

REIMAGINING THE SHOPPING CENTRE



Increasing the variety of food, drink and leisure options has become a key part of the extended customer experience at shopping centres, finds Retail Focus.

Text: Lyndsey Dennis

Today's shopping centres, and those of the future, are more than just about shopping. They offer a complete day and evening out, from restaurants, bars and cinemas to events spaces and experiences. Cue a host of refurbishments and leisure expansions for day and night use.

Hammerson's Victoria Gate in Leeds, which opened in October, has been awarded Best Shopping Centre at the MIPIM Awards. Designed by architect Acme, the development is a 21st century interpretation of the traditional Victorian retail arcades found in Leeds. The destination is adjacent to Hammerson's Victoria Quarter arcade and forms part of the new 53,400 sq m Victoria Leeds shopping destination. Altogether, the development accommodates around 42,000 sq m of retail and leisure space, including a casino, 30 stores, restaurants, cafes and leisure space. Global restaurant chain D&D has announced plans to open two rooftop restaurants at the shopping centre: a Japanese restaurant and Manhattan-style bar and grill called East 59th.

To mark its 20th anniversary, White Rose in Leeds is introducing a major 6,038 sq m leisure-led indoor and outdoor entertainment extension. The scheme includes an 11-screen state-of-the-art Cineworld IMAX cinema, six restaurants, a bespoke play area and outdoor live events space.

Similarly, Bluewater in Kent is enhancing its Plaza area, introducing four new screens at the Showcase Cinema de Lux, three restaurants and two leisure spaces. Commenting on the plans, Russell Loveland, portfolio director at Land Securities, co-owner and asset manager of Bluewater, says: 'Evolving Bluewater's offer to provide a day-out experience for guests unavailable elsewhere

Above: White Rose in Leeds has announced plans to introduce a major 6,038 sq m leisure-led indoor and outdoor entertainment extension.

in the South East is our priority. The upsizing of Showcase, the creation of three further restaurants, and the addition of two new exciting leisure concepts means we will continue to offer something different on every visit.

Ranging in size from 232 sq m to 353 sq m, the three restaurant units are being targeted at operators that add to the Plaza's existing offer, which is focused on entertainment dining. Land Securities and leading agents Shelley Sandzer are already in detailed discussions with several brands.

Edinburgh St James is also increasing its leisure mix. Designed by Allan Murray Architects, the new 157,935 sq m scheme will replace the current 1970s shopping centre with 78,967 sq m of retail space, a luxury hotel, up to 150 new homes, 30 restaurants and a multiscreen cinema, all due for completion in 2020.

TH Real Estate, the developers, refer to Edinburgh St James as 'a world-class example of city-enhancing placemaking.' Martin Perry, director of development at TH Real Estate, says: 'A landmark >



development within a celebrated European city. Edinburgh St James provides a once-in-a-generation opportunity to create a place where shoppers, residents and visitors can indulge and relax.'

Work has commenced on an £8 million refurbishment at Queensgate in Peterborough. Designed by architectural studio Benoy, the changes will include new lighting, doors, redesigned cladding, ceilings and internal finishes to create a bright, more modern and contemporary look.

To enhance the customer experience, seating areas will be upgraded throughout the scheme that complement the design and structure of the centre. Subject to planning approval, The Cumbergate entrance will also be upgraded to create an improved welcome hall. Feature walls incorporating the history of Peterborough and local imagery will be introduced, highlighting Queensgate's strong community links.

'Shopping centres and retail stores of the future will have to appeal to an increasingly knowledgeable shopper, offering experiences above and beyond your standard bricks and mortar store,' says Claire Yeadon, asset manager at Lendlease. 'Retailers and retail schemes will be further pushed to innovate how they can offer more personalised services to appeal to the local catchment, and compete with the convenience of online shopping and use of digital technology. Welcoming environments with a wide range of leisure uses will also make visits to shopping centres more of an experience and day out.'

Over the next three years, centre:mk in Milton Keynes will receive a £60 million investment. The refurbishment, in conjunction with architects Rawls and Leslie Jones Architecture, will create a more refreshing, exciting and modern look and feel: in turn a more enjoyable day out.

'Gone are the days where a trip to a shopping centre meant just a trip to the shops. They now represent compelling retail and leisure destinations in their own right and places for people to connect and relax,' says Ed Sellick on behalf of centre:mk's joint owners, Hermes Investment Management and AustralianSuper. 'As brands and retailers continue to embrace new models of retail and the "experiential economy", and with consumers fuelled by social media and driven by a want for new and authentic experiences,



increasing the variety of food and drink options has become a key part of the extended customer experience.'

Planning permission was granted in March for the expansion of Royal Victoria Place in Tunbridge Wells. Designed by Haskoll, the redevelopment will see an additional 16,065 sq m of new commercial space comprising 2,040 sq m of new F&B space featuring several restaurants; 11,209 sq m of extra retail floor space with major stores for key fashion brands; and an eight-screen, state-of-the-art, 1,000-seat digital cinema. The work is scheduled for completion in 2020.

Also on the agenda this year is an extension of Westfield London. The Lexicon Bracknell in September, Westgate Oxford in Autumn, Meadowhall Sheffield refurbishment finishing in December, and an expansion of intu Watford, due to complete in 2018.

Sam Robinson, head of brand and customer engagement at Milligan, the firm responsible for the transformation of The Mailbox in Birmingham, says shopping centres are having to adapt to the changes brought about by today's need for speed and instant gratification that has come to be expected. She says this demand - particularly amongst millennials - is shaping the future of the retail industry.



'Rather than simply being a place where goods are displayed, shopping centres are having to adapt to these changes by investing in creating memorable experiences for visitors. F&B and leisure venues, such as restaurants, cinemas and bars, play a huge role in this because these are elements that can never be fully digitised. They can certainly be enhanced by technology, but never completely replaced,' says Robinson. 'Multisensory elements can also significantly enrich and personalise a shopper's experience.'

The expansion of Chadstone Shopping Centre in Melbourne, Australia is a seamless celebration of engineering and architecture. Designed by CallisonRTKL alongside architectural practice, The Buchan Group, the project's centerpiece is a dramatic gridshell glass roof, which soars above what is thought to be the largest enclosed shopping centre in the Southern Hemisphere. The expansion accommodates upwards of 100 new retailers and a roster of leisure and food operators.

'The majority of our current work is looking at existing shopping centres and reimagining the way in which they engage with their customers - the focus of that being the dining and leisure experience,' says Ken Christian, LEED GA, CallisonRTKL director. 'We're already starting to see the social or community element of shopping come to the fore; places where people can meet and mix with like-minded friends or acquaintances. Easy to see the value



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this has to a larger community or neighbourhood.'

Christian believes we can expect to see much more flexible formats in the future: places where pop-ups and brand showcases can move in and out easily to cater to events like fashion shows or product launches.

'Food is only growing in its importance to retail and shopping centres, largely because it serves as an easily shared cultural currency for all of us. We all eat; we all like to eat with friends; we all like to share a pleasant dining experience. But this isn't about convenience or speed, so the traditional models are out; it's more focused on quality and the overall dining experience, so expect to see demo kitchens, local start-up chefs and seasonal ingredients define the sector.'

'The days of the out-of-town, single-use shopping centre are well and truly over and in its place are more complex, denser districts that include residential, civic/cultural and other uses,' concludes Christian. **RF**

Top from left: Work has commenced on an £8 million refurbishment programme at Queensgate shopping centre in Peterborough; The redevelopment of Royal Victoria Place in Tunbridge Wells will see an additional 16,065 sq m of new commercial space, including major stores, restaurants and cinema; The new Edinburgh St James scheme will replace the current 1970s shopping centre with 78,967 sq m of retail space, a luxury hotel, new homes, 30 restaurants and a multiscreen cinema; Designed by CallisonRTKL, the expansion of Chadstone Shopping Centre in Melbourne, Australia is a seamless celebration of engineering and architecture.