



NEWS RELEASE

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World Class Stratford survey highlights positive attitudes among local business community

Businesses in Stratford are taking a generally positive view of the economic outlook for the town, with many planning to increase the number of permanent staff they employ over the next 12 months and a third reporting increased turnover, despite the impact of the wettest summer on record.

The findings are contained in a new report commissioned by World Class Stratford (WCS) to establish performance indicators and attitudes within the local business community. This forms part of a reporting process to Advantage West Midlands, the Regional Development Agency which has provided £5 million funding for Phase One of the World Class Stratford project.

The report, carried out for WCS by the Stratford-upon-Avon Town Management Partnership, is based on responses from 249 town centre businesses during July and August. The majority of respondents were retailers (63%) but other contributors included offices, pubs, restaurants, hotels and the Royal Shakespeare Company.

Almost a quarter of respondents (24%) say they are planning to increase the number of permanent staff they employ over the next 12 months, while only six per cent are thinking of reducing their headcount.

Based on 2006/7 figures, a third of businesses (33%) reported an increase in their turnover, one in five (22%) reported no change, while a similar percentage (22%) had experienced a decline in overall income. Overall, despite the record breaking rainfall experienced over the summer, the outlook expressed by businesses was one of optimism for the future.

In terms of specific World Class Stratford initiatives, of those who commented, more than half (51%) believe that improvements planned for the Waterside area will encourage visitors to the town and contribute to improved business.

“As part of our funding agreement with Advantage West Midlands, World Class Stratford provides data on the anticipated impact of proposed development on the local economy. The findings of this survey will act as a benchmark against which we can compare the future benefit of World Class Stratford projects to the business

community,” said Paul Ogden, project leader for World Class Stratford at Stratford District Council

“For many businesses July and August were difficult months, for obvious reasons, so it is encouraging that a high proportion were able to take a positive view of the situation,” he added.

Among other findings of the study, strong support was expressed for the concept of pedestrianisation, with 43 businesses in favour of the idea and only nine opposing it. Bridge Street, High Street and Sheep Street were the most frequently nominated roads for closure, or partial closure to traffic.

A related issue that generated a high degree of feedback and comment was car parking strategy and the town’s Park & Ride service, both of which are subjects that are currently being considered jointly by Stratford District Council and Warwickshire County Council.

More businesses mentioned the need for street improvements and public toilets than they did concern for more potentially serious issues, such as crime.

“It is very clear from the results of this study that the vast majority of the people who live and work in Stratford-upon-Avon, care about their town. 95% of the businesses that took part went on to add their own suggestions as to how to improve the town,” explained Andrew Cooper from the Stratford-Upon-Avon Town Management Partnership.

“All of them felt passionately about Stratford-upon-Avon because they like the town and want to make sure it succeeds and prospers. Many saw the obvious correlation of a well-run and managed town to their own business thriving,” he said.

Supporting this view of professional and civic pride was the fact that almost half of businesses (49%) had carried out improvements to their premises during 2006-07 and 55% were planning to do so over the next twelve months.

The findings of the World Class Stratford *Town Centre Business Survey* will be available for viewing and download at www.worldclassstratford.net by the end of September.

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About World Class Stratford

The World Class Stratford vision comprises:

- Facilitating the development of Stratford as a centre of excellence for a range of functions, including education, culture, leisure and tourism
- Ensuring Stratford remains as one of the country’s pre-eminent cultural destinations by improving the quality and variety of the visitor experience to world-class standards
- Ensuring that Stratford meets the challenge to be the most significant and rewarding place for experiencing Shakespeare’s legacy and genius

- Affirming the perception of Stratford's unique qualities and attractiveness by seeking to achieve World Heritage Site status
- Improving the ways Stratford's historical, architectural and landscape heritage is conserved, interpreted and presented
- Identifying and maintaining a strong sense of place and local distinctiveness in all new development
- Ensuring an adequate supply of affordable housing
- Identifying how to co-ordinate new developments and public spaces to create a distinctive whole, integrated with the existing fabric of the town
- Improving the publicly accessible areas and their connectivity within Stratford in order to enhance the visitor experience and create an environment that will support business growth and job creation
- Working with partners to improve traffic movement in and around Stratford and create an effective public transport interchange