

Press Release



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Council unveils Cornerstone: behind the hoardings

Cornerstone, South Oxfordshire's new multi million pound arts centre, located in Didcot, is now entering its final construction phase. The council is delighted to reveal more details about this fantastic 2,010 square metres.

Cllr Bill Service, Cabinet member with responsibility for leisure, said, "Local people will have seen Cornerstone taking shape over recent months with its contemporary design and colourful cladding. The council is so proud of the building and what it will mean for Didcot. It's nearly ready, but for me the building won't quite be complete until it is full of people enjoying the facilities!".

The story behind the build

Cornerstone is an important step towards a bright and brilliant future for Didcot. South Oxfordshire District Council embarked on the project in 2001, predicting the growth of the town and the need for economic development and increased public amenities. The council developed the Orchard Centre, encouraged new retailers into the town, invested in a brand new multi-screen cinema and embarked on the ambitious arts centre project to increase the entertainment and cultural activities available for local people. Didcot is already a much more vibrant town centre, people no longer need to commute to neighbouring towns such as Newbury, Reading and Oxford for their shopping and leisure.

The council has worked with various partners including architects, artists, designers, construction firms and most importantly the local community, to make Cornerstone a centre for quality and excellence in the arts that will be accessible to all visitors.

ARCHITECTURE

Architects Ellis Williams, designers of the internationally renowned Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art in Gateshead, said " It's been an exciting process for us, developing the design collaboratively with the council, artists and local arts groups. We're really pleased that we've been able to realise a unique design and Cornerstone looks fantastic as the centrepiece to the new town square."

Ellis Williams has designed a contemporary and colourful new home for the arts, able to embrace as many different art forms and genres as possible, and to be accessible and welcoming to all.

ART, DESIGN AND THE COMMUNITY

Renowned artist and curator Jacqui Poncelet was brought in to consult on the design of Cornerstone. She also developed a commission proposal as part of the building's fabric. Her work was based on the use of colour and surface forms applied to elements of the building, such as the acoustic panelling in the auditorium, as well as the ways the spaces will be used publicly and privately.

Sculptor, visual artist and public art and communities specialist, Richard Layzell, joined the team in 2002. His remit was to facilitate a connection between local people in the community and the build itself. Richard held consultations with local arts groups and schools. The resulting design features make the building unique to Didcot and the needs of the community, and won external funding for their ingenuity.

- The Window Walls face out to the street and offer community groups, artists and schools an exhibition space for their work. Each window is designed to be used by a different group from the under 5s to local professional artists. The Window Walls connect the art inside to the people outside, demystifying what is going on inside the centre and hopefully making local people feel comfortable and welcome inside.
- The Every Day Jewels display chest will be a permanent sculpture installation developed with the community. The concept is to value small things that are unique to Didcot. The every day jewels displayed will include archaeological items excavated from the power station site and more modern items relevant to young people. Items will be showcased using push button lighting to highlight each element.
- The Perforated Panels idea came from a winning pupil at St Birnius School. Ian Caswell's design was selected by Ellis Williams Architects and has been adopted into the fabric of the building. The perforations and cut outs in the cladding create a textured, three dimensional effect.
- Finally Style Acre, a body working closely with adults affected by learning disabilities, greatly influenced the design of the door handles used to access the auditorium. The design is tactile and unusual, made of birch wood and easily manageable for all abilities. Renowned handle makers, John Planck Ltd, have realised the concept beautifully.

On his involvement Richard Layzell said, "What a wonderful new lease of creative and cultural life this is for Didcot, and for those of us that have been involved from the start, what an epic and fulfilling journey!"

CONSTRUCTION

Once all of these wonderful creative ideas were bought together in the design of the building, Leadbitter Construction came on board in November 2006. They have encountered many challenges along the way, most notably the unusual cladding which has taken masterful engineering and management to achieve the high quality finish to the building. All the main structures and internal fabric are now complete and Leadbitter is decorating, laying the floors and adding the final finishing touches.

THE FINISHED PRODUCT

Cornerstone will open its doors at the end of the summer and launch into a full season of varied professional and community events and performances throughout the autumn. The interior of the venue includes an auditorium, a visual arts gallery, a dance studio, an arts studio, two multi purpose spaces for everything from creative writing classes to toddlers crafts and community forums and a high quality café bar.

Various spaces will also be available for private hire and special events.

Ends

Notes to editors

For more information on Cornerstone contact Jane Martin, Marketing and Development Officer on direct line: 01491 823176 or email: jane.martin@southoxon.gov.uk