



Peterborough's Queensgate shopping centre celebrates its 40th anniversary

Peterborough's Queensgate Shopping Centre has been at the heart of the city's retail life for four decades.

By Paul Grinnell

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And today, the centre, which boasts 804,000 square feet of retail space that is home to more than 100 retailers of various shapes, sizes and offerings, celebrates its 40th anniversary.

It will mark the occasion with a year of festivities that begin today with a birthday party complete with free birthday cake for 500 visitors, retailer offers and a historic display of Queensgate through the years.

On Saturday, there will be a Time Travelling Disco plus a Scavenger Hunt with 40 prizes for 40 lucky winners.

Queensgate threw open its doors to shoppers on March 9, 1982, and was given a Royal seal of approval on November 18 that year when Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands was invited to officially open the centre that from securing planning approval had taken six years to complete.

Since then many thousands of shoppers of various generations from Peterborough and beyond have passed through the centre to shop, meet family and friends, to enjoy special occasions or to just pass the time of day.

They will have seen many changes from fountains located under the escalators in North and Central Square, which were removed in 2007, to the new regulations in the early 2000s that enforced a ban on smoking indoors.

The architecture and interior design was continually modernised and today the Queensgate now wears a quite different look since its opening in the early 80s.

It is 40 years in which many retailers and brands have come and gone or perhaps moved into a larger unit within the centre.

Among the other early retailers and restaurants, stand out names include British Home Stores, Laskys, Boots, C&A, Littlewoods, Waitrose and Maxine's, Papillon, The Coffee Mill and Reflections and John Lewis.

In 2011, a £20 million revamp heralded the arrival of popular discount retailer [Primark](#) and a refurbishment of the car parks. Five years later saw the collapse of BHS, which had occupied a prominent position across two floors in the Queensgate.

But none have left quite such a mark as the department store chain John Lewis, which had been the centre's anchor store since its very first day.

That was until last year, when, at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic and struggling with rapidly changing trends in retail, [John Lewis announced](#) it would leave its four storey home in the Queensgate with the loss of 318 jobs.

But the secret of the centre's success seems to have been its ability to evolve as retailers have moved on.

Now the centre houses more than 100 retailers, with big name and dominant brands, such as M&S, H&M, Primark, Pandora, LUSH Cosmetics, Hotel Chocolat, Superdry, River Island, schuh, New Look, Turtle Bay and Costa Coffee.

In addition, the centre has overseen the continued expansion of its hub of independent businesses, which are found predominantly in the Westgate Arcade, which celebrated its 90th year in 2018, and features small, privately owned boutiques offering fashion, jewellery, food, beauty and more.

But the Queensgate has always been more than just a retail destination and over the four decades has worked to establish its presence further by hosting a number of community-focused events, from the December Festive Fiestas to Half Term scavenger hunts and exhibitions, shooting celeb-fronted fashion campaigns, as well as winning home awards for everything from customer parking to corporate social responsibility.

But as it celebrates its 40th anniversary, Queensgate and its owners Invesco Real Estate and managers, Cushman & Wakefield still have big plans for the future.

Nearing completion is a £60 million extension that will see the opening of a 10-screen IMAX cinema, operated by [Empire Cinemas](#), in a 77,000 square feet expansion that will the opening of new restaurants, stores and leisure facilities, together creating 200 jobs.

Peterborough MP [Paul Bristow](#) said: "The Queensgate Shopping Centre is a flagship for the city and I'm sure, that although shopping habits are changing, with the right strategy, it will continue for many more years.

"It helps bring people into Peterborough because they want to come here to shop."

Tom Hennessy, chief executive of [Opportunity Peterborough](#), said: "Queensgate turning 40 is a huge milestone for the centre itself, and Peterborough.

"Queensgate made Peterborough a far more prominent economic centre, when it opened it was the largest in Europe, and just one year later was voted the best in Europe by the International Council of Shopping Centers.

"Its varied retail offer has driven up leisure tourism, footfall, and spend within the city, on top of creating thousands of jobs over its 40 years.

He added: "It's an iconic attraction that pulls in visitors from across the region. With the new cinema opening soon too, Queensgate will play an even more pivotal role in the city centre's post-Covid recovery."

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