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UCLan – new space for Preston



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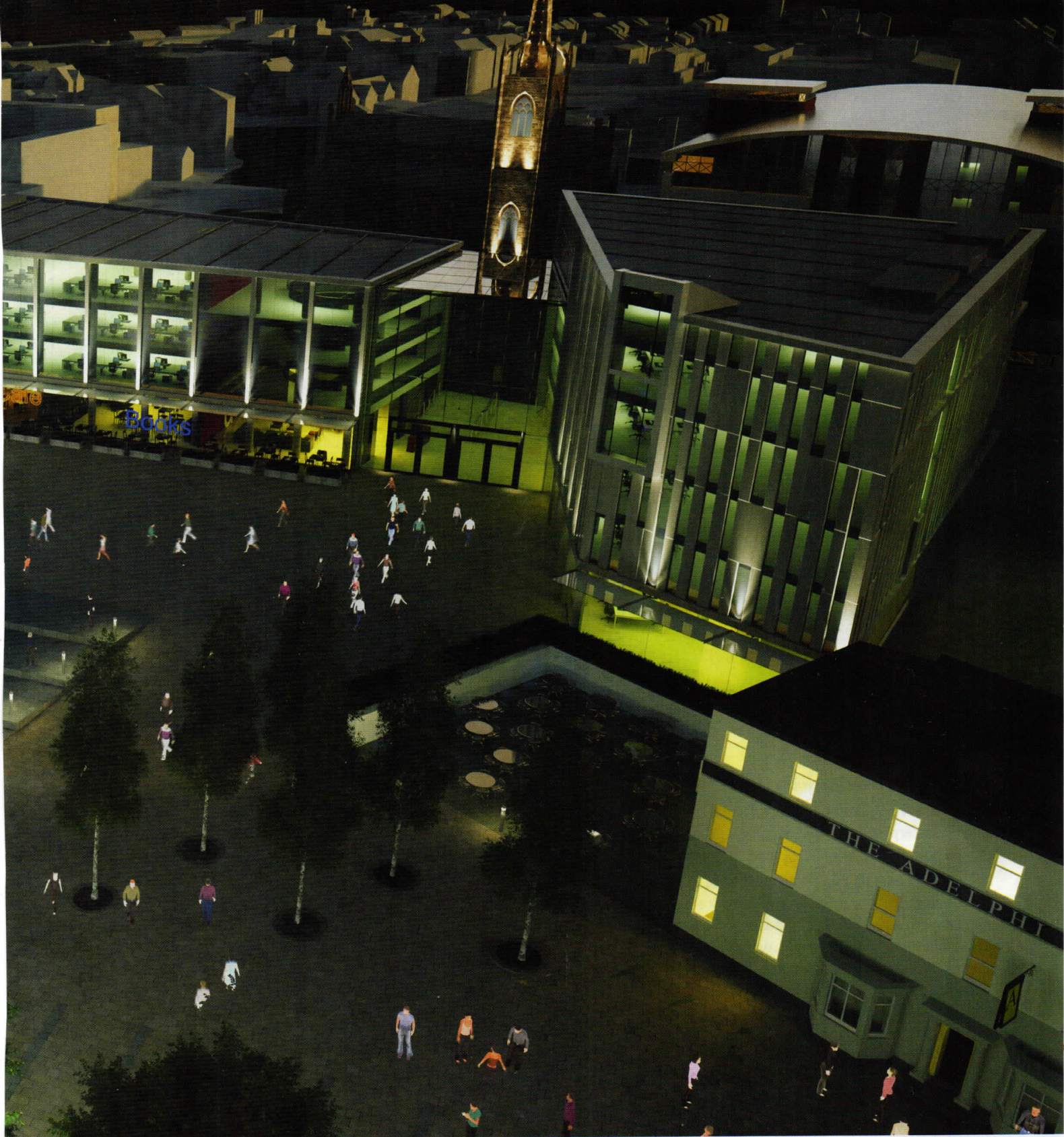
UCLan Vice
Chancellor
Mike Thomas

UCLan

A Changing University

Andrew Harris reports on good news for Preston, Lancashire and the North West

The University of Central Lancashire – better known as UCLan – is unusual because it is 3-dimensional; an academic body which is increasingly a catalyst for translating study and research into successful professional and business activity whilst providing space, facilities and wealth for its host – the City of Preston. It has just announced that it will invest £200 million to dramatically enhance all



three roles over the next 10-years.

UCLan can trace its roots back to 1828 when it was founded as the Institution for the Diffusion of Knowledge. Since then it has gone from strength to strength and became one of the new wave of universities in 1992. By 2015 it was the largest university in Lancashire with about 36,000 students – including about 4,500 post graduates - the 3rd largest in the North West and UCLan is the 9th

largest of more than 100 throughout the country for training undergraduates. Of course size isn't everything, so UCLan can also celebrate being ranked in the top 3.8% of all worldwide universities by the Centre for World University Rankings in 2015. So let us now go back to the future.

Vice Chancellor Mike Thomas explains "There are three requirements for a university to succeed; income & expenditure, town & gown and land

– and UCLan has all three of these". Professor Thomas continues "Better facilities will enable UCLan to meet the rising expectations of students who can be local, from elsewhere in the UK or from the 125 countries in our partnership network. UCLan will be world class and focus on skills and employability. Lecture theatres will feature less in the future as we move from cellular to open plan spaces. Our campus masterplan will equip us for



the future and provide major benefits for Preston.”

My 1,000 words cannot do justice to a big and detailed masterplan but three ‘flagship’ projects illustrate how all the roles of UCLan will benefit –

- The existing Adelphi gyratory system at the heart of the university will be replaced by a new and attractive pedestrian Square which will be a major feature. This will be the size of London’s Trafalgar Square providing an attractive hub to serve the City and the University. It will streamline traffic flows and be available for community and charity events. A design competition is being organised with help from the Royal Institute of British Architects but picture one shows how the Square might look in the evening. It is a design requirement that it must serve the people of Preston to blend the needs of the City and the University and bring them together. To clear the way for this new square the cellular and obsolete Fylde Building in picture two - not an example of architectural imagination – has already been demolished.

- Work will start shortly on a new Engineering Innovation Centre costing more than £30 million and using much of the car park in front of the Foster Building. This is due to open in early 2018 and lead to an increase of 500 trained engineering graduates each year. This will be an internationally competitive facility which will exploit UCLan’s location at the centre of one of the biggest and best areas of the UK for engineering and manufacturing.

This sector is disadvantaged by a major skills gap which the new Centre can help to remedy. To achieve the number of trained people needed it is vital that female undergraduates are attracted to the profession of engineering which must be recognised as ‘more cerebral than grease monkey’. It is hoped that the new Centre will help emerging firms and industrial links. UCLan already does well for ‘student spin-off’ when academic concepts become practical business ideas. New policy development and planning will underpin the curriculum. Picture three is a computer depiction of the rear of the new building; the front elevation is on the left of picture one. This modern and attractive design epitomises how UCLan’s sees the future of engineering.

- Replacing the Fylde Building on the north side of the new Square will be a new building to accommodate Student Services. Retail uses such as a café and book shop may feature at street level and picture four looks across a schematic design for the new square to show how the new building might look. This attractive building will – with the new Square and Engineering Innovation Centre – create a new centre and hub for the university. Emanating outwards clockwise from this hub will be the Harris, Media, Library and Harrington Zones; each with a distinctive character to be enhanced by the all the works contained in the Masterplan.

These three projects will provide a new and exciting public space for Preston, achieve new





Picture 3





ways of supporting the engineering sector and improve facilities for student services to meet greater expectations in the future. Environmental benefits will result from the university inverting itself by moving car parking from the centre to the periphery for which purpose the 10-acre Goss site has been acquired. New tree-lined links will connect car parks to the four zones and the new Square.

UCLan is adapting to new trends in higher education in other ways. Professor Thomas envisages more one-to-one contact so that students are engaged with rather than talked at. Peripatetic lecturers will travel from place to place rather than expect students to always travel to them. The future will see more transfers from one subject to another. Chief Operating Officer Michael Ahern emphasises that UCLan is a place for people and that “the main purpose of the new Square is to make people feel welcome”. The new facilities and new thinking are linked.

Many people in Preston and beyond will assess the new developments according to how they are affected



by them. The campaign for Preston to achieve City Status – led by your columnist – revealed many ambitions for the (then) Borough which have not yet been fully realised. Strategic successes do not always trickle down to benefit everyone but greater interaction with local employers, encouragement and help for potential entrepreneurs, an increasing direct input to the local economy and a splendid new pedestrian Square are all new and tangible wins which will give Preston

more of the status and facilities of the City it became. The motto of UCLan is ‘Ex solo ad solem’ which means ‘From the Ground to the Sun’; now THAT is ambition!

Andrew Harris ([mail@andrewharris.co.uk](mailto:andrewharris.co.uk)) was chief executive of the Preston Partnership 1994-2000.

