



FIRST LOOK

Citizens Design Bureau completes revamp of historical theatre

2 FEBRUARY 2023 *BY [FRAN WILLIAMS](#) AJ. PHOTOGRAPHY BY FRED HOWARTH



Citizens Design Bureau has completed its refurbishment of Jacksons Lane Theatre, which is housed in a Grade II-listed former church in London's Highgate

The Neogothic Wesleyan Methodist Church in Highgate was first converted into an arts centre by Tim Ronalds Architects more than 30 years ago.

The building has been used for theatre, rehearsals of *Strictly Come Dancing*, stand-up comedy and circus acts. The revamp involves remodelling the interior to expose more of the structure of the old church and remaking the studio spaces more accessible to disabled people in the double-height spaces of the former transept. The foyer was cleared out to reveal the central nave and side-aisles, and a lift has been installed.



The theatre's capacity has been increased from 150 to 180 and the full vault of the former church roof has been revealed by decluttering technical equipment. Urgent conservation repairs were carried out externally.

The original church porch has been re-opened as a 'new' and clearer entrance. The auditorium has been re-raked, with new seating and flexible stage extension.

The building now includes atmospheric colours, enhanced acoustic isolation to allow simultaneous use of studios and dramatic new spaces for rehearsal, community events and circus arts.

Citizens Design Bureau (CDB) gained planning approval for the refurbishment and remodelling of the Jacksons Lane Arts Centre [in August 2019](#). The project received a £2.26 million grant from Arts Council England, funded by the National Lottery in June that year. Haringey Council also committed £1 million and the centre's public fundraising campaign, Love Jacksons Lane, was launched to raise the remaining £1.7 million needed to complete the project.

Architect's view

Jacksons Lane has been well loved by so many people for decades. Everyone in the area seems to have memories of being there as a child, taking their own children and coming themselves. At the same time, there was also broad recognition that the building was long overdue an upgrade. We were therefore well aware that we had to balance the practical and functional challenges of access, acoustics, performance and rehearsal infrastructure against the more intangible need to make sure that Jacksons Lane would retain its atmosphere and ethos.

Our hope is that our architectural approach has distilled the essence of Jacksons Lane's distinctive personality. Using colour and material texture, the new insertions within the building are now playfully distinct from the historic fabric - allowing both to 'sing'.

Katy Marks, director, Citizens Design Bureau



Client's view

Since the re-opening of Jacksons Lane we have seen increased footfall, hire of space and a return of theatre and circus audiences, and the public, artists and users of our building are loving the new design, facilities and accessibility. For example, companies such as Extraordinary Bodies are utilising the newly accessible Studio 1 and our café/bar offer has seen more daytime use of the building by local residents.

Adrian Berry, artistic director, Jacksons Lane Theatre

Project data

Start on site March 2021

Completion February 2022

Gross internal floor area 1,360m²

Gross (internal + external) floor area 1,519m²

Form of contract or procurement route Traditional

Construction cost £3.3 million

Construction cost per m² Approximately £2,450

Architect Citizens Design Bureau

Client Jacksons Lane

Structural engineer Momentum

M&E consultant Skelly and Couch

Specialist conservation architect WEAL-Architects

QS Bristow Consulting

Acoustic consultant Gillieron Scott Acoustics

Project manager Cragg Management Services

Principal designer pFB Consult

Approved building inspector and fire engineer SOCOTEC Fire Engineering

Access consultant Jayne Earnscliffe

Main contractor GPF Lewis contractor

Conservation masonry Kafften

Environmental performance data

As a complex, listed building, detailed calculations have not been made. Many areas of high conservation significance could not be thermally upgraded without substantially altering the appearance of the building. Nonetheless, a benchmarking exercise considering similar buildings was undertaken at design stage and compared against the pre-development usage, which was around 400 kWh/m²/year. This highlighted how highly inefficient the pre-development building was. The aim was to improve on this by at least 11 per cent (set by improvements that had been achieved on comparable buildings).

Any new element introduced within the thermal envelope of the building was designed to exceed the current Building Regulation standards for existing building and improved where possible as follows:

U-values of new roof: 0.15 W/m²K (building regulations = 0.16 W/m²K for comparison)

U-values of new windows: 1.4 W/m²K (building regulations = 1.6 W/m²K for comparison)



As a refurbishment of an existing, listed building, there are significant constraints, but the main move has been to re-configure the plan layout to make much better use of the original structure of stone columns and in particular the original lancet windows. The spaces have been re-configured and the yellowing polycarbonate windows replaced with heritage leaded, double-glazed, opening windows. This improves energy efficiency but also allows for natural ventilation to studios and foyer spaces.

The principal architectural addition is the removal of an existing single storey foyer with patched together polycarbonate lean-to roof. This has been replaced by a double-height atrium with high level opening glazing, providing a stack effect that drives natural ventilation through the foyers. A BMS system and split metered distribution boards (separate monitoring of small power and lighting loads) was installed to allow the client to monitor in-use energy consumption and to distinguish between standard operational use and performance related use.

TM52 overheating analysis was conducted for the foyer to determine the natural ventilation strategy and specify required window opening sizes to avoid overheating effects. The analysis was conducted using a weather dataset to simulate a 'very hot, sustained, summer'. Spaces ventilated with mechanical ventilation heat recovery

(MVHR) systems have 'boost' mode functions to help mitigate overheating effects in the summer.

We will be carrying out a post-occupancy evaluation after one full year of use to compare these metrics with the building pre-development.

Katy Marks, director, Citizens Design Bureau