

Capital Works!

Spotlighting the user experience

Evaluation of Arts Council England's capital investment, 2012 - 2018

User experience

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Dawn Langley, Susan Royce, Anna Dinnen
Lisa Baxter (The Experience Business)



Picture 1. Square Chapel (Lisa Baxter)



Picture 2. Seven Stories (Damien Wootten)



Picture 3. Rum Factory (Lisa Bayter)



Picture 4. Derby Museums (Derby Museums)



Picture 5. Square Chapel CGI (Square Chapel)



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Picture 7. Square Chapel (Marc Haddon)



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Spotlighting the user experience

Want your users to fall in love with your designs? Fall in love with your users.

Dana Chisnell, Co-Director of the Centre for Civic Design, USA

When I design buildings I think of the overall composition, much as the parts of a body would fit together. On top of that, I think about how people will approach that building and experience that space.

Tadao Ando, Architect



Picture 11, Seven Stories - Frozen (Damien Wootten)

Background

Improved user experience has been a driver for many of the capital projects supported by the strategic programme (it was the number one priority for small scale recipients that responded to the survey). Several have been considered in more detail and are included as case studies to gain insights into the approach and processes they have adopted. These user experience case studies are designed to inform and accompany the wider 'Capital Works' evaluation report.

In particular, we have sought out those organisations that have gone beyond the 'hygiene factor' of improved facilities, comfort and décor (that will inevitably lead to an improved visitor experience), to attain deeper, richer experiences that in some way express their brand, purpose or ethos. These are:

- > Seven Stories, The National Centre for Children's Books, Newcastle
- Square Chapel Arts Centre, Halifax
- Derby Museums, the Museum of Making
- > The Rum Factory, London
- > HOME, Manchester

The word 'user' has been chosen here to represent the diversity of citizen 'usage' of arts, cultural or heritage buildings, including experiencing or making art, socialising in the café, visiting the shop or engaging in a learning activity.

A number of themes have emerged from investigating the process and impact of these capital projects through the lens of the user experience. They fall under three broad headings:

1. Clear Experiential Intentionality

- > A deliberate focus on user experience
- Distinctive user experience goals
- Alignment of the intended experience with mission, ethos and brand
- Navigating the balance between building form and function

2. An Astute User Focus

- > In-depth user insight
- Exploration and design of the user journey
- On-going user experience research
- Co-production with users

3. Organisational Development

- > A focus on inclusivity and its implications
- Recognition of the link between delivering the right experience and the business model
- Impact of capital projects on organisational design and professional development
- Disruption of dominant models and practices

1. Experiential Intentionality

Whilst meeting the basic hygiene factors of comfort, ease and access is important to capital development, for some of the organisations featured here, these were their starting point rather than the end point. What distinguishes their approach to capital development is a move away from a pure focus on the tangibles of compliance and service design to the intangibles of how brand/mission/ethos can translate into distinctive user experiences.

Seven Stories recognised the need to get the basics right first – achieving optimal comfort, ease and access - before they could add further depth and dimension to the visitor experience. Theirs is a joyful and colourful example of how the desire to create a magical environment for families inspires a love of books, and done in a way that tangibly expresses their core purpose.

The Seven Stories visitor centre reopened in July following a three-month refurbishment which transformed the building to provide deeper and more inspiring access to our growing Collection and make the experience that we give our young visitors even more magical than before. Seven Stories website

HOME and Square Chapel worked hard to successfully translate the best of their pre-capital brand experience to the new/redeveloped venue through the careful design of vibrant social spaces for both arts and non-arts users.

Effective user experience does not simply emerge. It must be envisioned, articulated and designed for. The organisations here exemplify the importance of establishing clear, distinctive experiential goals, together with a supporting rationale for why. Not only does this ensure that everyone is on the same page, but it unequivocally places the user at the heart of the capital development project.

In the case of the Museum of Making, this experiential intentionality was co-produced with a multitude of citizen representatives to ensure that the meaning, purpose and experience of the Museum of Making was as rich, deep and relevant as possible.

The sometimes-competing demands of form (design, aesthetics) and function (usability) can bring tension into the conversation between architects and venues. Architects want to preserve the purity of the architectural idea. Venue staff want to ensure the building works for everyone who visits it. The two are not mutually exclusive. Both are important to create appealing, high-functioning places.

Square Chapel's clear user experience goals provided a valuable compass with which to navigate 'healthy and robust' conversations with the architects, and underpinned decision making so that, as much as possible, the intended brand experience was not subverted or compromised by the architect's vision.

Developing experiential intentionality can be as simple or as sophisticated as is required to support the mission, ethos or brand of an organisation. The Rum Factory for example is a studio workspace for artists that has unashamedly adopted an aesthetics-free approach. The goal here is to create a neutral, well-functioning building in which a community of artists can occupy and personalise their own studio spaces.

The tangible creative experience here emerges from the ground up rather than through self-conscious design.

While the evaluation has not included user research directly, the buildings are only complete when they are in use. Some user's voices are therefore featured here to get a sense of what they value and appreciate.

Love the space they've created. Great space to eat, drink, meet. Always something interesting to entertain and love the cafe - inventive food with lots of vegetarian options and brilliant service. HOME, TripAdviser

All the staff are attentive, yet relaxed, there was a great atmosphere at the bar, creating the feeling of very much a HOME. HOME, TripAdviser

Seven Stories has quickly become one of our favourite places to visit. The staff are all friendly, warm, funny and amazing. They recognise us as regulars and we always feel welcome ... I also suffer with anxiety and depression. So Seven Stories has become my go to "safe place" on the days I do not like leaving home. To all the staff keep doing what you do and thank

you for making our visits fun and enjoyable. Seven Stories, Facebook Review

I have been visiting this venue [Square Chapel] for a few months now and find it the perfect setting to either relax with a cup of tea/coffee or enjoy one of the quality craft/ real ales on offer whilst working away on my laptop ... There is a vibrant atmosphere much of the time but also quieter moments during the week which is helpful should you need to concentrate or conduct business. Square Chapel, TripAdviser

2. Astute User Focus

The case studies highlighted here reveal the value of seeking deeper, richer insights that can inform more empathic approaches to capital development.

What unites them is the belief that traditional consultation may not always offer the depth of understanding required to deliver a great user experience. What distinguishes them from most capital development projects is the adoption of, and investment in, research and design methodologies not commonly used in the sector.

Seven Stories' qualitative research effected a paradigm shift in their understanding of why people choose to visit.

This brought about a rethink around their value proposition from the user perspective which materially informed their priorities for the capital development.

In addition, findings from a Service Design Study provided the insight required to re-design the user journey and associated experience from the moment people walked through the door.

The Museum of Making has taken user focus further by adopting the practices of human-centred design and co-production as its core modus operandi. Here, hundreds of Derby citizens are involved in co-producing the concepts, designs, prototypes and finished product, together with staff and the project team.

HOME, Square Chapel and Seven Stories demonstrate a commitment to continual improvement, recognising that the work doesn't stop when the building opens.

In HOME's case, despite high customer satisfaction ratings, a major Visitor Experience Study was commissioned which, among other things, revealed ways to improve the welcome and foyer experience for less engaged users.

Seven Stories continues to monitor its user experience through ingallery observations, regular surveys and focused research with priority target groups.

Bow Arts has an on-going system of managing the artist's experience of The Rum Factory via a very hands-on Studio Manager who listens

carefully to the needs and experiences of the tenants so she can place each artist in the collective mix to best effect.

3. Organisational Development

The case studies here all have in common an understanding that delivering the right experience is central to their business models. Whilst this is actually a truism, what makes these organisations stand out is the way they have broadened their focus beyond those elements of the business which specifically generate income.

To different degrees, each has adopted a more holistic approach in shaping the user experience to attain enhanced inclusivity, and/ or loyalty, and/or brand buy-in, and/or a deeper understanding of their core purpose. Whilst this may not generate revenue in the short term, their view is that this long-term approach will both deliver and return enhanced value. For most it has resulted in some degree of organisational shift.

Striving to become a more inclusive organisation is core to many arts and cultural organisations but in recent years this can be a difficult balancing act in terms of the business model. The user experience case studies show how they have approached gaining maximum value per user at the same time as welcoming and making specific arrangements for those with limited or no disposable income. This issue will not go away, as the continued impact of public sector austerity measures bite.

Seven Stories introduced a picnic room for those users who cannot afford to purchase food or drink in the café. Square Chapel has introduced a flexible menu with different portion sizes to suit different budgets. HOME has introduced social spaces outside of its catering areas for those who can't, or don't want to, consume food or drink as part of their visit. The Rum Factory's whole business model is predicated on a no-frills design ethos to create affordable spaces for artists.

Capital development can and should stimulate staff development and organisational design shifts to better deliver and manage optimal user interactions. This has been clearly in evidence, from small changes to radical departures.

Square Chapel has brought its catering in-house to better manage the quality of interactions with customers. The redevelopment has proved so successful it is now re-adjusting to manage the levels of demand created and ensuring it can deliver the same level of service as the rest of the organisation.

Seven Stories has focused on the professionalisation of the Receptionist's role to deliver enhanced employee and visitor engagement, as well as instigating the role of 'Story Catchers,' "to ensure personal interaction for every visitor, bringing book, story and our museum to life."

The Museum of Making has chosen the path of creative disruption. Not only has it re-cast the museum's responsibility from delivering a curatorially-driven experience to co-producing it with their users, but they have adopted a radically different approach to delivering a capital development project that challenges the way things are done. Both have necessitated fundamental shifts in the culture, structure and processes at the Museum.

Fulfilling potential

Looking at capital development through the lens of user experience has revealed the degree to which experiential intentionality, astute user-focus and alternative research and design methods can bring immense value to capital development projects.

At present, many of these approaches remain at the margins of practice. Without them, beautiful, comfortable, environmentally sustainable and accessible venues will continue to be built. The question here is not one of judging how successful these new and improved buildings are, but whether, in the absence of these alternative mindsets and practices, they are fulfilling their true potential.

Acknowledgements

The evaluators would like to gratefully acknowledge the support of all the organisations that have shared their user experience journeys. It has been a genuine privilege to visit their buildings and to hear their stories and experiences. We trust we have done their achievements justice.

Seven Stories, the National Centre for Children's books

Founded in 1996, Seven Stories is situated in the east end of Newcastle Upon Tyne, one of Britain's most disadvantaged communities. Providing an enjoyable and inclusive visitor experience sits at the very heart of its mission, making books and stories accessible to everyone regardless of ability or background.

Accreditation with national styling awarded by ACE in 2012 prompted Seven Stories to consider what the visitor experience of a National Museum dedicated to children's books should be, and embarked on an ambitious programme of organisational development culminating in the opening of its fully refurbished building in 2015. Designed to increase the building's capacity, strengthen revenue generation and improve the visitor experience on every floor, the resulting multi award-winning visitor experience demonstrates the value committed user focus and clear experiential objectives bring. These objectives were:

- > A great welcome
- Comfort and ease
- Creating a magical experience
- > A sociable environment
- Cuddles, giggles and cosiness
- > A tangible ethos



Picture 12. Seven Stories Opening (Damien Wootten)

Early in 2013, a PhD student from Northumbria University worked with staff teams on a Service Design research project which identified a number of problems around service delivery. Through a combination of observational research and customer journey mapping the Museum discovered that a key visitor touchpoint, the Reception area, had shortcomings which together reduced the quality of visitor orientation and experience.

- A lack of dedicated receptionists mean that visitors were receiving an inconsistent welcome from a pool of casual staff
- Visitors often couldn't digest the volume of information told to them at Reception causing them to lose their way or miss scheduled events

Exploring user interactions in this detailed way reframed everyone's thinking and staff agreed to focus upon providing a 'great welcome' as a means of positively anchoring the subsequent visitor experience. In response, not only was the Reception scheme designed to ensure a playful, inviting look, but the visitor interactions themselves were re-designed.

We created dedicated receptionists because this is a really important job. It's the first welcome people get and we weren't treating the job with the importance it deserved.

The Receptionist role became two dedicated posts. Supported by training in customer service, the professionalisation of this function was intended to enhance ownership, increase job satisfaction and improve

the visitor welcome. Practical information, which had constituted most of the visitor interaction, was reduced and re-distributed throughout the building via improved information systems and a new guide was designed so that it could be updated and returned/reused to reduce waste. This freed up valuable time for the Receptionist to engage more 'humanly' with visitors on arrival. The result is an improved, more personal welcome, and improved flow and orientation at this important first stage of a visit.

Comfort and ease

"Inevitably there were some things that we didn't get it right first time", admitted Director Kate Edwards of the original capital build in 2005.

Part of the problem lay in the fact that Seven Stories had under estimated the volume of young family visitors (and buggies), leading to problems around insufficient toilets, long queues in the café, access and wear and tear. They prioritised the basics first.

We were getting more complaints about the practical visitor experience. If you don't get these basics right, its difficult to engage people in creative offers.

The original furniture was replaced with accessible, durable, comfortable and colourful alternatives, including circular tables with central podiums which are fully wheelchair accessible.

Facilities were upgraded including more toilets, and more accessible toilets, on more levels, with more pull down changing tables.

The replacement dishwasher in the Café freed up valuable staff time to serve and interact with customers. This marginal gain had a significant impact and indicates the importance of building enough working capital to be able to replace expensive items.

As a Museum with original artwork and objects, it was especially difficult to accommodate family packed lunches, as food and drink are prohibited in several spaces. The limited space in the building prevented a picnic facility from being incorporated in the original capital project, meaning school groups and families found themselves 'squatting' in whatever space was available to eat a packed lunch.

Whilst Seven Stories is committed to inclusive practice it has to, by necessity charge entry. Kate was determined not to compound the cost barrier by meeting the needs of visitors who couldn't afford to eat in the Café. The creation of a new packed lunch space, therefore, was an important strategic addition.

We felt that we were forcing people into the Café they couldn't always afford, or they would go outside to eat, even if it was raining ... and there was a conflict between having people eating their own food in the Cafe and turning away paying customers.

The packed lunch room is more than just a practical solution. Lit by a canopy of paper lanterns and decorated with wall displays from the archive collection, this is thoughtfully designed room that creates a beautiful and visually interesting space for families, demonstrating the high value Seven Stores places on designing exceptional experiences for all.

Kate and her team regard getting these basics right as one of the biggest success of the refurbishment. In creating a truly family friendly and inclusive venue, where all visitor needs are met and where they can feel comfortable and relaxed, the aim was that they would become more receptive to enjoying the intended unique 'Seven Stories' experience.

Creating a Magical Experience

A key experiential dimension the Museum wanted to achieve was 'magic', bringing literature alive for visitors in a way that was atmospheric, theatrical and inspiring.



Picture 13. Seven Stories lanterns (lisa Baxter)

To this end, they engaged a lighting designer who, amongst other things, created a fairy-tale atmosphere in the Attic space where many of the public programmes, readings and performances take place. With half a kilometre of industrial fairy lights wrapped around the low wooden beams, coloured LEDs that create changeable mood palettes, and theatrical lighting to enliven performances, this space is charmingly twinkly and beautiful, a magical setting to explore and discover children's stories.

In addition, the Museum instigated a new staff structure for Front of House, moving away from "a multi-functional team who did a bit of everything" towards contracted positions with clear roles.

We didn't just look at the building, we looked at the whole organisational design, and very particularly, investing in staff training.

Through this the 'Story Catchers' came into being - a team of 'players' whose role it is to bring magic to the visitor experience through direct interaction and the delivery of performance based programmes and events. Proactively friendly, smiley, interactive and engaging, the Story Catchers and the environmental 'magic' of some of the Museum's spaces combine to create a distinctive experience within which to discover the wonder of books.

A sociable environment

Seven Stories was originally conceived around the learning and

education goals of the organisation. This was called into question when a programme of qualitative research revealed insights into visitor motivations, emotional and social needs.

One of the most significant findings was that visitors tend to visit Seven Stories in groups, or to meet each other, in order to have a social experience.

Our visitor experience had been configured around intellectual and educational engagement, but actually, people's first motivation was to come for a social experience. It made us look with those eyes around the building to see where we could create places for people to sit, be comfortable and sociable.

In response, Seven Stories introduced a new coffee shop and the packed lunch room. This significantly increased opportunities for families with different disposable incomes to gather and connect in spaces that are warm and welcoming.

Cuddles, giggles and cosiness

There are little pockets of cuddliness in Seven Stories that are colourful, quirky and just beautiful to look at. Bespoke, playfully designed armchairs encourage family reading. Beanbags, cushions and squashy window seat covers in the Bookshop invite physical closeness.

A circular 'nest' with a soft mattress and scatter cushions in the Story Station is perfect for snuggling and reading. This is a Museum where families can relax, huddle and giggle, surrounded by softness, colour and books.

A Tangible Ethos

The Service Design project revealed that the Museum's ethos around love of books wasn't immediately apparent on entry. It could have been, as one member of staff commented, "a doctor's waiting room."

The anonymity of the welcome space, together with the overall invisibility of the Museum's charitable purpose was a concern. Kate was clear on what needed doing:

We wanted to get our organisational values communicated better through our interior spaces, signage and wall decorations.

The Reception area became more playfully 'book-ish', with literary graphics decorating the welcome desk and quirky book-shaped lights hanging from the ceiling. Throughout the building the walls are strewn with quotes about books and the joy of reading.

Calligrapher and book jacket designer Sarah J Coleman's charismatic book illustrations have been drawn directly onto the walls of the Café, and wall panels have been introduced to communicate the Museum's charitable purpose and outreach work.

Walking around the building now, the brand experience clearly communicates 'love of books' and the Museum's 'below the radar' community programmes now have visibility, adding depth and dimension to the visitor's understanding of its ethos and purpose.

A Culture of Continual Improvement

Key indicators demonstrate the success of Seven Stories unwavering user-centric approach, both in terms of organisational performance and industry recognition. Within first 2 months of opening:

- > Visitor numbers were 6% ahead of target
- > Admission income was 4% ahead of target
- > Average overall spend per head went up from £7.25 to £8.75
- > And there was a trebling of corporate enquiries and bookings

In addition, the Museum has won a raft of awards, including the North East Tourism Awards for Best Large Visitor Attraction (15/16) and Gold Award for Inclusive Tourism (16/17), and the Get Creative Festival Awards for Best Family Venue and Best Family Welcome (15/16).

Rather than resting on its laurels however, Seven Stories continues to carefully monitor the visitor experience through in-gallery staff observations, regular surveys and focused research (including a current programme looking at the needs and experiences of SEND visitors), and then making on-going adjustments to uphold the very high standards they have set.

This is a story of an organisation that has leveraged astute visitor insights to re-imagine the Seven Stories experience in a way that is both empathic and imaginative. Informed by Service Design, and bringing together considerations around human interactions, information systems and deeper visitor need states, Seven Stories has elevated its thinking beyond the 'nuts and bolts' of the space to a more carefully crafted approach to experience design.

Capital investment here has supported the delivery of a holistic brand experience, bringing together the practicalities of a refurbishment with a wholesale review of staffing roles, as part of a broader strategic programme of organisational development.

> It wasn't about refurbishing the building and then saying 'right, we've done it'. This was about a long-term shift in organisational culture and strategy.



Picture 14. Seven Stories Opening (Damien Wooten)

Square Chapel Arts Centre, Halifax

The building is beautiful, but its never as lovely as when it's full and people are enjoying it ... because really, why we're here are our audiences, and making that experience at the heart of it is what brings the building to life. Without it the building would be just a monument.

Founded twenty-five years ago by six local theatre lovers, some of whom are still committed Trustees, Square Chapel Centre for the Arts has always been a site where art and community converge, evidenced by its loyal audiences and committed volunteers. The impetus behind the capital redevelopment was to become a Centre for the Arts for all to enjoy by overcoming the shortcomings of its Grade 11* listed Chapel building. Whilst strong financial imperatives underpinned the re-development strategy, this case study will show how Square Chapel's founding and enduring ethos of community focus and inclusivity ultimately informed a capital redevelopment that placed users at its heart.

The Ambition

Square Chapel was really successful. It wasn't perfect but it was loved. We wanted to keep as much of what made it successful as possible; the warmth, the personality, the welcome, the volunteers.



Picture 15. Square Chapel bar

Initial public consultation at pre-concept design stage confirmed what Initial public consultation at pre-concept design stage confirmed what Square Chapel already knew - that limited accessibility, a cramped, part-time bar, an austere and opaque Chapel exterior and a public perception of 'cliquey-ness' were significant barriers to attendance. As Director David McQuillan observed, "it took a certain amount of confidence for people to come in."

The consultation also surfaced the high degree of affection existing audiences felt for Square Chapel, much of which was attributed to its warm welcome, friendly volunteers, cosy atmosphere and community spirit.

The insights from the public consultation reinforced Square Chapel's commitment to become a more open and inclusive venue, one that did not revolve solely around a high quality arts programme, but which also provided social spaces and creative opportunities for individuals and community groups to enjoy in their own right. This ethos became the organising principle for the capital redevelopment programme with the goals of creating:

- > A fully accessible, open and welcoming venue
- An amplified, more varied programme of work together with expanded community use
- Within a vibrant social environment that retains the warmth and intimacy of the original building

- > Where people feel at home to gather, talk, eat, relax
- Cared for by staff and volunteers who bring Square Chapel's personality and identity to life
- And in doing so, becoming highly valued by an extended community of existing and potential users in a way that engenders a sense of ownership

Translating Ethos into Building Design

There were arguments sometimes around architectural purity and design aesthetic versus user focus, and therefore the experience of the building ... our argument was 'we're not building a monument'. We're all interested in beautiful spaces and beautiful architecture, but we are building an arts centre.

Once the project got into levels of more specialist detail, key decisions were made at sub-committee level through the more formally structured 'contact with client' meetings. At this stage, from the perspective of the staff team, the programme appeared to 'go underground'. David and Martin Clarke, Head of Technical Operations, worked hard to engage them as much as possible throughout the process. Martin, for example, become heavily involved in a capacity beyond his technical manager role, personally taking on the responsibility of ensuring staff perspectives and expertise were brought to the sub-committee meetings.

If I was involved in a certain part of the building design and I thought it was going to impact on someone else's department, I would get them to join the dots, because the architects are just taking my word as their contact with the client.

The fact that he described how he felt "fortunate to be welcome in these [sub-committee] meetings", suggests the degree to which the process can be regarded as 'behind closed doors' and demonstrates a will to open those doors up as much as possible.

The capital sub-committee included three Trustees with specialist architectural experience who, as David put it, "were passionate about what the extension would look like from an architectural point of view". This, together with the architect created "a formidable set of people who were really concerned about the aesthetics of it."

At the client contact meetings, David and Martin described the healthy but robust conversations they engaged in to ensure Square Chapel's core ethos and intended user experience did not get lost in pursuit of the architectural vision.

They were concerned, for example that the suggested minimalist, industrial interior design would work against their much sought-after warmth, cosiness and personality. Frank conversations ensued around colours, materials, finishes and furniture, and whilst David thought the architects listened and respected their views, trade-offs and

compromises were made, on both sides.

Trade-offs notwithstanding, David believes this consistent championing of the Square Chapel ethos and user experience created an effective counter-balance to those who were more focused on aesthetics and architectural purity.

The Building

The redevelopment comprises a large Copper Box extension connecting the original Chapel building to Piece Hall (a newly reopened heritage site with its own cultural and events programme, retail and shopping offer) with single level access from the street to the auditoria. The extension comprises a large Foyer, housing the Box Office and Café/Bar/Restaurant, a new small-scale auditorium, community/workshop rooms and a dedicated volunteer space. There is single level access from the street to the two auditoria, and thus significantly improving accessibility, with greatly improved public facilities throughout.

From Building Design to Service Design

Our menu design embodies our ethos so, it's seasonal, its fresh, its high quality, constantly changing, like the theatre.

The specific choices made around the service design of the Café/Bar/Restaurant serve to reinforce the welcoming and inclusive ethos that under-pins the building design.

The carefully selected furniture, made of wood for 'warmth', supports different social configurations and comfort requirements depending on different user needs and preferences. Food and drink is managed in-house, securing a greater degree of control and flexibility around programme and commercial events. Staff are inducted into the Square Chapel ethos to attain the highest quality service delivery "without losing the individuality and warmth of the welcome."

The food offer is designed as an extension of the Square Chapel ethos, from the choice of dishes and craft ales to a menu offering different portion sizes at different price points to cater for different needs, budgets and group sizes. Decisions such as these reflect how Square Chapel wanted to create a space where anyone would feel able to enjoy its hospitality. As one staff member put it "The experience it's not just about the art ... you wouldn't just pop into the Bradford Alhambra for a coffee."

A Great Start – But The Work Doesn't Finish After Opening

The Centre re-opened in September 2017. Whilst it's still early days, all the indications are that it is achieving its objectives.

- Audiences to shows in the original Square Chapel venue are up over 100% (from an average 81 to 164) this season – of which 35% are new to Square Chapel
- More tickets have been sold for the opening season of Square

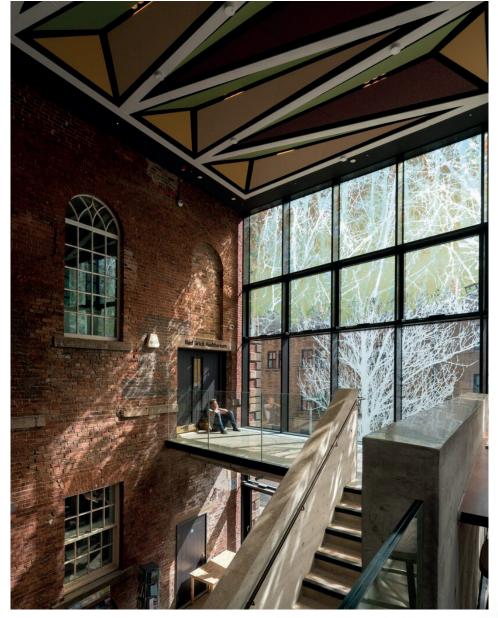
- Chapel's own programme than for the whole of the last financial year
- > The total of tickets sold (including outreach, workshops, hires, schools shows etc.) for the opening season is more than in the whole of last financial year (21,689)
- > The estimated total number of people using Square Chapel before the re-development (including non-ticketed use) was just under 40,000 per year. The projection for the first full year of operation is 250,000
- > The Café/Bar has surpassed targets with over 60,000 transactions between July and September alone
- > Square Chapel has sold more coffees on the opening season (40,000) than the total number of people reported to be using the building over a year!
- Community use and hires have significantly increased and there has been a pronounced increase in the size and diversity of the people inhabiting the building, from the Walshdale Ramblers to rugby fans in the bar, Council meetings to ante natal classes and a marked increase in family visitors

The feel of it and the ambiance is why people are coming and coming back ... on a Sunday afternoon when the rugby's on, we get the rugby crowd here for a beer. For them to feel comfortable to come into an arts centre is brilliant.

Square Chapel is now in 'snagging' phase. Many of the issues it faces are, to a large degree, a direct result of its own success due to the sheer volume of customers it is attracting and the resulting increase in circulation throughout the Foyer. Staff are working hard to try and anticipate demand and model scenarios to achieve efficiencies, manage flow and improve the service offer. No patterns have emerged yet due to the unpredictability of external factors such as public programming at the adjoining Piece Hall. In addition, the Foyer is a multi-functional space that has to work very hard to meet the needs of different users at different times of the day. An example of this is when interval audiences pour in to the Foyer filled with diners. The convergence of the 'every man for himself' mode of ordering interval drinks with the more orderly queueing system for diners has caused confusion.

These issues notwithstanding, the initial success and promise of Square Chapel's new incarnation provides a tantalising peek into what can be achieved when a clear organisational ethos and shared culture around the importance of the user experience is placed at the heart of a capital redevelopment.

At Square Chapel we believe in the magic that happens when you bring people together in a shared experience ... it could be as simple as a performer in front an audience or people sitting down having a meal together ... rather than having art at the heart of what our vision is. Art is just one of the things we do.



Picture 16. Square Chapel (Marc Haddon)

Derby Museums, The Museum of Making

"Feel the fear and do it anyway."

Derby Museums is on track to deliver the country's first co-created Museum. In doing so, they are tearing up the rule book of 'the way things are done' and championing a disruptive approach to capital development that has citizen participation and visitor experience at its heart.

From failure to re-invention

Derby Silk Mill is the site of the world's first factory; an industrial Museum run by Derby City Council until 2011 when, because of falling visitor numbers, an unsuccessful HLF bid and a lack of clear direction for the Museum's future, it closed. The Council realised they were not the organisation to take it forward and so Derby Museums Charitable Trust was established to create a new vision for the Silk Mill. They started with a blank sheet and a remit to re-open the Museum in a way that generated community ownership. From the very start, Derby Museums embraced a citizen-driven approach. Hannah Fox, the Project Director, explains why:

This is public money and these are national lottery players who, more often than not, are in the lower socio-economic groups in our society. They are buying the tickets that are funding this project, and they are the ones who are least likely to come to Museums.



Picture 17. Derby Museums

Between 2011 and 2013 nearly 30,000 people engaged in an experimental programme of events, activities and learning programmes to develop a bold new vision for Derby Silk Mill. What emerged was the Museum of Making (MoM). Rooted in Derby's rich industrial heritage, intended as "a place of public pride representing the "soul of the city" with the aim of regenerating Derby as the City of Makers, what is significant here is this ambition came into being from the ground up.

The Museum of Making concept has emerged from the process rather than the vision for a Museum of Making being first, and then we worked out how we do it.

This freshly minted core purpose led to Re:Make in 2013, a volunteer-powered Development Phase that successfully tested new ways of working resulting in the partial re-opening of the Museum. The next stage was to scale-up and obtain significant investment to deliver on their whole-Museum ambitions, and in 2016 Arts Council awarded Derby Museums a Stage 1 pass for £2.58m towards redevelopment as part of a £17m capital programme.

The build begins this year, opening in summer 2020. Every stage of the journey has been an exercise in re-thinking the way things are done, and it really got motoring during Re:Make.

Re:Make

Re:Make's goal was to re-open the Ground Floor of the Museum. How this was achieved represents a radical departure from the norm. With a modest sum of £700K from Derby Council and ACE, the team decided to strip out one floor of the Museum to create a project space in which to test new design models for the capital development. These were human-centred design and co-production.

Human centred design is a practice where new products and services are developed based on user needs and motivations. Inherently creative, empathic and iterative, it follows a repeating cycle of ideation, concept development, prototyping and testing until a position of confident viability is reached. Derby Museums wanted to prove that working in this way, with user needs front of mind, would result in optimal Museum experiences. In addition, the in-built mechanism of stress-testing ideas – through low cost, front end prototyping – would de-risk the process, reducing expensive mistakes and minimising the need for the compromises.

Co-production is a key element of human centred design, working with users in genuine partnership to develop ideas, solve problems and leverage opportunity. During Re:Make, over 200 volunteers were involved in re-thinking every element of the Silk Mill, from concept development and design to prototyping and testing, resulting in the successful re-opening of the first floor in 2012. This got them through the first stage of developing the whole site.

By working in genuine partnership with citizens, stakeholders and staff teams, Derby Museums is ensuring everyone's voice is heard and has impact, and in a way that instils a genuine sense of ownership and investment in both the process and the results.

You've got proof of concept because you've tried and tested it through a number of iterative phases with low cost and low resource at the front end of the project ... and you are bringing people into that concept. They are part of shaping it with you. Through the iteration, as you grow that concept and the investment to going along with it to the point of delivery, it really is what's needed and you have de-risked it.

With a re-minted, publicly owned mission, and a tried and tested design model, it became clear that the conventional design-and-build model for scaling into a full capital development would not suit the team's purposes or ethos.

Embracing a new construction model

The project team sought an alternative model to design-and-build because of perceived intrinsic flaws and incompatibility with their own working processes.

The primacy of the architect's vision together with the inherent hierarchies in a typical design and build model do not sit well with either a human centred design or co-production mindset, both of which require the 'parking of ego' to work more empathically and formatively with users,

In addition the separation of design and build creates factions that impede collaborative working and the iterative process of prototyping and testing. This frequently leads to construction issues that can cause delay, an escalation of costs and disheartening value engineering. Commercial self-interest is embedded within the delivery supply chain which is at odds with the ethos of focussing first on client and user needs, and it is the client who is the most vulnerable in this scenario, knowing they must deliver within strict budgets and timeframes.

You reach a position where, when the contractor gets the design, they may decide the architect has done something wrong and you hit problems. Everyone is in a default blame position. Everyone is protecting their own position, and the people who are worse off is the client because you know you've got to get it delivered to a certain budget and a certain time, so all you can do is compromise.

And so, the project team began searching for alternative models that could accommodate early and equal involvement of the delivery parties with designers in the development phase to avoid duplication, re-design, reworking, waste and inefficiency.

With assistance from their appointed design team, they landed on the Integrated Project Insurance model (IPI) - one of three models being tested by the Government to address the inherent problems in the construction industry, some of which are outlined above – and developed a hybrid version more suited to heritage buildings.

Put simply, IPI involves the creation of an Alliance Board from the outset who are all equal members in a delivery partnership.

For Derby Museum's this included architects, the construction team, M&E, structural engineers, independent risk assessors and the exhibitions team, all procured before a detailed design had been produced or the finance secured. When asked what the benefits of this model would be, Hannah reeled off an impressive list:

- Everyone on the Alliance Board aligns themselves and their interests to the co-production ethos of the capital project from the outset, incentivising them to focus on outcomes that maximise benefit for all stakeholders
- > The Alliance Board can take a more holistic view of the capital development, with a more nuanced understanding of the different interdependences at play
- Having the whole supply chain on board from the outset enables a broad level of expertise to assess what is achievable and identify efficiencies
- > The IPI model supports an iterative approach of problem identification and solution finding, where issues can be dealt with at the time rather than specifying something early on only to realise later that it doesn't work
- > IPI assists improvements by embedding three external experts to support the alliance in achieving 'fit for defined purpose' outcomes
- > The emphasis shifts from one of value engineering after the fact (what cannot be done) to design validation on-the-go (what can be done) which is much more creative, effective and rewarding

The User Experience - Process

What is so striking about how this capital project was conceived and is being delivered is that the focus on user experience begins with process rather than the resulting in-venue experience. The project team were clear that the process of realising the MoM must engage the citizens and potential makers of the future through high quality, inspirational experiences that elicited wonder and unleashed creativity. The resulting impacts would be a transformative, eliciting a sense of empowerment, ownership and investment that would strengthen bonds between all those who took part and the Museum.

The positive impacts of this approach are well documented, beautifully expressed here by Graeme Smith, a project participant who has since set up his own design business, who says:

Not only have I gained practical skills, I feel better in myself and part of an open and empowering community. This has had a hugely positive impact on my life.

The intention is that the practices of human-centred design and co-production will continue beyond opening, ensuring the Museum continually engages, co-produces and evolves to achieve enduring relevance.

The User Experience – Visitors

The experiential intentionality for Museum visitors was co-produced by the volunteers who took part, with regular sense-checking to make sure what emerged is what people want. This intentionality is too rich to fully explore in this short case study, but here is a flavour of some of its dimensions:

- Ownership: people wanted 100% access to their collections and MoM is responding by co-producing accessible open storage and intensive display. Everything will be on show. Nothing will be hidden As Hannah put it, "our collections are owned by the citizens, so they won't be hidden and stored so that people can only see them when a curator says you can see them."
- Authority: in the true spirit of co-production, MoM is replacing the authority of the curator in mediating the social value of objects in the collection with an invitation for visitors to bring their own thoughts, feelings and histories into play. Value here is not 'conferred' by the expert, but emerges through the interplay between visitor and object because, as Hannah put it, "who are we to ... bestow importance on an object when a member of the public may place bigger importance on that object than we might have."

Both these experiential goals required a bold shift in dominant Museum practice, away from the 'curatorial powerhouse' and silo mentality towards a much more interdisciplinary and user-driven approach.

Hannah described this as being a very painful and difficult process

at first, and regards the fact that she now has a truly integrated staff team who "are not coming to it with their own personal agendas" as a significant achievement.

- Moments of generosity: people want the Museum to feel vibrant through the continual discovery of new things they may not have noticed before. To this end, MoM will incorporate 'moments of generosity', where visitors can spot objects in unconventional places and 'the places in-between' as part of their journey though the Museum.
 - ... in transitional spaces you have those little surprises, those little moments where you thought you were moving from one space to another, but, there's a story here, or you might look up and see a curve where a small object has been placed.
- Appreciating the materiality of the Silk Mill: it was important to everyone that visitors could experience the materiality of the building. To this end, everything is being stripped back to reveal how the factory was made, what with, and how it functioned, with an emphasis on the physicality of those materials.
- Experiencing materiality differently: the decant stage created a window of opportunity for the curators to develop a taxonomy of materials around the collection and test how an interpretative strategy could be meaningfully applied to the collections. What is emerging is an ingenious system of pods, each around a material grouping, that makes surprising connections

> The move to a material taxonomy was driven by the need to make access to collections non-hierarchical. Fine ceramics, traditionally the reserve of decorative arts displays, will sit side-by-side with industrial applications of clays, for example bricks and state-of-the-art turbine blades. This democratisation of collections is key to ensuring levelled access to all collections for visitors.

What is so striking about the story of the Museum of Making is the degree to which the team has convinced everyone (funders, stakeholders, citizens and staff) to take a creative leap of faith with them in re-inventing how a Museum is conceived, designed and built. Their empathic approach to co-designing the Museum experience demonstrates a remarkable lack of ego for a project of this scale. In effect, what Derby Museums is doing is re-writing the manual on how a large capital development is done, and all of this before the spade has even hit the ground.

We want to ensure this Museum is something people feel they have been part of, they are informing, designing and codesigning, so when it opens its already running and therefore our chances of sustainability and resilience are much greater because it truly is a publicly owned asset that people feel part of, and doesn't rely on having to work really really hard all the time to gain new audiences, and marketing budgets. People will say 'This is part of my life. I'm part of this Museum. This Museum belongs to me.'



Picture 18. Derby Silk Mill, Derby Museums

The Rum Factory, London

It has to be people-centric. If it doesn't work for people, there's no point.

Bow Arts is a social enterprise company that develops and manages creative workspace in London for artists, designers and makers. At the heart of its approach is an unwavering pragmatism, where functional considerations, user focus and an eye on the business model take precedence over aesthetics.

This approach is clearly evidenced in the conversion of The Rum Factory, a Victorian building and former News International headquarters in London's Docklands. Described by CEO and founder, Marcel Baetigg, as a *'meanwhile space'* due to its limited 5-year lease, the build needed to be quick, cost effective and deliverable within the skin of this Grade II listed building.

A lesson in 'lean development'

Ambitious in scale, yet efficiently delivered on a budget of around £130K (including £85K from ACE), The Rum Factory's 20,000 square feet of space was converted into 90 artists' studio pods within 3 months. That's no mean feat, especially given the restrictions of the building's listed status.



Picture 19. The Rum Factory (Lisa Baxter)

Everything was pared back to the bare essentials, the minimum viable offer as it were, to attain the most conducive and cost-effective environment for artists to work in. To achieve this, Marcel and his project team worked through a series of pragmatic user-focused questions:

- > How can we work with the shape of the building to create the most number of usable spaces?
- What is the configuration of those spaces?
- > How would people flow around them?
- How can we make artists feel safe and secure at night?

No changes were made to the structure of the building and there was no desire to design to a level of finish that would increase costs.

According to Marcel: "Nothing needs to be smarter than it needs to be."

The shell of the building simply houses the pods which, when the time comes, can be easily removed leaving virtually no trace. The residual historic features, together with News International's ducting and tracking, were left untouched. This wasn't just a cost saving exercise, but a conscious decision to respect the site's unique and potentially inspirational sense of place, utilitarianism and history, described by one artist as a 'living in a tapestry of urbanism'.

The Business Model comes first

One of the core elements of Bow Arts' business model is keeping studio rents as affordable as possible for artists by extracting maximum value per square foot. In Marcel's words, "Every little bit of the building has to pay for itself."

Walking around The Rum Factory, what stands out is that every available foot of space has a utilitarian function. The building is a warren of white pods, a hive of activity where artists work cheek by jowl. With the exception of The Project Room – a small gallery area where artists can explore exhibiting their work before taking it out into the real world – there are no extraneous spaces that don't 'earn', because each square foot that does not bring in revenue means an incremental increase in the rents for the artists.

This pragmatic social enterprise approach has resulted in a model where the cost per square foot to the business are controlled to around £7, with external costs such as rent, rates - negotiated with the local authorities and landlords - kept to an absolute minimum.

This allows the studios to be offered at an extremely low £15/sqft to artists, while still generating a small surplus that is directly reinvested into community arts activity. This investment of up to £4/sqft of its rental income is put towards a community seed fund, which supports cultural and education activity in its local areas – the investment attracts up to 3:1 match funding and provides professionally paid employment and career building opportunities for Bow's artists.

We can invest £4 per square foot back into local community services and activity ... work which is available to the artists.

Affordability over aesthetics

The Rum Factory has none of the self-consciously 'cool' social spaces that are typical of many contemporary, urban creative buildings. There is a grubby little room with a kettle tucked away in the warren with truly shabby (not shabby-chic) sofas, but that is about as far as it goes.

Neither is there an imposed design aesthetic, just the simple utility of the white pods. This is because Marcel wants to be honest about what a creative space should be, a blank canvas where each pod becomes inhabited by, and takes on the identity of, the artist.

The idea of just having Hoxton-esque meeting point for creativity just doesn't work ... Practical working spaces are taken very very seriously by people because they don't have much money, and everything they do is to be there ... and they are making sacrifices to be there The studio is a part of their DNA.

An empathic eye on artist's needs

Marcel is clearly passionate about ensuring artists have the best possible experience of their working environment and is sensitive to their sense of isolation when working alone.

A clear design intention therefore was to create a working environment that fosters a sense of community and encourages interaction - where artists can mingle, engage with each other and collaborate.

We think it's a great model as working in a studio all day can be a solitary activity, and being able to meet and speak to other artists easily is just one reason why people choose to have studios with us.

To this end, the studio pods have no doors and no ceilings. Walking through the corridors and around the mezzanine you can look straight into their creative worlds. Open and accessible, conversations can take place between artists in each other's environments which can be a far more personal and inspiring experience than gathering in self-consciously designed creative spaces.

What actually floats most people's boats is their space, their bit, their ideas and if they want to be social they want to bring you into their space. They want to share and grow in other people's spaces around their ideas.

Marcel recognises that this might not suit all artists so, to avoid disappointment, applicants are carefully screened to ensure this way of working suits them. As a large, dense complex, the potential for neighbourly tensions is high.

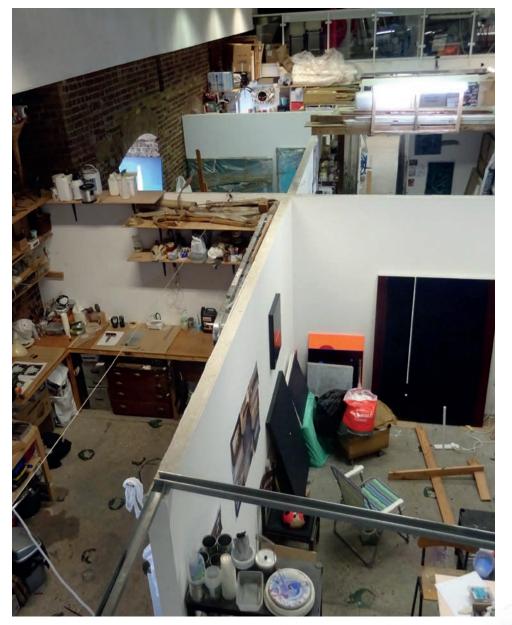
This is carefully managed by the studio manager who takes on a curatorial role, ensuring artists are placed in the most conducive space for their work. Their preferences, the medium they work in, any specific technical needs and how they might fit in and work together are all factored into a careful placing of artists within the building. This degree of care and attention demonstrates Marcel's commitment to doing more than just developing a building where artists can rent some space in and work. He wants to create a thriving community where they can engage with each other and operate to their fullest potential.

It does what it says on the tin

Asked if, with the benefit of hindsight, he would have done anything differently, Marcel answered 'no', because the building works really well. That it opened to 70% capacity is testament to how Bow Arts got the design formula right in what was its most ambitious project to date.

The development and management of The Rum Factory studios deftly addresses the creative needs and financial precarity of its artists, delivered via a lean, sustainable and highly efficient business model. No ego. No aesthetics. No 'nice to haves'. The building simply 'does what it says on the tin'.

You have to really understand what your business model is and what you want to achieve, and design to that rather than to a budget or someone else's idea.



Picture 20. The Rum Factory (Lisa Baxter)

HOME, Manchester

Now in its second year, HOME is a thriving contemporary arts venue situated in the First Street urban redevelopment. As the venue name suggests, a key intention behind the building design was to create a 'home' for the arts, where people from all backgrounds would feel welcome and comfortable. HOME worked hard to attain this, supported by architects who went the extra mile to ensure this aspiration was achieved.

Borne out of a merger between the Library Theatre and Cornerhouse (a centre for contemporary visual arts and independent film), the new building comprises of a 450 seater theatre, 150 seater flexible studio space, a gallery, 5 cinemas as well as 3 food and drink spaces and bookshop. HOME opened in 2015 with the ambition to commission, produce and present major artistic projects and become a catalyst for the emerging new creative quarter growing up around it. Built at a cost of £25 million, £5 million from ACE and fundraising and £19 million from Manchester City Council, the budget is relatively modest for a building of this size.

Feeling at HOME

For Pat Raikes, Head of Operations, the decision by Manchester City Council to appoint architects who preferenced the user experience over and above a 'what went where' approach is an important indicator of the commitment to create a distinctive brand experience.



Picture 21. Home (Paul Karalius)

Mecanoo ... approached the design from an experiential point of view and produced a vision which was all about atmosphere and experience.

Many of the people involved in the project team were at Cornerhouse and it was extremely important to them that it's unique atmosphere (comfort, warmth, welcome and vibrancy), and core audiences, translated across to what could have very easily have been a new building that felt like "walking into a glorified office block".

The architects developed the interior concept and layout of the social spaces as "an urban living room, instilling a sense of warmth and intimacy. The rugged concrete floors and walls contrasting beautifully with the warm oak of the bars."

The choice of materials was budget driven because, as Pat put it, "the amount of money left for decoration and softening the spaces was minimal." Whilst the budget was inhibiting, HOME has succeeded in injecting maximum 'warmth' into the social and circulatory spaces by procuring "the best materials, furnishings and lighting options for the money available".

Warm colours, soft fabrics, comfortable armchairs, natural textures and ambient lighting all combine to create a relaxed interior that encourages dwell.

A key technical constraint around the social and circulatory spaces was the housing of the main theatre within a box concrete construction designed to minimise noise interference from the adjacent railway line as well as visitor circulation internally. The remaining studio space and 5 cinemas all needed siting with maximum access while still maintaining acoustic integrity, all this to fit in with the very limited footprint of the site.

Mecanoo's ingenious design response was the staircase. Made of wood, spacious and open in design, the staircase acts as major 'artery', integrating seamlessly with the bars and restaurant and connecting the auditoria with the café, bar and restaurant. Its open design means the flow of people around the building is palpable, conferring a dynamic 'pulse' to the building as part of HOME's distinctive social experience.

Mecanoo worked closely with the Cornerhouse team and Manchester City Council to complete a design which addressed the requirements of both organisations. Manchester City Council, the clients for the whole project, appointed the main contractor to deliver the building and luckily for everyone Mecanoo stayed involved throughout the build and fit out to help realise the vision.

Due to a number of constraints, not least the budget, once opened there remained some design issues which needed to be settled. Problems with the initial design of the entrance doors together with a failing system of louvres led to problems heating the foyer and ground floor bar. Following a number of physical interventions these issues are finally on the way to being resolved.

HOME as a Work in Progress

We have evolved over time, responding to on-going feedback and flow, noticing where people want to sit, what they want to do, adding a new bar and moving things around.

Since opening in 2015, Clare Sydney, Head of Marketing and Communications, has been pro-actively monitoring the user experience through a rolling programme of research. Adjustments have been made in response, from addressing the 'cool' minimalist aesthetic of the interior spaces to building a new Cinema Bar.

After two years of consistently good feedback, with survey respondents rating the different dimensions of their experience at 93% or above, HOME felt it was, in Clare's own words, "time to ramp it up and take it to the next level."

A major Visitor Experience Study was commissioned to explore the customer journey from the perspective of different user types, with a specific focus on the less engaged. A key finding was that the degree of space between the entrance and the Box Office was off-putting to new visitors and needed to be 'warmed up' to make it feel more vibrant and welcoming. In response HOME is trialling initiatives such as extending the shop into the space and bringing exhibition content out of the Gallery and into the Foyer.

The study also surfaced important questions around ensuring HOME is genuinely welcoming and comfortable for all. This includes those

users who choose not to - or cannot - spend money on food or drink. In response, HOME hopes to introduce additional seating and comfortable gathering spaces away from the food and drink areas and is working with the caterers to see what can be offered at lower price points. In Clare's view, this represents a significant "culture shift" for HOME, especially as the limited space available for corporate hire intensifies the financial imperative to optimise ancillary spend.

Managing the diverse experiential needs and expectations of different user types is also playing out in how they seek to build their cinema audience. From the outset, HOME set out to offer a premium film experience for their core audience of film buffs. To this end, projectionist David Petty, was heavily involved in developing the technical spec – which includes a 35mm projector - so that, in HOME's view, the sound quality and the screen quality is as good as you can get.

If you come to see Blade Runner here you're going to see it at the right ratio, with the right sound quality, and if you're a film nerd that means the world.

This commitment to delivering the highest quality arts experience is evidenced by the fact that, when HOME discovered that the front rows were too close to the screen, they removed some of the rows and raised the screen. However, with five cinemas to fill, Clare describes the challenge they face in meeting the expectations of the more populist cinema goer (who may want to consume hot food, drink, sweets and use their smart phone, during the screening), without alienating the film purist who requires absolute silence and no distractions whatsoever.

Considerations around how to balance these two divergent user experiences is one which may require further culture shift if financial considerations dictate.

Financial sustainability

HOME's commitment to creating a welcoming environment for all and increasing engagement from economically disadvantaged communities has implications in relation to ancillary spend. The building is 'frustratingly small', and with no option to extend, this limits the potential to grow revenue through additional hire space. In light of this, Pat offers the following advice:

Don't design the building you need now, design the building you think you'll need in 10 years because you need the room for growth and change ... you don't know if the financial circumstances of the organisation are going to change so for instance you might need to increase the amount of corporate hire you can offer or look at other income generation potential.

HOME has succeeded in creating a popular and welcoming Front of House experience, one that can be enjoyed in its own right. This experience is enlivened by the building's dynamic rhythm, a 'pulse' of people made more excitingly tangible by the open staircase. The warmth and contemporary stylishness of its many social spaces invite everyone in, from the ardent cinema buff to the casual drop-in visitor.

The end result is a place that is both vibrant and relaxing, where users are welcome to make themselves at home whatever their reason for visiting.

We want people to experience art here ultimately, but if they just want to come and be part of the atmosphere, to be part of the social space and the HOME community, then they can ... and that atmosphere is prevalent throughout the building, from top to bottom.



Picture 22. HOME cinema (Chris Payne)