

NORFOLK

A car-sharing campaign for Christmas

Shoppers are being given the chance to win a pre-Christmas shopping spree and find out about car-sharing opportunities in their area as part of a new campaign launched this week.

Norfolk County Council's 'Save your Pennies for Prezies' campaign has been designed to encourage people to consider sharing their car journeys, particularly over the festive season when more people are expected to travel.

As part of the scheme, the council has teamed up with the Chapelfield shopping centre in Norwich to give people the chance to win £250 towards their Christmas shopping if they register their interest in car sharing.

People who register before Sunday, November 15, will be automatically entered into a prize draw to win the Chapelfield gift card.

Stevie Spencer, smarter travel choices officer at County Hall, said: "Car sharing can really help with cutting the cost of travel, allowing you to spend that money on other things over the festive period."

"Not only that but with more people sharing their journeys there will be less congestion, and hopefully it will ease the pressure on parking in the city centre."

■ To register your interest or find out more about car sharing, go to www.carsharenorfolk.com.

NORWICH

Excitement as new youth venue is declared 'Open'

Pictures: SIMON FINLAY

By SAM EMANUEL

A new venue for young people in Norwich received the backing of a government minister as it was officially opened yesterday.

The Open youth venue at Bank Plain has been transformed from a 19th-century bank into the country's first under-18s nightclub, which has a capacity of 1,100, a climbing wall and a media centre with free use of the internet.

The centre also boasts a dance studio, a games area, a reading area, a recording studio and a café. In addition, a skate park has been put up in the building for young people to use during half-term.

Youngsters aged 13 to 25 can also get advice and guidance about a range of issues, including career, health and substance misuse advice.

Dawn Primarolo, the minister for children and young people, officially opened the £12.5m venue, which has received funding from a range of sources.

It is the first of the government's 'myplace' venues, which aim to deliver world-class facilities to young



HAVING FUN: Skateboarding inside the Open venue.

people, to open in the country.

She said: "It is just so fantastic to be here in this iconic state-of-the-art facility. If you listen to young people and empower them to act on their hopes and aspirations, what you end up with is something like this that's needed and wanted, and is a true investment for young people."

"Now we have to support others in different parts of the country who are on the same journey."

Project director Russ Dacre, the son of Christian businessman Graham Dacre, who has spent millions of his own money on the scheme, said: "This really is a world-class facility for young people. It will be open from 8am to 10.30pm from Monday to Friday, 9am until 11pm on Saturday and 10am until 4pm on Sunday, and is a safe, healthy and fresh environment."

The centre currently employs 25 staff, with 50 volunteers joining in the last two months, and is already going down a storm with youngsters, who are keen to make the most of its facilities.

Dee Stroud, a 13-year-old Hellesdon High School pupil, from Norwich, who was at the centre with her friend Alysha Leverett, 13, also of Hellesdon High, said they had been there almost every day over half-term, taking part in various workshops including



UNDER WAY: Minister Dawn Primarolo joins youngsters on the decks for a DJ session at the official opening of the Open venue.

photography, dance and graffiti.

"It's great because it's something to do," she said. "Otherwise we would just be hanging around where we live, watching movies and stuff, and it would be boring. People aren't put off by the no alcohol or drugs rules, because there is just so much to do here. They have under-18 club nights

every week too."

The reworking of the building was the product of work by Norwich-based architects Hudson and dozens of young people who they consulted, and combines the ornate and impressive bank building with a modern and colourful interior.

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Saturday

Magazine

BRECKLAND

Authority plans for no rise in council tax

Council chiefs in Breckland have agreed to aim for no rise in their council tax charge next year.

They say it would yet again make Breckland the cheapest authority in the country when it comes to what residents pay in council tax.

But it means the possibility of charging for car parking in the district has been increased and staff at the authority have the task of cutting 10pc off their budgets.

It comes as income made by the council from people developing property and selling homes has dropped by £236,000 because of less work done by the planning department and lower land charges income, according to the report to yesterday's Breckland cabinet meeting.

It said recycling credits had also been reduced by £120,000 and what the council makes on cash investments is expected to plummet from 3.9pc this year to 1.73pc in 2010/11.

However, savings of £355,000 had been made through how the council runs the concessionary bus fare scheme and a total saving of £1.4m was expected to be made through efficiency savings.

The report adds: "It is an observation of our budget and of our medium-term financial strategy that there remains an opportunity to consider the introduction of charging for off-street car parking."

Mark Finch, head of finance, told the cabinet: "The key is the zero per cent increase in council tax which

will keep us as the lowest council tax in a district in the UK.

"The budget is for consultation and remains a work in progress. We have efficiency targets to meet and we aim to address those during the consultation period."

The report says the precept requirement for 2010/11 is £2.7m. Council tax for a band D property would be £64.05, as last year, and changes to fees and charges are proposed from April 2010.

Residents in Thetford, Dereham, Bawdeswell and Watton would have to pay more because they have street lighting costs to pay for on top of what everyone else pays because these are not covered in their town council precepts.