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The White City wonder awaits

ON 30 October 2008 the nation's capital will receive a massive retail facelift with the opening of Westfield London. Set to become the UK's third largest shopping centre, the development is remarkable on many fronts — not least that it has been built just three miles from Oxford Street, London's retail epicentre. At a time when much of the news coming out of the industry is negative, the new White City centre is a welcome spark of excitement and anticipation.

Westfield London is the latest mammoth project from The Westfield Group, a retail property business whose shopping centres are valued globally in the region of \$63 billion. With this kind of pedigree it is little surprise that the group's vision for the centre is to create nothing less than a new retail icon for the capital.

It might also explain the confidence necessary to invest more than £1.6 billion to realise this vision in a city not exactly starved of shopping alternatives. The White City development needs to dazzle in order to compete with its long-established competitor destinations, a fact acknowledged by the scale and specification to which it is being built. With 265 top name retailers, more than 40 different places to eat, a 16-screen cinema, a gymnasium, an holistic spa and a huge glass-covered events space, Westfield London is a both a beauty and a beast.

Ahead of the opening, Westfield is making serious investments in local infrastructure and amenities — pouring £170 million into the construction of new and improved transport links. The company is also forming multiple partnerships with local government groups and is convincing in its oft-repeated assertion that the centre will act as a catalyst for further regeneration of the White City area. Certainly the 7,000 or more new jobs Westfield London is creating would seem to justify such claims.

While the majority of these 7,000 will pursue careers within the enormous retail population of Westfield London, ensuring the centre itself operates smoothly is also going to require the recruitment of a small army of employees. Around 120 people will manage the daily running of the centre, including concierge and maintenance personnel. In addition, Westfield will be recruiting specialist contractors

Combining high street favourites with high-end luxury, the huge new Westfield London shopping centre will change the face of retailing in the capital — creating 7,000 new jobs in the process

to undertake the cleaning, security and car park management at the centre which will take the total to more than 400.

With around 20 million shoppers expected through the doors in the first year alone, the pressure will be on Westfield's staff to deliver a shopping experience commensurate with the grand surroundings. As Paul Buttigieg, centre manager of Westfield London, asserts: "The people employed at Westfield London will be vital in delivering the innovative new services and hospitality that we will provide."

The retail tenants will range from high street favourites to high-end luxury names, with five major brands as anchor tenants: Marks & Spencer, House of Fraser, Debenhams, Next and Waitrose — each of whom is set to open sizeable stores at Westfield. Indeed, M&S has opted to take a huge 108,000sq ft space

'If the reality equals the designers' and developers' vision, Westfield London is going to be simply stunning'

over three levels, located in the north-east corner of the scheme. The lowest level will house a food hall with direct car park access.

The other levels will be dedicated to fashion and homeware ranges as well as hospitality including an M&S Café, a "Hot Food to Go" section and a deli bar. There will also be an M&S Kitchen situated in the Mall. According to M&S the store will offer an extensive array of fashion across womenswear, including per una, Limited Collection and Autograph ranges. Menswear will boast the Autograph range, as well as a wide selection of tailoring. Childrenswear, lingerie, and a selection of accessories will also be available.

It's no small task transforming the huge interior shell into a

fully functional retail extravaganza in the three short months before the opening but M&S seems to be taking it in its stride:

"While a store and project of this scale offers many challenges," the company says, "we are used to working on flagship stores of a similar scale. We only recently opened a new store in Colliers Wood which trades on a very similar square footage to Westfield."

The process of recruiting for M&S's enormous retail expanse is just kicking into gear, with between 400 and 450 jobs being created, which will be a mixture of full and part-time positions. That's an awful lot of people for one store but then it's an awfully big store.

Clem Constantine, director of property and store development at M&S, explains why the company chose such a major development: "We are constantly striving to shape our store locations to meet the changing needs of our customers so we are delighted that M&S will be one of the anchor stores at The White City Development, which will be one of the leading retail schemes in the UK. The new store will provide our customers with an inspirational shopping experience and a great alternative to our surrounding offer in the West End and the outer M25."

The other anchor tenants are equally enthusiastic about the scheme. Debenhams chief executive Rob Templeman reflects: "We are looking forward to the opening of our new flagship store in Westfield London later this year which will offer customers a new and exciting shopping experience at Debenhams."

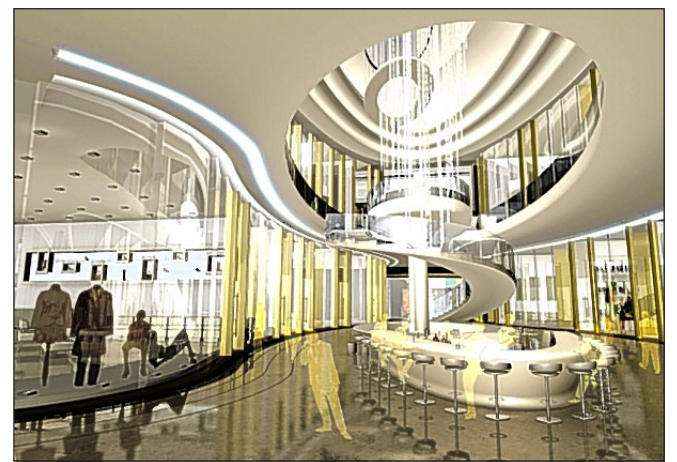
Similarly, Nigel Keen, Waitrose director of development, enthuses: "The Westfield Centre is undoubtedly one of the most exciting and important retail developments and we are looking forward with great anticipation to being part of it." Next declares itself "thrilled to be involved in this premium shopping destination" and Matt Chambers, House of Fraser's brand director, completes the chorus of approval, saying: "We are very excited by the opportunities presented by our new store in Westfield London — in par-

ticular how it will complement the investment we continue to make in our flagship Oxford street store."

If the reality equals the designers' and developers' vision, Westfield London is going to be simply stunning. It's a bold fusion of airy, detail-conscious design, fantastic retail names and more than a touch of Bond Street glamour. And, of course, for 7,000 people it's going to be a pretty amazing place to work.



Classy glass: a CGI impression of Westfield London's vast, covered interior



Swirling vision: The Village will house many leading luxury brands

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