, and we are indebted to him for his help and guidance.

The new CLOA chair is Richard Hunt, head of leisure at Suffolk County Council, and we wish him well with his tenure and the tasks that lie ahead.

Despite the loss of a number of culture and leisure posts in local government, over the last two years CLOA has actually increased its membership. Lynn said that CLOA remains a healthy, vibrant and meaningful organisation that continues to influence policy in the cultural sector and beyond. Our association has made an offer to the LGA to lead the improvement agenda, which is a priority for the future.

The AGM presentations can be viewed in more detail on the CLOA website: www.cloa.org.uk

POSITIVE

As more UK cinemas embrace digitisation, the scope for attracting new audiences widens. Dee Davison presents a rosy picture from the Cinema Exhibitor Association's latest report



The UK box office is set for another good year with big-hitters like *X-Men First Class*



PROJECTIONS

British cinema looks set to see a landmark year in 2011. Cinema as a leisure activity has continued to perform strongly in the recession, with admissions remaining stable and box office revenues growing steadily over the last decade, in 2010 reaching £988m for the UK, an increase of 4.2 per cent on the previous year.

Expectations are high for another record-breaking year at the box office, with an impressive line-up of films hitting the big screen, including *Pirates of the Caribbean - On Stranger Tides*, *Kung Fu Panda 2*, *Thor*, *X-Men First Class*, *The Twilight Saga - Breaking Dawn Part I* and *The Smurfs*.

But this will also be the year which marks the point at which over half of UK cinema screens will be digitised, the mid-point in a process that has been underway for several years and which will continue to the end of the year and well into next.

It is a change that will have a fundamental impact on cinema exhibition and the film industry as a whole. While in truth many cinema customers may not notice a huge difference in terms of the picture quality displayed on screen, digital cinema is the gateway to modern 3D, more flexible programming and so-called 'alternative content' - live theatre, opera, ballet and sporting events.

CROSSING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

Digital conversion has not been without its challenges, one of the biggest of which has been the cost of digital projection equipment. This is particularly relevant for smaller independent operators, for whom running a cinema is often a precarious business without a significant profit margin to cover the outlay for new equipment. In recognition of this challenge, and the potentially significant savings which the distribution sector stands to make



CINEMA ADMISSIONS IN 2010 (MILLION)

France	206.5
UK	169.2
Russia	165.5
Germany	118.9
Italy	109.9
Spain	100

SOURCE: UNIC

The success of modern 3D cinema is now well established, with films like *Avatar* setting the benchmark

ing than the short-lived and inferior 3D gimmicks of the past. The turning point in all of this was the success of *Avatar* at the beginning of 2010, which showed the interest among audiences in seeing cutting edge 3D movies in their ultimate environment. Going on to make an incredible £93.5m in the UK alone, *Avatar* has set the benchmark for modern cinema.

Digital film also provides much greater potential for flexibility around programming in cinemas, with films more easily moved from one screen to another in keeping with audience demand. The days of one film playing on one screen all day may soon be numbered - you could see a cartoon in the morning, a family movie in the afternoon or early evening and then a horror movie or thriller late into the night, all on one screen.

Digital film is also much more environmentally-friendly, with hard drives capable of repeated use as opposed to a 35mm print, which would be disposed of and elements of it recycled.

when the sector is fully digitised, the industry came together to agree a system of 'virtual print fees' where distributors make a financial contribution to the costs of digital equipment.

This approach has served to accelerate the process of digitisation and as a result, the number of digital screens in the UK is rapidly increasing. At the end of 2010, there were just over 1,400 digital screens out of a UK total of 3,700 screens (doubling the figure for 2009) of which 1080 were 3D-enabled (trebling the figure from the previous year).

The success of modern 3D cinema is now well-established, and has proven itself to be more long-last-

Digitisation also opens up opportunities for cinemas to screen what is known by the industry as 'alternative content' - theatre, opera, ballet music concerts, sports and even live computer gaming. An increasing number of arts companies such as the Royal Ballet and the National Theatre are professionally filming their work and either streaming live to cinemas via satellite or providing for performance to be screened shortly after the live event. For a much lower ticket price, and in the comfort of their local cinema, an increasing number of audiences are choosing to see performances by leading artists and companies across the world.

LUCRATIVE MARKETS

And this is proving an increasingly important revenue stream for cinema operators. For example, a Screen Digest report noted that one of the first screening programmes from the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, saw *La Traviata* screened across 176 screens in nine countries and nearly selling out with 26,500 attendances.

LOOKING OUT FOR CINEMAS

The Cinema Exhibitors' Association (CEA), which published its report in May 2011, represents the interests of over 90 per cent of UK operators, from large circuits to independent sites. It works on behalf of the sector at a local, regional, national and international level, giving advice on legislative and operational matters such as digitisation, licensing, film theft, energy efficiency, food hygiene, disabled access and film classification. Details: cinema.uk.org

Those kind of numbers are made doubly attractive when one considers that the average ticket price for *La Traviata*, for example was €17 (compared to an average UK cinema ticket price of €6.50), leading to gross revenues of €450,500 for this production alone.

In the sporting arena, cinema screenings have proved a huge suc-

cess, with football, rugby and Formula 1 racing all gaining an audience. That trend has kicked on further with the introduction of live 3D screenings, to which live coverage from Wimbledon was added this year.

The chance to engage a different – and potentially wealthier – audience is also reflected in other developments in the sector. An increasing number of cinemas are now offering VIP or 'gold class' tickets in an attempt to attract customers willing to pay more for arm-chair style seating or recliners, with more leg room and space for wine and nibbles, providing an altogether more premium experience. While the success of such initiatives has in truth been mixed, where it works, it has provided a significant boost to income.

At the other end of the spectrum, customers seeking value for money in the UK can still use the long-running Orange Wednesdays 2-for-1 ticket promotion, or a range of company-specific loyalty card or discount schemes.

One specific area the CEA has been working together with the industry on is access for its disabled customers.

Watching Leonardo Live

The National Gallery's landmark exhibition, *Leonardo Da Vinci: Painter at the Court of Milan*, opening in November 2011, will feature a tie-up with Picturehouse Cinemas and Sky Arts to broadcast a live, red carpet preview programme via cinema screens nationally.

The 80-minute *Leonardo Live* simulcast will be presented by art historian and broadcaster Tim Marlow and screened to cinema-goers and art lovers the night before the main opening in London.

Like many cinema chains, Picturehouse has been screening alternative output for several years, such as live drama from the National Theatre, and opera from the New York Met since 2005. This year's *Leonardo Live* represents a more involved collaboration, and the company will also act as the distributor to other cinemas.

Gabriel Swartland of Picturehouse Cinemas, which are owned and operated by City Screen, says the company's 19 independent cinema sites have seen a great upturn in



Leonardo da Vinci's *The Madonna of the Yarnwinder*

demand for such screenings. "We have seen a huge influx of new audiences regionally who want to see this type of event. They have been phenomenally successful."

Swartland says that from 2009 to 2010 their cinemas saw a 24 per cent upturn in revenues from alternative content alone, and a 25 per cent rise in admissions generally.

With each of Picturehouse's art house sites creating their own identity, the company has also encouraged the use of social media to connect with their audiences.

"Each cinema has grown this organically – now every site uses Twitter and has a Facebook page for film listings, reviews, conversations

and competitions. Content is also driven centrally and we have embraced the use of YouTube," says Swartland.

Within cinemas, niche clubs have also been used to build customer loyalty. For example, the company says its Slackers Club, run in partnership with E4, has been very popular with its target student audience and there are regular free screenings.



OPERA AT THE CINEMA

Verdi's 'Macbeth LIVE' was enjoyed in cinemas around the world

The Royal Opera House in Covent Garden offers an extensive season of cinema content which now plays at 600 cinemas in 22 countries worldwide, with its expansion being

supported by Bank of America Merrill Lynch. The Royal Opera's most recent screening was *Macbeth* in June 2011, while ballet, music and dance productions are also available for cinema in

both 2D and 3D. For the 2011/2012 season there will be nine new productions, including *Faust* (live), *Tosca* (recorded) and The Royal Ballet's *The Sleeping Beauty* (live).

The UK cinema sector is a world leader in terms of accessibility, but remains conscious of the need to continue to improve in this area, and to take advantage of developments in new technology. At present, while many cinemas programme subtitle screenings for those with some impaired hearing, these are typically attended only by a handful of people, and so remain a significant financial burden. However, there are a number of companies developing personal 'subtitling glasses' which the sector hopes will enable it to provide a much more widespread and comprehensive service.

PROTECTING ASSETS

A constant challenge affecting the whole industry remains film theft. Illegal copying is estimated to cost the film and TV industry nearly £500m a year, with just short of £150 million of that lost to the cinema sector. Even in a time when the vast majority of illegal

films are downloaded from the internet, it remains the case that nine out of 10 of those movies started life as films illegally recorded in cinema theatres. Through the efforts of cinema staff and colleagues across the industry in the last few years, very few of those films are now stolen from UK sites. But film theft remains a truly an international trade.

The future drivers for the cinema market will undoubtedly revolve around the potential offered by digital technology. This transition lowers the 'barriers of entry' to cinema operation.

The UK remains relatively underscreened compared to many of its

European counterparts, meaning that there is a great deal of untapped demand across the country. The lower costs of building and operating digital cinemas, and the potentially greater revenue, means that we are likely to see the growth of a number of 'miniplex models' in smaller towns and communities across the UK.

The message from the sector is an overwhelmingly positive one - of strong economic performance, technological innovation and potential for significant further growth in the coming years. ●

Dee Davison is a senior policy executive for the CEA

The lower costs of building and operating digital cinemas means we are likely to see the growth of 'miniplex models' in smaller towns

LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTION



Future Cinema creates “living, breathing experiences of the cinema” at locations as diverse as empty hospitals and car parks. Founder Fabien Riggall tells Julie Cramer how his events are attracting thousands of ardent film fans



PHOTOS: MIKE MASSARO

How would you describe your business?

We have three main strands, all based around film. Secret Cinema [launched 2007] is our larger-scale, themed film event held at a secret location every few months, with a large cast of actors, where the audience are key characters in the event. Our original company, Future Shorts, was set up in 2003 to promote the short film genre, bringing it out of its ghetto and delivering it to a wider audience. We wanted to socialise the film experience, using music, drama, food and drink, to create a great, friendly night out. From Future Shorts we expanded to Future Cinema in 2005, which involves similar events based around full-length films, held at different venues in cities around the UK, and also the world.

What was your inspiration for the business?

I was a filmmaker and producer working for many years in the film industry and also in advertising. I was passionate about short films and believed that everybody should have access to the very best and latest offerings. Short films get people thinking, talking and debating with each other. They also fit in with today's climate of people wanting quick, bite-sized pieces of culture.

However, I was clear that I did not

Recreated scenes from *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (left) and the Secret Cinema audience gathers for *Blade Runner* (right)

want to set up a film festival that simply runs for two weeks and is then over. I wanted something that people could experience on a regular basis.

Where was your first event?

Our first short film event was held in a club in London's Shepherd's Bush and 150 people came with very little marketing. I could see there was a real appetite for this type of experience, so a year later I left my job to focus on the business full time. Future Shorts now operates in 12 different countries and is still expanding.

How did the Future Cinema and Secret Cinema brands evolve?

We saw there was a huge demand for cinema events that not only involved the film, but a whole theatrical, interactive experience which brought people together on a large scale. I love the idea of making the experience of a great film even better and more powerful, by involving the audience, making them they are part of action, making them feel special.

Can you describe the Secret Cinema experience?

We have such a following that people will buy into the experience without knowing what it is or where it will be. Each event is based around the showing of a film and is a fully staged with actors to re-enact scenes, the latest technology, music, videos, catering etc – and held at a secret city location, lasting around five to six hours. We only disclose the name of the film, dress code and location a week before the event, but spend weeks before that building the narrative and sending out clues. The audience may be split into groups and ask to dress in certain character roles.

How do you choose your themes?

Films range from *Ghostbusters* and *Alien* through to cult classics like *Blue Velvet*, and we don't shy away from harder-hitting films that have something to teach. Our most recent event was the *Battle of Algiers* – a 1966 film about the Algerian revolution. We chose it because it referenced to the current times of political and social unrest in many countries.

How do you choose your locations for Secret Cinema?

With the events being so large scale we obviously have to find major loca-



Battle of Algiers: The audience were invited to dress in character



UNDERGROUND MOVEMENT

The latest Secret Cinema event – *Battle of Algiers* – took place at the Old Vic Tunnels under London’s Waterloo Station, from 15 April to 8 May 2011.

The post-event statement from Secret Cinema to film fans gives a flavour of the experience: “Over 12,000 citizens travelled

to Algiers through the checkpoints into the secret alleyways of the Casbah and splendour of the French Quarter. Those that did not have the correct papers were arrested and taken away.

“Following an incident at the French Embassy, citizens were taken into hiding to

watch one of the most important and relevant political films of the last century.”

US actor and Old Vic artistic director Kevin Spacey, said he was “blown away” by the event, saying the mix of film and theatre “allows for a much more powerful experience... for the audience”.

tions that we can also keep secret. Gus Van Sant’s *Paranoid Park* was held under railway arches at London Bridge, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* was in a disused hospital.

How long does it take to prepare for an event?

Between six to eight weeks. From a staff of 14 we grow to 200 plus people comprised of the art department, set designers plus and cast of actors.

What role does technology play?

Technology makes our lives easier and we can create some amazing effects, such as projecting holograms that are difficult to distinguish from reality.

But no matter how good the technology is, we still want our events to be about people meeting up and having fun – the kind of excitement that children naturally feel. We operate in 4D, giving audiences the chance to experience the sights, sounds, smells, taste and touch of a film’s world.

How many people attend?

We have a customer database of 130,000 and can attract up to 15,000 to a month-long event. From an audience of just 400 at our first event in 2007, Secret Cinema has grown rapidly and it is the next part of our business that we will expand globally.

Our other companies have already expanded into other countries with partners in Russia, Spain, France, Sweden, Norway, the US, and most recently Iceland.

How do you market your brands?

We have worked hard to create a strong online and multimedia brand. Around 2.5 million people a month visit our Future Shorts web channel – which has music, culture, short films, interviews and documentary. We also have a strong presence on YouTube, Facebook and Twitter.

Most importantly, we view online social media as a powerful way to bring people together in a real setting.

Do you stage any events in cinemas?

Yes we work with operators such as City Screen to stage special film events. Digitisation is really opening up the market and making it possible to screen films anywhere and we see lots of potential for tie-ups in the future. We see potential for temporary, pop-up cinemas in libraries, town halls, etc – and for people to partner with us to open a cinema in their town.

What about future plans?

We will continue to expand all our brands into new countries and new markets. We also work in the corporate sector staging themed film events and promotions for business, film and product launches, and this business is expanding all the time.

And your next Secret Cinema event?

Well it’s still a secret. What I can tell you is that it will be in August, hopefully outdoors and bicycles will have a part to play! ●



The holiday park spans 435 hectares, with cabins enjoying open views of nature

FOREST ADVENTURE

I've got three great reasons to love the concept of bungalow parks - my three children, aged two, five and eight.

At such parks the children can play outside, cook for yourself, and you have more space - overall far more freedom than a hotel offers. As a family we've stayed at many such parks, but had not stayed at a Center Parcs for several years. There had been several positive magazine articles about its latest park, Les Trois Forêts in Moselle-Lorraine, Northeast France - so we booked a mid-week stay in May, at a cost of €1,250 for four nights.

After a five-hour drive and a car full of excited children we arrived to a traffic jam at the gate. Anyone with kids would understand the frustration of this delay, but two Center Parcs characters arrived to entertain the children. They had read the situation, and this made for a great first impression.

We rented a mid-range Premium Style cottage (we had considered the high-end VIP Style with private sauna!) and were happily surprised by the quality and amenities. The fully-equipped

Bart Dohmen and his family try out Les Trois Forêts holiday park in France - Center Parcs Europe's largest site

kitchen included tableware for our entire family for every meal, dishwasher, microwave etc. The beds were very comfortable and several steps up from what we've found at other parks.

OUT IN NATURE

We noted that the Center Parcs Europe website claimed their cottages integrated into the natural surroundings and were happy to discover that this was indeed the case. We felt we were 'out in nature' even as we enjoyed the comfort of our cabin. From our living room we saw only forest. The cottages are positioned in a way to afford complete privacy. The fully retractable glass wall between the living room and terrace helped complete the feeling of being immersed in the natural world.

The Market Dome - the central building of the park - was 10 minutes from our cottage by the most direct

route, 15 minutes if we took the scenic route. Our children were just on the verge of getting cranky when we took this trip. It brought home the size of this place - at 435 hectares, this is a very, very big park. For people who want to walk, this may be problematic. It is possible to hire bicycles and golf carts, but this is an additional expense. The park offers a shuttle train, but this only runs in the morning and late afternoon/evenings, which doesn't make it very useful either.

However, the positive aspect of the size of the park is the constant sense of being in the beautiful world of natural wonders. Even with almost a thousand cottages, our family felt we were in a forest. We came face to face with deer and wild Mouflon sheep during our stay. A 58-hectare nature reserve occupies the centre of the park, including a man-made river. For



exploring this river you can hire both paddle and electric-powered boats.

Center Parcs has embraced a “harmony with nature” theme, and we were able to find ample evidence that they have been faithful to this mission. Buildings feature information about energy savings and the natural plants that provide a host of benefits. The development might consider promoting this benefit even more boldly, so guests don’t have to look for it. Guests are there to have fun, so a little more effort might be needed to stress the environmental benefits being offered.

FAMILY FUN

A highlight of our stay was a daily visit to the children’s farm. I know some top theme park designers joined Center Parcs and I could immediately see that they took care of the family-friendly design of this place. Even

though it was quite large with some big buildings, we always felt in an intimate setting sized for children.

Our kids had the opportunity to romp with goats, look at cows, and mingle with chickens and turkeys. They went to the riding school and rode the ponies through the park. Both the outdoor as well as the large indoor playground were themed as a farm area, made from natural materials, with all kinds of play options for children. A small remark here – some extra activities for the very small ones would be a great addition – our two-year-old toddler didn’t find much to do.

Another way this park distinguishes itself from competitors is the number of recreation options it offers to adult guests, including a professional ‘High Adventure Course’. This allows you to go from tree to tree via suspended bridges, passageways, Tyrolean

The park’s Eden Cottages are well equipped and priced at three different levels. Families can enjoy extensive outdoor activities or find indoor fun at the waterpark

traverses and other adrenaline-producing activities. There’s a course for everyone – from easy to advanced – and even an indoor version. Other recreational opportunities include standard offers like tennis, mini-golf, and soccer, but also less regular activities like paintball and archery.

The Market Dome is fully integrated into the nature theme, and we felt as if we were entering a tropical rain forest when we ventured inside – trees and foliage everywhere. The Dome hosts a reception area, tourist information, souvenir shop and a fully-



The Domaine des Trois Forêts opened in June 2010 and is currently the company's largest site

stocked supermarket. There are also a number of dining options, including an Italian restaurant, gourmet restaurant, express counter and buffet. We were pleased that this place had a children's playground to keep them occupied as we relaxed.

MAKING A SPLASH

The Market Dome is the entry way to one of Center Parcs most famous features – Aqua Mundo, the swimming paradise. My kids couldn't wait to get there, and their sky-high expectations were exceeded. They spent their entire time in Aqua Mundo splashing, whooping, yelling and having a blast.

It is very well designed, retaining an intimate, friendly feel even though it is enormous. We never had the feeling of being engulfed by a thousand other people. The place features four areas – Relax, Kids, Action, and Outdoor – so if you weary of one activity you just move on to a new kind of water fun.

The lush vegetation added to our enjoyment, and the place has an ingenious acoustical design so that the kids' screaming and squealing rarely bothers the adults. Our kids

PARK CREDENTIALS

Center Parcs Europe now operates 20 holiday parks – covering the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany and France. In January 2011 it took over six holiday villages from sister organisation Sunparks, taking the portfolio from 14 to 20.

Facilities at Domaine

des Trois Forêts include:

- Eden cottages are offered at three levels - Comfort, Premium and VIP. There are also larger cottages for 10-12 people
- Aqua Sana nature spa
- Aqua Mundo water leisure centre
- Sports Hall offering indoor activities such as badminton, trampolining, table tennis and petanques. Guests can also try out the Rolling Bubble where they can roll around in a 3m-diameter transparent bubble



Trying out the High Adventure Course

- Outdoor activities include a High Adventure Course, archery, paintballing and electric-powered boats.
- Special facilities for children include a farm, pony riding, adventure course and mini disco
- There are eight bars and restaurants on site, including the Suzette Pancake House and the Marche du Monde buffet

PRICES: Last-minute offers advertised for July 2011 start at €539 for a weekend in a premium cottage, and €649 for a VIP cottage

loved everything, including the wave machine, slides, wild water river, waterfall/climbing wall and something I'd never seen before – a swimming pool with a sand pit in the middle. Someone obviously asked kids what they wanted, because they loved this!

Center Parcs has created a new benchmark for bungalow parks. Families stay in very comfortable cottages in a lush natural environment that helps you forget the stress of everyday life. Every member of the family

can find something interesting and challenging. The only challenge Center Parcs faces is the distance between the cottages and the activity centres. By using the train to fuller capacity, they could easily tackle this problem. This makes their challenge easier than mine – next time taking my kids to a place offering more fun and quality than Les Trois Forêts. ●

Barth Dohmen is managing director of BRC Imagination Arts Europe

SCORE CARD (Out of 10)

COTTAGES	9
ACTIVITIES	9
INFRASTRUCTURE	6
CLEANLINESS	9
OVERALL	8.5

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Personal and corporate spending are being squeezed in these hard times, but that does not mean a hospitality business cannot prosper with the right controls, says Grahame Senior

The alchemist's trick

How to get more from less

It seems likely that your forecast sales for the next 12 months are looking level with last year at best. With inflation rising, your margins will be squeezed and any profitability you managed to eke out last year will be a challenge to match in the coming year. How can you generate a better result from an effectively lower income – in essence, more from less? Careful planning for the coming year and rigid adherence to that plan could get you a surprisingly positive result. Key factors to consider are:

Cost controls

One of the by-products of such a tough economic climate is that more or less everybody is in the same boat. It means that all suppliers are likely to be much more susceptible to arguments about cost control. Nobody wants to lose a sale – there aren't that many other fish in the sea. Take a look at your annual overhead budget and also at your purchasing regime. Talking to your regular suppliers and taking a positive approach to driving costs down, rather than querying invoices retrospectively, is a better way to do it.

There is a lot of competition for business in the area of energy costs. Shop around, look for the right deals and buy at the right time – particularly if your main fuel is oil. Another area of cost control is that of professional charges. Working with advisors like

accountants and lawyers and agreeing fixed charges in return for a regular schedule of payments can shave costs.

Another important area of potential resource is the right relationship with the right trade associations. The British Hospitality Association, the Association for Small Businesses – all have purchasing and resource arrangements which can help you cut some of your one-off costs and make use of their pre-arranged support systems.

Controlling costs at the planning stage and then sticking rigidly to the budget is the best way of moving your margin up just a bit in the coming year.

Positive pricing

It would be a foolhardy operator who decided that the best way to succeed was to increase prices across the board. Just like you, most of your customers are also feeling the pinch. It means that people are not looking to pay more year on year as they tend to do in the good times. They want value. The best way to give value but also increase your revenue is to offer more added-value products and services. In effect, more for more.

One of the underlying factors of the leisure and hospitality industries is that they sell a perishable product.



Hour-by-hour, day-by-day, meal occasion by meal occasion, the value of the product offered is eroded by the ticking of the clock. If it's not sold, the value is gone forever. You can't sell anything to people who are not there. One of the most important things to remember is

that only when customers and guests are actually in your establishment are they able to add to your revenue. For that reason, providing offers which give the customer more reason to stay for longer can make good sense.

Creative offerings

Take a look at the traditional rhythm of your bookings and look for those periods when demand is not so high. The dog days of February, the shoulder weeks between the bank holiday hotspots. For operators with accommodation, offering longer stays for a fixed price can make a lot of sense. If they're staying in your establishment, they can eat there and use the facilities. If you're not full, you're not getting a return anyway. It's no accident that the middle class supermarkets such as Waitrose and M&S are loaded up with three-for-two offers. They too are fighting to get more out of the market by offering more. The principle of added value is that by planning

THE THREE P'S FOR UNLOCKING A BETTER YIELD

Planning makes it possible – three factors to evaluate and improve

1 Purchasing - Make sure you review the whole purchasing approach and your complete list of suppliers and evaluate where you can make improvements.

2 Pricing - Review your prices and look for those areas where added value pricing – giving the customer more for more – can improve your yield.

3 People - Staff utilisation is key. Review the job specification and operating practices of the whole team and look to get everybody working smarter.

36 ON THE QUAY, EMSWORTH

A friend and I had a 10-plus mile walk around Thorney Island in Hampshire, and the bracing sea air put us in the mood for a good lunch at this gem of a restaurant in Emsworth.

George Rushton and I used to work together for the Rank operation and used to visit the Quay for lunch. We were thrilled to find out that what had always been good has now become very good indeed. They have been Michelin-starred for years, but their commitment to excellence in every aspect seems fresher than ever.

From the efficiency with which they took the telephone booking to the allocation of the right table with space to lay out our maps and privacy to talk, they responded to each request with professionalism and commitment to client satisfaction. They even helped us with car parking.

The wine list and appetisers were the perfect prelude to a great lunch. The succulent quail as starter and turbot as main course were perfectly balanced. The informed service (they told us where and how the quail and turbot had been brought up and educated) and unfussy skill with which they delivered the meal were exemplary.

Prices had risen a fair bit since our last visit and it could be seen as expensive for a quick lunch. But our expectations were high and they did that wonderful thing seldom achieved even at the top of the market - they exceeded expectations and delivered real value for money. We were not alone in thinking so, as the place was full.



The Quay at Emsworth excels in both food and service

when to offer extra, you give more, sell more, and gain more.

Be creative. If you're already paying for kitchen staff, reception and a front of house team, adding more meeting occasions in the week can be cost effective. Breakfast meetings, free meeting facilities with a lunch offer - all can add more revenue into periods where costs are already committed.

Staff culture

For most leisure and hospitality budgets, the largest cost line is staff - is the people who look after the guests and make everything work. Like suppliers, staff today are increasingly realistic about the way the world is. There may still be some residual actions in the public sector trying to fight back against 'The Cuts' but in the private sector, people are much less likely to be unrealistic. They want and need their jobs and they realise that if they don't deliver, there are plenty of people queuing up to take their place. The law of the market applies. Such

"The principle of added value is that by planning when to offer extra, you give more, sell more and gain more"

a culture means that staff are more likely to be flexible about changes and ways in which you can improve the efficiency of your operation.

Start with a review of what you do and how you do it, what resources you use to deliver the products and services you sell. Every large customer-facing company has some version or other of 'The Book' - the operational handbook of the way they do things. It's their bible - the guidebook of good practice - that is used to look at each aspect of service delivery.

Many smaller individual businesses don't have one. They simply do what they do and communicate by word of mouth. Writing down the manual of how you operate and deliver every service - who does what and how long

it's expected to take - can be a very effective way of improving efficiency.

In the latter part of the 20th century, one of the biggest growth industries was logistics, where the principle was to shave costs by doing things 'just in time'. That same thought process can apply very effectively in our industry. Don't over-staff when you don't need to and use all staff effectively for each part of the process.

A by-product of this, of course, is that it shows all the team their importance and their place. The more professional you are, the more supported, involved and motivated they will feel. What your team wants most of all from you is continuity and security of employment. Now more than ever, they need you to succeed too. ●

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Leisure Management is published four times a year by The Leisure Media Company Limited, Portmull Lane, Haslem, Hems SG5 1DU, UK, and is distributed in the USA by SPP, 75 Aberdeen Road, Englewood, PA 17318-0437. Periodicals postage paid at Manchester, PA POSTMASTER: Send US address changes to Leisure Management, c/o PO Box 437, Englewood, PA 17318-0437 USA.

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PETER DE SAVARY

Peter de Savary is an entrepreneur and philanthropist, whose business ventures have covered areas as diverse as the oil industry, shipping, property and hospitality. He talks to Magali Robathan about his approach to the leisure industry

What are your plans for the next 12 months, and for the longer term?

I shall be concentrating primarily on my projects in Grenada and looking for new business opportunities abroad.

[Peter de Savary's latest developments are the luxury Mount Cinnamon resort hotel and the Port Louis development in Grenada. His past projects include the Abaco Club in the Bahamas, Skibo Castle in Scotland and Cliveden Hotel in Berkshire]

You recently bought a hotel in the Cotswolds and a boutique hotel and pub in Devon. What attracted you to these properties?

Actually my wife, Lana de Savary, is the owner of the Old Swan and Minster Mill in the Cotswolds and the Cary Arms in Devon. She was particularly attracted to the Cary Arms because of its amazing location on Babbacombe beach. By the same token, the Old Swan & Minster Mill has more than 60 acres of water meadows, ownership of over a mile of the lovely River Windrush, and 600 years of history.

Lana has completed a total refurbishment and redecoration at the Cary Arms, and plans to make some further additions at the Old Swan and Old Minster Mill as appropriate.

Why did you choose to buy the Vanderbilt Residences on Rhode Island in the US?

The residences are very luxurious apartments on the waterfront of

Newport, Rhode Island, with a marina. There are a few left to sell and I believe it will prove to be a very satisfactory investment.

What roles do you and your wife play in the de Savary business?

I concentrate on overseas and foreign business, while Lana concentrates on the UK businesses.

What have your hospitality businesses had in common over the years?

They're always unusual, with the same

We prefer being on the creative side and establishing the businesses. Once they are successful, it's time for us to find a new adventure

goal of "good fun, high standards and excellent value in unique locations".

You seem to buy properties, develop them, sell them and move on to the next project. Is this a deliberate business strategy?

It's a deliberate strategy as we prefer being on the creative side and establishing the businesses. Once the businesses are successful, it's time for us to find a new adventure.

How has the recession affected you?

Our UK businesses have been less affected as (British) people are choos-



ing to holiday in the UK, but our Caribbean business is down by around 30 per cent.

What has been your favourite project to work on?

They are all favourites, but I always particularly enjoy the project I am doing at the time.

What do you look for in a potential acquisition?

I have to find the property or business attractive and desirable for my family's use and that of my friends. It must be in a location that has something unique about it.

What do you consider to be your biggest achievement?

Fathering five wonderful daughters, two of whom now work in the business.

What have been your best and worst business decisions?

My best decision was taking on Skibo Castle (with 8,500 acres), the home of Andrew Carnegie, completely restoring it and turning it into a very successful leisure business.

I haven't had a worst. I've enjoyed them all in the leisure field, but my least enjoyable business activity was owning and running a funeral home!

What drives you?

The thrill of the chase, accolades from customer and creating something that will stand the test of time, where my creativity has added value, enjoyment and employment for others. ●



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