

DESTINATION CHESTERFIELD

I don't know whether I've ever mentioned my background in S40 Local, but I'm not Chesterfield born and bred, I actually moved here from Nottingham after I got married. Most of my friends from Nottingham thought I was mad - what do you want to move there for!? Was the typical response. However, 8 years on and they've changed their tune.

And I think that's what Destination Chesterfield needs to do, it needs to help us, the people who live here, change our tune about Chesterfield - to start singing it's praises and starting telling ourselves and people from outside what a great place it is - for living working and importantly for our future, for investing.

Those same friends are now envious that after work or school in 10 minutes we can be walking along Curbar Edge (in the summer of course), at a weekend can go for lunch in Bakewell, pop across to Baslow and walk through Chatsworth Estate or I can do some great mountain bike rides from the house! We can shop locally on Chatsworth Road where we can get all the things that these trendy little boutiques are selling in Nottingham and we can have a spot of lunch or a coffee in a deli or restaurant - all on our doorstep.

Of course, you and I know all this, but we need people from outside the area to start recognising it too.

So, back to Destination Chesterfield. Something you might not know ... this year I signed up to be Chesterfield Champion. "What's that then?" I hear you ask, if you visit www.chesterfieldchampions.co.uk it will tell you:

"The Chesterfield Champions scheme is a powerful network helping to drive the development of our economy, shape our future and showcase all that is good about us.

It's a direct statement of belief from organisations about their commitment

to Chesterfield and its successful future. It is also about providing organisations with access to a range of services and support that will have a direct impact on their success as well as increasing Chesterfield's profile."

I like to think of it more simply. It's a bunch of local people who own and run businesses in the area that care about our town and want to see it maintain it's heritage, improve as a destination for business, retail, visitors and for people looking for a great place to live. And it's Destination Chesterfield's job to raise the profile of our town and ensure it has a great future.

18 months ago a project kicked off, managed by 'Thinking Places' to look at how Chesterfield can raise it's game. From this project the

thinkingplace

"thinkingplace is a company that specialises in working exclusively with places, helping to improve their competitiveness, image, performance and profile."

Champions scheme was born, and there's now funding in place and a manager appointed to move it forward and promote the good things that happen in Chesterfield. The new manager is Dominic Stevens, he's only been in post for a few weeks but I sat down with him in Mes Amis for a quick coffee and to see if we could find out a little bit more.

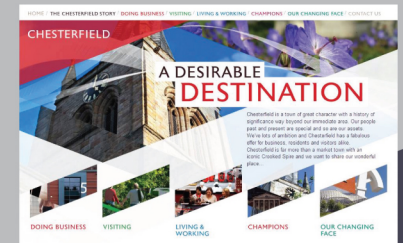
"Previously a Derbyshire resident living in Matlock, a tourism hotspot, I'm looking to move my family back to Chesterfield after working in a very similar role in Gloucester. That role, with mix of private and public funding, was responsible for marketing and promoting Gloucester as a destination; based on similar model used in Derby and also Hull."

As Dominic pointed out "Gloucester and Chesterfield are very similar in many ways, the size of population, also the size and history of town and proximity to great open spaces, Peak District for us and Cotswolds, Forest of Dean, and Malvern Hills for Gloucester."

In Dominic's view "To work, destination projects need physical changes - which are happening in Chesterfield, we've seen new developments including the football stadium, Casa hotel, planned waterside developments along the A61 corridor, even the blue deer developments on Chatsworth Road (see page 15). These need to work alongside a programme to market the destination. Places consists of a number of elements which when combined produce a great destination. We need to consider; the people who live here, the people who commute - both to and from Chesterfield, the business owners, potential investors and agents, visitors to the town and tourists and not forgetting our media image and how we're marketed".

I wanted to understand where the project is now and what happens next - but unfortunately until it's all signed off by the project board it's under wraps for now. Who's on the project board, anyone we know I hear you ask? It's a well healed and influential collection of local leaders, Peter Swallow (Urbo Developments), Huw Bowen (Chief Exec of Chesterfield Borough Council), Ray Russell (Councillor and leader of Chesterfield Borough Council), Dawn Sweeny (Derbyshire Times), Judith McCarthy (Chesterfield College) and George Cowcher (Derbyshire and Nottingham Chamber of Commerce).

As a business owner, resident and now a Champion I'm going to keep close tabs on this project and I promise to keep you posted of events. S40 Local wish Dominic every success with the role and thank him for taking time out to talk to us.



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