



**Business
LIFE**

LINCOLN

Thinking BIG *for the future*

Whether or not you are convinced that the Recession is fading away – Lincoln has a tendency to stand out from the crowd when it comes to weathering tough times.

Words: Glynis Fox Photographs: Mick Fox

Lincolnshire's 'capital' generally benefits from being part of a diverse county, which largely rides out economic highs and lows – although it has not totally escaped the knock-on effect of what is happening in the wider world, which is why this springtime is seeing the city back on the path to growth.

There have been announcements of job losses, but these are being tempered by news of ongoing investments, a boost on the transport front and an entrepreneurial spirit which still burns brightly – helped by the growth of the University of Lincoln and its Business School.

Lincoln Business Improvement Group (Lincoln BIG) and Lincolnshire

Chamber reflected on what is happening 'on the ground,' and it is clear that there is a lot of hard work going on to make Lincoln more attractive for residents, visiting shoppers and tourists, as well as firms which want to be based in a low-cost, yet high-quality part of the UK.

Lincoln BIG chief executive Matt Corrigan spoke to Lincolnshire Life in the wake of news that Siemens is to shed 155 jobs over the summer, and possibly more next year, and the closure of Chicago Rock.

"I believe that trading conditions will remain challenging and that whatever the local and general elections bring later this year, funding feeding through to the county from

Government, will be tight," he said.

"Whilst the uncertainty over Siemens' jobs is of great concern, Tesco has created twenty-five jobs at its new St Mark's store, £1.2m is being spent on a major upgrade of Bailgate, the city's Free School Library has had a facelift, and Lincoln has been promised it will finally get a faster rail link to King's Cross from May 2011."

Mr Corrigan also added that the city will benefit from European cash this year, and Lincoln BIG will be maintaining strong links with key contacts to ensure that key projects in the pipeline get the best possible support.

"Businesses gave us a massive vote of confidence in our five-year re-ballot



CITY SQUARE AND THE RIVER WITHAM

Streets Ahead

Work on a £1.2 million project to upgrade one of the most historic parts of Lincoln is on course to be finished by June.

A team from North Midland Construction is hard at work on a major revamp of the area which runs from Newport Arch to the White Hart Hotel corner in Bailgate, where it is repaving the road and pathways.

The Bailgate Restored initiative, involves the laying of York Stone paving, which will complement the cobbled Steep Hill and Castle Hill areas. The project also includes the refurbishment of a Roman Well and the ancient site of St Paul in the Bail.

The Historic Lincoln Partnership securing funding for the work, with support from the county council and

emda.

Lincoln's Cathedral Quarter boasts more than 150 small shops. It is claimed that, together, they add up to the greatest concentration of independent specialist retailers in the Midlands.

Bailgate Guild chairman Mark Hollingworth, of Flowers by Suzanne (Bailgate), said: "The work is getting done really quickly and the early signs are that the finished result will look fantastic.

"Most shops have been unaffected by the project in terms of trade. People are continuing to support individual traders and things are not as bad as some people had forecast," he added.

All of Lincoln's Uphill car parks will stay open while the restoration work is underway.

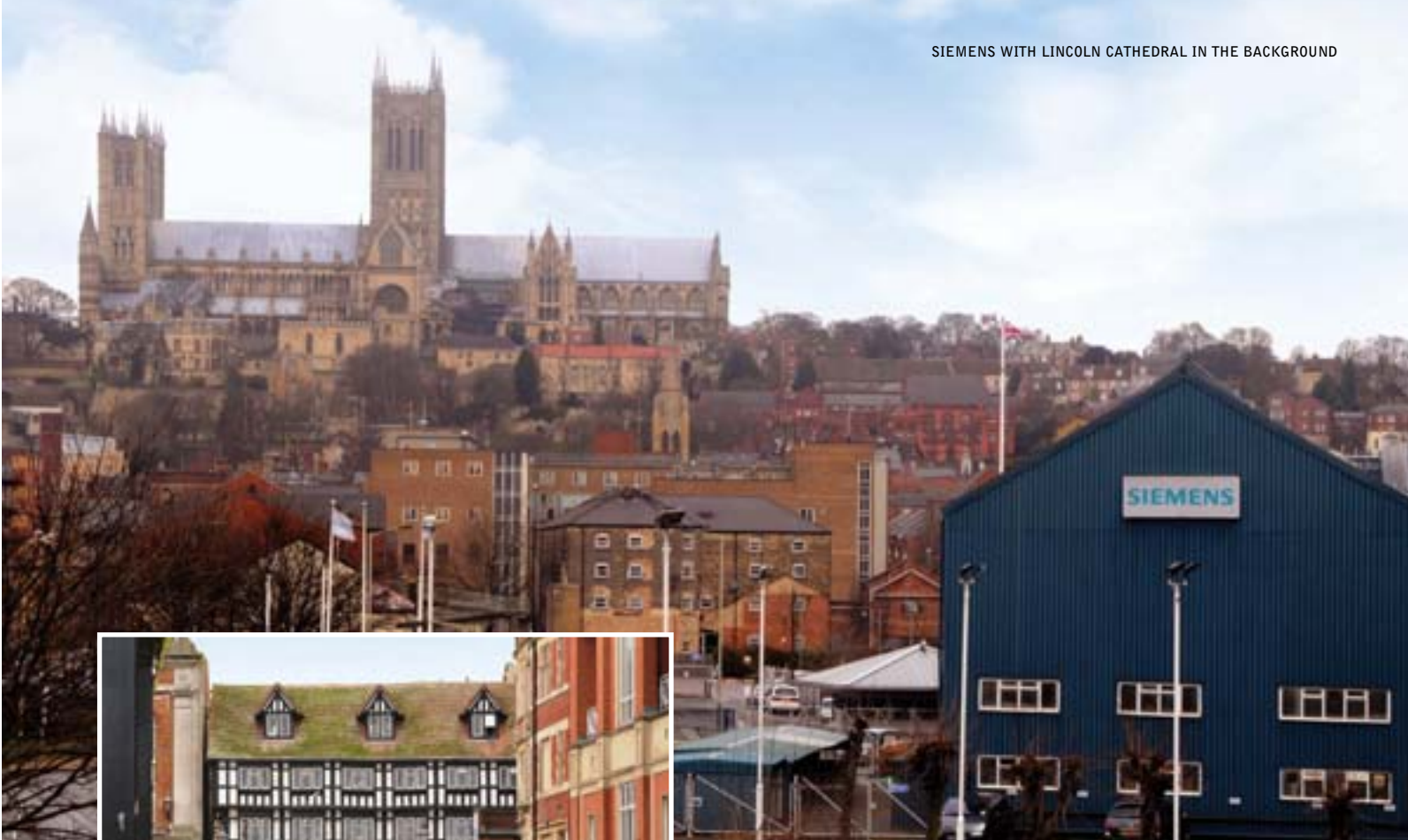
in October and we are looking at a raft of potential initiatives which will allow us to continue making a difference in the city centre and to build on the work which we have already done.

"We have started work on improving and upgrading the city's Visitor Information Centre in Castle Hill, which we inherited from Lincoln City Council, and we are looking forward to extending the city's Business Improvement District to include Lincoln College and businesses at the western end of Monks Road, this summer," he said.

Lincoln BIG has been concentrating heavily on initiatives which are designed to make Lincoln cleaner, safer and more welcoming and it has masterminded a lively programme of events aimed at encouraging more people from outside of Lincoln to visit the city centre and Bailgate areas, and local shoppers to make more of what is on offer on their doorstep.

Continued on page 55





Continued from page 53

It is also hoped that Lincoln will benefit from the growing trend of the "staycation," whereby families decide to holiday in the UK, rather than jet off abroad.

In line with this, as many people as possible are being encouraged to snap-up the chance to explore Lincoln's exciting attractions, for free, during the Discover Lincolnshire weekend, which takes place on March 13th and 14th.

Lincoln is the jewel at the centre of a largely rural county, which is often dubbed the bread basket of the UK and Mr Corrigan said the city's farmers' markets – which celebrated their tenth anniversary last year – appear to be increasing in popularity.

"Other street events that people should watch out for this year, include our popular artists' markets, which are staged in the area at the foot of Steep Hill, special craft markets and themed events, including the July Children's Festival – which attracts youngsters from schools countywide who entertain shoppers by performing songs and dances."

"Our May Jazz Festival is staged in a variety of pub and hotel venues, and culminates in an outdoor spectacular in City Square, and the weekend of July 23rd will see the city

celebrate its second Italian Weekend, following our highly successful event last year, which included an Italian Market in City Square and complementary events in other parts of the city," said Mr Corrigan.

"Many of the events which we organise offer businesses twofold benefits – the chance to get directly involved and to be visited by the increasing number of potential customers who are spending more time than usual in Lincoln."

Lincolnshire Chamber chief executive Simon Beardsley said: "During the last quarter of 2009, the UK economy was coming out of recession and there was growth of 0.1 per cent at that time. Those are the official figures.

"The Chamber carried out a quarterly economic survey of its members, in association with Lincolnshire County Council and we broke our findings down into the views from local manufacturers and service businesses."

The feedback revealed that while Lincoln and other county-based manufacturers were slower to emerge out of recession than many national companies, they had been slightly later going in.

Service sector businesses, meanwhile, had reported a better third quarter of the year, but worse figures for the final three months of the year.

Business owners and managers were asked how confident they were feeling about their order books, the future turnover and profitability of their operations.

"Some firms reported that orders have been rising over the past couple of months but businesses generally predict that 2010 will be difficult in terms of local trade, and they expect to see better growth in 2011."

While many traders seem to be little more than "cautiously optimistic", Mr Beardsley said many shopkeepers had enjoyed a good Christmas. There had also been a rush from people keen to buy 'big ticket' items for the home ahead of the January rise in VAT.

Hitch a ride

While Lincoln's magnificent Cathedral and historic Castle are natural magnets for visitors to the city, they are often surprised by its diverse range of shopping.

In addition to the plethora of major names to be found on most High Streets, Lincoln boasts a multitude of niche (some quirky!) enterprises, especially in areas like Bailgate, Steep Hill, Sincil Street and the lower High Street.

So one of the biggest decisions facing today's shopper or tourist is how to fit it all in. Should they start off Uphill, in the centre of the High Street or by browsing St Mark's Shopping Centre.

Whichever they choose, the city's handy Walk & Ride bus service, which links all three, can help.

Because there is so much to enjoy, from historic treasures, to individual shops, as well as an ongoing programme of special events, hopefully visitors will not only get a good deal – they will think of returning, complete with their suitcase!

Despite tough times, Lincoln still boasts plenty of characterful shops, including family outlets which have celebrated important milestones and shown confidence in the future by going ahead with long-planned investments.

Last year, Ruddocks celebrated 125 years of family ownership. The business comprises a High Street shop, selling everything from stationery to art materials, and a Great Northern Terrace Design & Print Centre – which

serves business and personal customers.

The frontage of Ruddock's store benefited from a complete makeover late last year, when twenty-eight layers of paint were removed from some of the detail and analysis showed that the colours chosen closely matched the early nineteenth century original.

A new "old-style" shopfront was installed, blending with the architecture of the upper storeys of the Grade Two-listed building. The facelift followed hot on the heels of the City of Lincoln Council's revamp of the area, made possible with the assistance of National Lottery funding. And, to top things off, the shop also got a refit.

Managing director Henry Ruddock believes that keeping up-to-date is essential in today's fast-changing and uncertain environment.

"You have to take a longer term view and not be frightened off by the recession. Businesses have to find ways of surviving and responding to the prevailing circumstances, both economic and technological," he said.

An example of where Ruddocks Design & Print has done just that is by splashing out on Kodak equipment which allows customers to upload their own files and proof their own documents, ready for printing.

Last year also saw the fiftieth anniversary of Lincoln jeweller and clock specialist Eric A Bird in St Mary's Street. The business was founded by Eric Bird in 1959, with his late wife Geovanna – but today,



husband-and-wife team Steve Thompson (who took over the business he worked for when Mr Bird retired) and his wife Maria, are at the helm.

With so many jeweller's names on the High Street it is hard to stand out from the crowd, but the Thompson's feel their St Mary's Street shop is in a great position - close to the city's main taxi rank, bus stops and the railway station.

Mr Thompson said the business is traditional in its approach but also keeps a close eye on modern trends. Eric A Bird also has a website, which gives people a flavour of what is on offer.

"We are surviving through tough times by trying to offer a really, really good service to our customers. We get excellent feedback from them and they keep returning to see us," he said.

"Although we have a website, which we believe is essential in today's world, it really acts as a shopwindow for us even though people cannot shop directly online. As a jeweller's we believe that people really like to come in and see and touch products."