

Regeneration News

The Community Newsletter of the Gloucester Heritage Urban Regeneration Company Ltd



Blackfriars Update

Welcome to our second special news update on Blackfriars, one of Gloucester Heritage Urban Regeneration Company's 'Magnificent Seven' sites leading the city's regeneration.

Since our first Blackfriars update in July, work has progressed well on this site, including the start of work on the North Range of the Priory and the complete demolition of the old 'Clutch Clinic'. Further archaeological surveys to record the Clutch Clinic site have taken place before construction of the Language Immersion Centre can begin.

Elsewhere at Blackfriars, Gloucester City Council has purchased three key parcels of land, thanks to funding by The South West RDA (Regional Development Agency) and mapping surveys, undertaken by local volunteers, have been carried out on redundant buildings at Ladybellegate Street. The work is being undertaken in order that this area of Blackfriars, known as The Barbican site, can be taken to the market in 2011 for a comprehensive redevelopment by private investors and developers.

Blackfriars is the critical link between the City and the Docks. Located between the River Severn, Westgate Street, Southgate Street and Commercial Road.

Blackfriars has eight of Gloucester's 33 ancient monuments within it. It has 20 out of the city's 490 listed buildings and seven of the 36 buildings on the 'At Risk' register.

It has taken four years and many public consultations for the GHURC and its partners to finalise plans for the area's regeneration. In 2009 the masterplan was agreed and work began in June 2010.



Celebrating our heritage

During the summer of 2010, a fortnight-long extravaganza of heritage events were held in Gloucester. English Heritage threw open the doors of Blackfriars Priory and Gloucester's Heritage Service was on hand to show how paper is made and encourage visitors to copy the beautiful, illuminated writing of Monks living at the priory more than 800 years ago.



Building on an archaeologically sensitive site

Archaeological investigations on the former Clutch Clinic site have revealed part of a thirteenth century tiled floor which once belonged to the chapterhouse of Blackfriars Priory. Given their age, the tiles are in remarkably good condition and will be left under the floor of the new Language Immersion Centre, which will be built on the site.

Whilst building on an archaeologically-sensitive site is always challenging, over the last two decades a huge amount of knowledge has been amassed as an increasing number of historic cities across the UK have undergone successful regeneration by developers, many of which faced tough archaeological challenges.

The site for the new language immersion centre was known to be archaeologically sensitive, and parts of it were designated as an ancient monument. Initial archaeological evaluations established the depth of the important remains, and that information was taken into account when the new building was being designed .

Since then, a comprehensive archaeological dig has taken place, which recorded and removed all the buried material down to the 'post medieval' level. It also recorded the walls and foundations remaining within the site as most of the buildings on the site had reused the foundations laid for earlier buildings. The new language centre will be the first building on the site to use piled foundations, which will go through the archaeology down to the solid gravel and rock layers below. Everyone wants to destroy as little of the remaining archaeology as possible in the process, so the position of the piles has been carefully planned to minimise the damage. An archaeologist will be on site throughout the piling process, and a technique will be used that will cause as little damage as possible; both to the archaeology and the listed buildings of the Priory that stand adjacent.

Blackfriars regeneration

Total estimated investment:
£135million

- 1,500sqm language teaching centre
- new concert hall for Gloucester
- new 150-bed 4-star hotel
- 4,000 square metres of retail; 5,000 square metres of bars/restaurants
- 300 new homes
- 2 historical complexes of ancient buildings restored and reused
- 18,000sqm offices
- 1,500 new jobs
- eco sculpture park

Conservationists take in Blackfriars Priory

The AGM of the South West branch of the Institute of Historic Building Conservation was held in Gloucester and members were treated to a tour around Blackfriars by the GRURC. IHBC Chair, Jo Evans, expressed her surprise at the scale of the regeneration work needed on such an historic city but added: "It was beneficial to see it at this stage where a lot had been achieved and some projects were still on-going"

Without repeating ourselves

The South West Regional Development Agency (RDA), has submitted an application to Gloucester City Council for the demolition of the empty building on the corner of Commercial Road and Ladybellegate Street, formerly E & J Printer's, and a redundant BT Repeater Station further up Ladybellegate Street – the ground floor of which had been used by the City as a museum store. Demolition of these two buildings, on a site known as The Barbican, will enable the South West RDA to prepare the plot for sale to developers.

Gloucester Heritage Service once again invited local people to record these two buildings. Volunteers received training in surveying, photography, building recording, interpretation and report writing.

Whilst the buildings are certainly not 'old' in relation to other historic buildings around the City, every building has a history and the city aims to record as much as possible for future generations.

Both buildings lie within the old Roman City and are within the Conservation Area.

The BT Repeater station on Ladybellegate Street is one of many across the UK which has been made redundant by modern technology. Telephone calls used to be transmitted via copper cables, but over too long a length the power of the transmitted signal diminishes until ambient noise swamps the signal altogether. Repeater stations were built to re-amplify fading messages. As BT replaces copper cables with fibre optics, repeater stations are no longer required.



E & J Printers Building (above and below)

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Bringing Blackfriars 'back to life'.

Gloucester City Council is working with English Heritage, owner of Blackfriars Priory, on the preparation of a business plan for the operation of the North Range as a public entertainment space.

English Heritage and SWRDA have allocated £800,000 to invest in new lighting, heating and toilets to serve the users of the Priory as a whole and work to install these has begun. The North Range Priory will operate as a concert hall and a venue for exhibitions and conferences. Gloucester City Council's role will also include opening the Priory to visitors interested in its past history.

From the Severn to the City

The entire Blackfriars area spreads across 5 acres, bordered by the River Severn, Westgate Street, Southgate Street and Commercial Road and has some of the best, and worst, examples of Gloucester's history lying within it.

The historic, but largely hidden, Fleece Hotel on Westgate Street and Gloucester Prison (on the site of the former Gloucester Castle) are two notable buildings. Others are known more for their community function: The 1960s County Council offices; The BT building; an NCP car park. Between the River Severn and the new South West Bypass, lies Castlemeads, also part of the area known as Greater Blackfriars.

The Masterplan

Blackfriars Masterplan is split into two phases:

Phase 1

- Construction of a Languages Immersion Centre, on the site of an old garage (often referred to as the Clutch Clinic), next to the Priory's scriptorium. This land is owned by Gloucestershire County Council which secured £5 million from the Government for the project. The building will be the first of its kind in the country and will include facilities for use by visitors to the Priory. The new centre is scheduled to open by January 2012
- Creating a new public space and concert hall in the North Range at the heart of a new performing arts centre which has already drawn large amounts of interest. Work on this is well under way
- Making the South Range of the Priory accessible to all visitors



Phase 2

- Redevelopment of one of the unsurfaced car parking areas behind the prison (called the Barbican site) as a 4-star 150-bed hotel and multi-storey car park
- Refurbishment of Longsmith Street Car Park
- The redevelopment and re-use of The Fleece Inn as housing, hotel, cafes and shops
- Rebuilding of the County Council Offices
- Creation of a new urban Blackfriars Square adjacent to the Priory
- Development of an eco sculpture park on Alney Island – opposite Gloucester Prison



About Gloucester Heritage Urban Regeneration Company (GHURC) Ltd

The entire GHURC area includes 33 ancient monuments, 490 listed buildings, including 37 Grade 1 and 51 Grade II* listed and 36 buildings on the 'At Risk' register. A quarter of the Gloucester Heritage URC area, 88 hectares, is covered by conservation area designations. The GHURC 10-year plan is based on the regeneration of seven key sites within the City centre. Nicknamed the 'Magnificent Seven', these are: Gloucester Docks, Gloucester Quays, The Railway Triangle, King's Square, Greyfriars, Blackfriars/Westgate Quay and The Canal Corridor. Alongside these projects is an integrated public realm and public art linking together key developments. www.gloucesterurc.co.uk