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Cheshire Oaks Visitor Information Centre

Cheshire Oaks, located just off the M53 motorway in Ellesmere Port, is the largest Designer Outlet in the UK. Owned by McArthur Glen, the development hosts over 140 stores and the site acts as a gateway to Chester and other tourist attraction such as Chester Zoo.

Cheshire Oaks Designer Outlet is in its second decade of trading. The retail environment has changed significantly as the need to exceed customer expectations continues to increase through a demand for an improved environment and customer services.

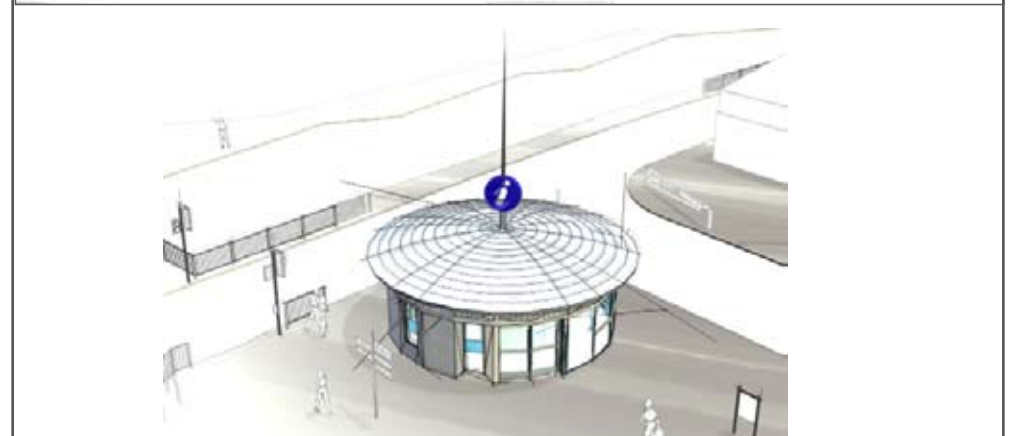
In addition to the overall macro influences affecting the retail industry, Cheshire Oaks faces a number of local challenges not least of all the total redevelopment of Liverpool. The centre's strategy over the coming 5 years is about re-positioning for growth to ensure continued success.

Due to the impact of increased visitor numbers the centre needs to make changes to its current customer and tourist information provision. The centre as a whole cannot increase in size but the configuration of space within it is under review.

With more than 6 million visitors each year, the Cheshire Oaks development offers a wide range of other amenities to support the shopping experience. These include, special needs services, cafes and restaurants, a children's play area, baby changing rooms and a Customer Information Desk (CID).

The current Customer Information provision not only acts as an information service for the development but in peak season provides 75% of tourist-based information to visitors.

The developer's, in partnership with Chester City Council, see the future Cheshire Oaks information service acting as a tourism gateway to Chester and Ellesmere Port and the surrounding region and wanted to provide an 'iconic' stand alone structure in a highly visible location within the development.



Initial concept direction

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Broome Jenkins were invited to prepare a design feasibility bid document which could be used in support of a joint funding bid between the developers and the council. Adopting this approach would not only consolidate all of the stake holder's requirements but would enable cost estimates to be sought which would be submitted against the funding application to the North West Regional Development Agency (www.nwda.co.uk).

The need for a stand alone Visitor Information Centre (VIC) provision was identified as key to being able to provide visitors with a full tourism-led service as well as acting as a point of contact for services offered on the development.

The visuals you see here represent extracts from the bid document. The design proposed is a modern single storey structure which uses sustainable materials and finishes sympathetic to the surrounding 'mock Tudor' Cheshire Oaks development.

Our proposal positions the VIC on the site at an angle to maximise visibility for approaching pedestrian and vehicular traffic. This also allows the design to address the problem of strong prevailing winds, providing shelter for the entrance.

The use of proprietary curtain walling techniques looks to maximise 'off the shelf' manufacturing systems and the building height has been optimised to use standard component parts. Using standard product lengths minimises the waste involved in the production of bespoke structures such as this one. The design is constructed as a 'kit of parts' and therefore leads the way for a systemised approach to future 'new build' Visitor Information Centres.

Broome Jenkins are presently working with Visit Chester and Cheshire to secure funding for the scheme to move forward to design detailing and implementation. The aim is to be in a position to start build work early in 2009.



Final developed concept

Broome**Jenkins**

T: 0044(0)1243527177

F: 0044(0)1243527213

M: 0044(0)7711675216

E: barry@broomejenkins.com