

Would a Sunderland discount card boost city centre trade?



Councillors Peter Wood and Robert Oliver are calling for an introduction of a "city card" which would give shoppers in Sunderland discounts in participating stores. Published on **Monday 25 February 2013 09:29**

A "CITY card" could breathe new life into Sunderland's struggling shopping centre.

That is the claim from some councillors who believe the scheme – tried and tested in other cities – could bring in more shoppers.

Conservatives in Wearside say a discount card, similar to those used in Manchester and Leeds, is a good way of boosting business for the retail and entertainment industry.

Councillor Peter Wood, deputy leader of Sunderland Conservatives, said: "Sunderland belongs to all of us so let's get behind our enterprising traders

and make more use of our city centre with the encouragement of a discount card.

“Discount cards have worked well in other cities and are helping city centre traders thrive as well as supporting the local economy.

“Many people living and working in Sunderland want to buy, eat and be entertained in their city but need more reason to do so.

“Along with other initiatives such as regular markets and events, a discount card could encourage people to stay local rather than travel to neighbouring cities.”

Manchester City Council currently offers a “CityCard” for people living or working in the city, offering up to 50 per cent discounts in restaurants, retail outlets and health clubs.

Leeds offers a card, along with three magazines a year, offering discounts at theatres and museums and is available for purchase from libraries and leisure centres.

The “Love Rochdale Card’ is free and includes discounts on tours of the town hall, wedding photography and automotive servicing as well as town centre shops and restaurants.

Coun Wood believes a Sunderland City discount card available for people who live or work in the city could be administered by the council or local businesses.

The card, which would be valid throughout the city, could offers discounts on retail, food outlets and entertainment. It could also include discounts at markets to support their use in the city centre.

Manchester’s card costs £55 a year, while the one in Leeds costs £7.50 a year but is free for young people. Rochdale’s card is free.

A card could also be made available as an app with offers online and emailed to users on a regular basis.

The Conservatives’ proposal also suggests corporate cards could be made available for businesses or council staff as well as fire and police personnel.

Councillor Paul Watson, leader of Sunderland City Council, said: “We continue to work closely with city centre traders and partners.

“Businesses in the city centre are clearly best placed to consider many of the measures most likely to drive further footfall. Working alongside businesses, the council’s Economic Masterplan recognises the city centre is a key driver for all the city’s prosperity.

“It is with this in mind that major infrastructure works have begun for the realignment of St Mary’s Way.

“This is as we look to the next steps for development of the former Vaux brewery site as part of a new central business district.

“It is one of the council’s priorities to attract more shoppers, businesses and visitors to all of the city, not just the city centre.”