

Manchester Central, formerly GMEX and MICC, offers event space, a concert venue and more to rival the country's best conference centres.

The vaulted arches of what was originally Manchester's Central railway station have been a much-loved feature of the city's skyline for over 150 years. In 2008, they are now just one part of the Manchester Central Convention Complex, a collection of outstanding conference and exhibition facilities that has well and truly put Manchester on the international business tourism map.

Regenerating Manchester

This Manchester success story goes back to 1986 with the conversion of the city's Victorian listed railway station into a 10,500 sq m exhibition space, the Greater Manchester Exhibition & Events Centre, one of the first urban regeneration projects in the country. Over its lifetime GMEX, as it became known, played host to numerous national trade and public exhibitions and international events including a major role in Manchester's 2002 Commonwealth Games.

The opening in 2001 of the adjacent Manchester International Convention Centre was when Manchester's business tourism facilities moved up a level right at the heart of the city centre in an area now known as Petersfield. With new and refurbished hotels nearby and Manchester's magnificent international concert venue, The Bridgewater Hall, a concentration of conference and exhibition venues has been created that is unique in the UK.

Competing with the best

Prominent national and international specialist conferences, particularly in the health sector, have come to see the city as the ideal location to host their events and Manchester now rivals traditional convention cities such as Brighton, Bournemouth, Birmingham and Harrogate in attracting high-profile events that bring maximum economic benefit to the city region.

Such benefits prompted a major rethink of the way that the two venues and the Petersfield area as a whole are marketed. It has become clear that Manchester's business tourism offerings should be seen as one major asset to the city; hence the re-branding of the two venues as Manchester Central in 2007.

Coming together as Manchester Central

The full name of the facilities is the Manchester Central Convention Complex, embracing everything that the Petersfield area can provide in business tourism terms, but the use of the abbreviated Manchester Central is an acknowledgment of the special place in the Manchester psyche that this historic city landmark holds.

Labour and Conservatives choose Manchester

Despite its success in attracting events from 2001 onwards, the rest of the UK really woke up to what Manchester Central could offer when it hosted the 2006 Annual Labour Party Conference, the first time a major UK political conference had been held in a city centre location. The event was so successful that the Labour Party is returning to Manchester this year and again in 2010, with an estimated economic impact for the city region of £30m. This figure is set to rise to £60m following the announcement that the Conservative Party are also holding their Annual Party Conferences in Manchester in 2009 and 2011.

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