

# BIG IT UP BULLETIN

Major news and updates for Leicester and Leicestershire

March 2009

Here is the latest update for Big It Up campaigners on major projects and good news stories for Leicester and Leicestershire, brought to you by Leicester Shire Promotions.

If you have any more Big It Up stories to tell of how you, your colleagues or organisation have championed the cause of Leicester and Leicestershire, please feed appropriate details through to Simon Gribbon at Leicester Shire Promotions on 0116 225 4001 or email [simon.gribbon@l-p-l.com](mailto:simon.gribbon@l-p-l.com)

## **Leicester Comedy Festival LTD announces new name**

Leicester Comedy Festival Ltd, the company behind Leicester Comedy Festival, has changed its name to Big Difference Company. The organisation's work has never just been limited to organising the annual festival. The company, which was formed in 2004, has worked on a number of contracts for high-profile clients such as Highcross Leicester, The National Forest, Department of Health, local authorities across the UK and De Montfort University. Major projects include contributions to conferences and events and event management projects such as the spectacular opening events for Highcross Leicester.

This year's 10-day Comedy Festival attracted over 2,100 reported bed nights in local accommodation, resulting in a major boost to the Leicestershire visitor economy.

## **University system makes top five in international climate change competition**

A ground-breaking cooling system, developed at Loughborough University, has made it to the last five in a global competition for innovation to tackle climate change, featured in the Financial Times. The evaporating tiles system - called Zephyr - was one of nearly 300 entries from around the world to the FT Climate Change Challenge. The winner, who will be decided by a public vote online, will be awarded £75,000 to help develop their idea and bring it to market.

## **Shops among top in UK**

Leicester's multi-million pound Highcross complex has boosted the city in the UK's rankings of best places to shop. The city climbed five places - from 16th place to 11th - in the national retail Venuescore 2009 rankings. The survey looked at cities across the UK, and ranked them in terms of the range of shops on offer, taking into account everything from major department stores and supermarkets to clothing stores, leisure and multiple retailer outlets. Highcross Leicester, which opened in September 2008, cost £350 million to build and features 120 stores, as well as restaurants and cafes, and the multi-screen Cinema De Lux.

### **One million virtual visitors to Leicester and Leicestershire**

The official online visitor guide to Leicester and Leicestershire has seen a dramatic surge in visitors wanting to know more about the leisure and tourism opportunities in the city and county. Latest figures have revealed that the [www.goleicestershire.com](http://www.goleicestershire.com) site, which is managed by Leicester Shire Promotions, received a total of 1,002,049 visitors during 2008, a massive 173 per cent increase from 2007. Visitors to the site have risen a further eight per cent in January 2009 (in comparison with January 2008). As well as receiving its highest ever number of hits, the site outperformed similar web sites set up to promote cities such as Newcastle and Manchester.

However, more important than the number of website hits is how these are translated into bookings. Leicester Shire Promotions is on course for a record-breaking year in terms of campaigns to attract short break visitors to the city and county. Full details will be reported as soon as the year-end figures have been collated.

### **Film to boost castle visits**

The 'location vacation' phenomenon of film-inspired holidays is to help boost visitor numbers at Belvoir Castle in Leicestershire, a survey has suggested. Some 34 per cent of British travellers have taken trips after seeing films, a survey by [travelsupermarket.com](http://travelsupermarket.com) found. It said The Young Victoria is expected to help promote the castle, which features as a location in the film.

### **Leicestershire County Council is crowned Council of the Year 2009**

Staff members at Leicestershire County Council are celebrating after the authority scooped the prestigious Council of the Year award at the Local Government Chronicle (LGC) Awards. The authority is the first ever county council to receive the award which 'recognises levels of excellence and innovation well beyond basic service provision'. This follows a year of outstanding achievement, across all service areas, and reinforces its '4 Star and Improving Strongly' status.

### **Leicester City Council wins prestigious award**

Leicester City Council won the Improving Accessibility for All category of the Rights of Way Improvement Plan (RoWIP) awards, held by environmental organisation Natural England. The award marks work done by the city council to open up more rights of way than ever before. Over the last three years, the amount of Leicester's rights of way network which is easily accessed by the public has risen from 70 per cent to 94 per cent, which has improved opportunities for walking, cycling and horse riding.

### **Melton Mowbray to host first ever pie awards**

Pie producers the length and breadth of the country are rolling out the pastry to compete for the esteemed title of Supreme Champion 'Pie of Pies'. The awards competition, called the British Pie Awards, will have an impressive line-up of judges including Angela Boggiano, Food Editor for Delicious magazine, Xanthe Clay, food writer from The Daily Telegraph and Sheila Dillon, presenter of The Food Programme, Radio 4. The first ever British Pie Awards will take place on 21 April 2009 at St Mary's Church in the 'holy land' of the British pie industry itself, Melton Mowbray.

### **National award success for Leicester Conferences**

The University of Leicester's Residential and Catering Service has celebrated its success at the Meetings and Incentive Travel National Industry Awards. Leicester Conferences (the University's conference services) received a bronze award for Best Value for Money Conference Venue and finalist recognition for Best Academic Venue.

### **Olympics Minister visits university sports set-up**

Olympics Minister Tessa Jowell visited Loughborough University to see the work being carried out to support Britain's athletes and the efforts to attract a major international team to Loughborough in the run up to the London Olympics. Ms Jowell visited the University's world-class sports facilities, state-of-the-art sports science laboratories and internationally renowned Sports Technology Institute, before meeting with a group of 2012 hopefuls and their coaches.

### **Electric bike firm in line for eco-prize**

A firm that developed an electric bike is in the running for a prize that recognises businesses helping to tackle climate change. Walters Innovations in Leicester is one of nine finalists from across central England and Wales on the shortlist for the Shell Springboard awards. Prizes of up to £40,000 are available in the contest, which aims to give a financial boost to commercially viable business ideas that could help protect the environment. Walters Innovations has developed the MonVal Bicycle, a pedal-bike with a battery pack said to power a journey of up to 40 miles.

### **Leicester council worker honoured at Number 10**

A staff member at Leicester City Council has been honoured at No 10 Downing Street for his work improving city libraries for children and young people. Paul Gobey, Head of Children and Young People's Services, has won the accolade of Year of Reading 'Reading Hero' for his outstanding contribution to reading in the community. Paul, one of just thirty Reading Heroes nationally, was presented with his award by the Prime Minister's wife Sarah Brown at a special ceremony.

### **Mission control for UK's Leicester-based space academy at NASA**

Scientists and educators from the UK's first space academy at the National Space Centre in Leicester have been on a mission to NASA's Johnson Space Center in Houston to showcase their ideas on space and science teaching. Science teachers, Judith Green and Steve Althorpe, from Robert Smyth School in Market Harborough, gave a presentation with Dr Simon Roberts from The University of Nottingham and National Space Centre Education Director Anu Ojha. Their presentation was part of NASA's Space Exploration Educators Conference (SEEC), the largest space education event in the world.

### **Help local picnic spot win prestigious industry accolade**

Families in Leicestershire are being urged to vote for Ashby Castle which is in the running for the UK's favourite picnic spot title in this year's Warburtons Picnic Awards, an awards scheme part of the National Bread Week celebrations. Ashby Castle has been shortlisted for the East Midlands Best Picnic Spot. To vote for Ashby Castle and to be in with a chance of winning a year's supply of Warburtons products, log on to the website at [www.welovebread.co.uk](http://www.welovebread.co.uk) and register your vote before the closing date of 5 June 2009.

### **Innovative furniture wins place at world's biggest home show**

Award-winning innovative furniture designed by three talented students at De Montfort University is to be showcased at the biggest home show in the world. The DMU Furniture Design students will feature within the Innovation Nation feature at the EDF Energy Ideal Home Show that runs until 13 April at Earls Court, London.

### **Joy at device's latest honour**

A firm is celebrating after its latest award for a gadget which allows computer users to help the environment. Bright Ideas Global, of Melton, was named 'one to watch' at the Fast Growth Business Awards for its Ecobutton. The device allows people to put computers into energy-saving mode at the push of a button when leaving their desks. More than 150,000 have been sold.

### **Market Harborough: one of the best places to live in Britain**

Country living in Market Harborough is the best outside the south east of England, according to a recent survey. People earn more, live longer and have a better education than most of their rural counterparts. Some 84 per cent of the area's 37,000 households own their own property, while 96 per cent of properties have central heating. The survey by the Halifax bank said the high quality of life in the district put it in the top 14 in Great Britain. Figures also showed that Harborough people earned an average of £594 a week before stoppages, they lived to nearly 80 years of age and there were fewer than 26 children in a class.

### **Leicester-produced asthma drug has biggest break-through potential in 40 years**

A new drug pioneered in Leicester could be the biggest breakthrough for sufferers of asthma in four decades. Doctors at the city's Glenfield Hospital say the new therapy could be life-changing for many sufferers and even save lives. A team at the hospital has discovered a specially-designed drug has halved the number of severe attacks. The breakthrough could also mean that sufferers will no longer need to take steroids which can cause major side-effects.

### **Mission to moon a giant leap for Zeeko**

It is one small step towards Man's return to the moon - but one giant leap for a small Leicestershire engineering firm. When the space agency's £345 million Lunar Reconnaissance Orbiter spacecraft lifts off from Cape Canaveral, Florida, on board will be powerful lenses created by machines manufactured in Leicestershire. Coalville company Zeeko, which specialises in machines which make optics for cameras and telescopes, won a £1 million contract to supply two of its devices to Light Works Optics, of California. Light Works used the machines to produce the lenses for the lunar orbiter.

### **£10m business centre plan for Loughborough**

A £10 million training and business centre is to be set up, creating jobs and helping develop skills. Charnwood Borough Council wants to open the centre, to be known as the Greenhouse, in one of the most deprived areas of Loughborough, to boost the local economy and help regenerate the surrounding neighbourhood. The centre is being planned for Windmill Road on former industrial land that has now become derelict. The centre will be home to about 60 small businesses, which will be involved in green energy projects, developing environmentally-friendly technologies and construction techniques. Discussions and funding applications are planned for the coming months.

### **Shops are smartening up**

More than 50 shops and cafes across Leicester have undergone major renovations thanks to a £100,000 scheme. The improvement programme has helped to cushion independent retailers from the economic downturn and the launch of the £350 million Highcross shopping centre. Providing cash for shop front improvements, the scheme is running alongside a £20,000 initiative aimed at helping shop managers to adjust to the challenging high street conditions. About £280,000 has also been spent on nine new city centre CCTV cameras over the past few months. The schemes are being managed by Leicester Business Improvement District (Bid) and funding has come from Leicester Shire Economic Partnership.

### **Research profile of universities gives boost to Leicestershire**

All three of the county's Universities were rated highly in the recent Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) Research Assessment Exercise (RAE).

- De Montfort University, a significant amount of whose research was rated as 'internationally excellent' and 'world leading' and, in the case of its research in English was placed among the top institutions in the country, has experienced an increase in applications to the university that way outstrips the national average
- Loughborough University is to receive the fifth largest increase in its research funding - and the greatest increase of any UK university without a medical school. In the 2008 RAE, every department at Loughborough was found to be undertaking research that is internationally excellent, with 18 per cent of the University's research considered to be 'world leading'
- The University of Leicester, identified in the Research Assessment Exercise as housing -in the Department of Museum Studies - the greatest cluster of world-leading researchers of any discipline in any university in the UK, also celebrated one of the best funding awards in years

### **Chemist Direct secures backing from VC firm Atomico**

A Leicestershire internet business launched in a garden shed just over a year ago has secured a multi-million-pound investment from the founders of online success story Skype. Chemist Direct, of Evington, Leicester, received the funding from venture capital firm Atomico, which is backed by the people behind the voice over internet business, sold for £1.4 billion to Ebay four years ago. The fast-growing online pharmacy, set up in November 2007, has been handed £3 million in return for a minority stake, thought to be significantly less than 49 per cent. It plans to use the money to expand its product range and double its workforce to 110 over the next year.

### **Ceramics breakthrough at University of Leicester**

Engineers at the University of Leicester have invented a new technique to manufacture ceramics which could cut production costs. Academics have applied computer technology to get away from the expensive trial and error production method traditionally used. The university's department of engineering has developed computer software that can predict changes in size of ceramic products during the heating process, known as "sintering".

### **Samworth hails £4m Marks & Spencer deal**

Leicestershire food giant Samworth Brothers has won orders worth around £4 million a year to make cakes for Marks & Spencer. The company will produce tens of thousands of loaf and cup cakes at its factory in Leicester Forest East for the iconic high street name. The company said it had already created 150 of the 200 new jobs it announced last year, with the other 50 set to be recruited as a result of the cake orders.

### **DMU students' success in national fashion competition**

Fashion Design students from De Montfort University have wowed fashion industry experts in two national competitions set by high street store River Island. First year students Emily Andrews, Sophie Kempner and Roseanna McReynolds have won the Recycling Competition and will now see their work displayed at Graduate Fashion Week from 7 to 11 June 2009. Graduate Fashion Week, which is sponsored by River Island, was launched in 1991 as a forum to showcase the best fashion design talent amongst new graduates in the UK. Final year student Stephen Hughes was selected as a runner-up for the Womenswear Competition.

### **Foxton Locks wins at Waterways Renaissance Awards 2009**

British Waterways celebrated many successes at the Waterways Renaissance Awards run by The Waterways Trust and BURA (British Urban Regeneration Association). In their seventh year, the awards recognise best practice in sustainable waterway regeneration and development throughout the UK. The highlight of the ceremony was the presentation of the Outstanding Achievement Award for the development of the historic Foxton Locks and Inclined Plane site in Leicestershire.

### **The National Space Centre to celebrate historic moon landing**

In 1969 Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin landed on the Moon and the nations of the world watched on in awe. The National Space Centre is developing a new interactive exhibition to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the Apollo moon landings and wants the people of Leicestershire to be included. The National Space Centre is looking for memories of that special day from local celebrities to include in the exhibition and is looking for help.

Are you a local or national celebrity? Do you remember what you were doing on 21 July 1969? What were your thoughts of the momentous events? If you want to get involved all you need to do is email [malikaa@spacecentre.co.uk](mailto:malikaa@spacecentre.co.uk) at the Space Centre with a maximum of 200 words about your memories, funny stories or anecdotes. If you have a photograph of yourself in 1969 that would be the icing on the cake!

### ***And finally...***

The Big It Up Bulletin is produced in conjunction with Leicester Mercury's 'The Business' supplement. For the latest business news in Leicester and Leicestershire, visit [www.thisisbusiness-eastmidlands.co.uk/News/Leicestershire.aspx](http://www.thisisbusiness-eastmidlands.co.uk/News/Leicestershire.aspx)