

All change for the future!

Sheffield's Winter Garden is the latest architectural gem in the city's regeneration programme. The magnificent timber and glass structure with its fantastic collection of plants is the largest temperate glasshouse in a European city centre.

And what a centre Sheffield is going to be! As part of the £120 million 'Heart of the City' project which was first mooted in the mid-1990s, the Winter Garden sits alongside the award-winning Peace Gardens and Millennium Galleries as part of the public phase of the Heart of the City project.

So impressed was Sheffield author and broadcaster Michael Palin, he agreed to be the Winter Garden patron:

"The Winter Garden is absolutely beautiful," says Michael. "The scale of it is very powerful, and I love the fact that it's close to the Millennium Galleries which is another very striking building."

Sheffield's skyline has been changing rapidly over the past few months – and there are other big changes to come. The 1970s Town Hall extension known locally as 'the eggbox', has been demolished to make way for redevelopment, with the Winter Garden making its debut in 2002.

The 'Heart of the City' project has evolved into a grand master plan for the city centre which takes in several major projects including the new retail quarter, City Hall, Barker's Pool, Castlegate, Sheffield Station and an integrated transport strategy.

By any standards, this is a comprehensive plan that will only succeed if every part of it is implemented. Every component is essential in creating the conditions for sustainable investment and growth.

In common with other northern cities such as Manchester and Leeds, the renaissance of Sheffield is a long-term vision that will have important economic implications for the people of Sheffield and their future affluence.

A vital element in the city centre master plan has been to create a major new hotel to help reposition the city as a leading destination for the business, visitor and conference market. The hotel will have a modern exterior in stone to blend in with the magnificent Town Hall. It will be set back from the Winter Garden and linked by a new single-storey glazed pavilion full of cafés and restaurants which will add life to the area.

Helping to bind the various parts of the city centre together will be the new retail quarter which is another vital part of the master plan. It will be a distinctive development with exciting new buildings, streets and public spaces. Construction is planned to begin in 2005.

Last but not least is the project to transform the city's railway station and surrounding areas into a modern, world-class gateway to Sheffield.

The first phase of development – including the new passenger bridge, lifts and new station car park – is complete. The next phases of the project include plans to totally refurbish the station and upgrade passenger amenities; to create a spectacular new square in front of the station with water, trees and a 'Cutting edge' landmark sculpture; a realigned Sheaf Street; the redevelopment of commercial buildings; and the upgrading of Howard Street to create an attractive pedestrian link to the city centre.

There's no doubt that the people who work or study in Sheffield are living in exciting times. An impressive start has been made on the planned changes, and with the backing of Objective 1 funds plus the ongoing commitment of leading city centre agencies and the support of local people, Sheffield is on target to become a truly great city.

ENDS
