

The Hive at Five: from design to delivery

Introduction

The Hive in Worcester is home to Europe's first integrated public and university library, Worcestershire's Archives & Archaeology Service and Worcestershire County Council's Customer Service Hub. Having celebrated our fifth birthday in July 2017, this article presents an opportune moment to reflect on the original vision and how the innovative design has helped us to transform both university and county library services in Worcester.

Design and vision

The project was 10 years in the making and came about as a result of the University of Worcester needing a new library and Worcestershire County Council's need to move out of an old Victorian building. A site was identified (formerly the Council's waste collection site!) and talks began. The partnership between the University and the County is unique and due to the huge commitment on both sides, The Hive came into being. The site was of great archaeological significance and there was a lengthy consultation period covering everyone from Board members and Governors down to key target groups; students, children and families, schools, disabled communities and businesses, to name but a few. This consultation also included staff who were fully involved at all stages of the process.

Design Statement:

The Hive is a £60million PFI and the client was involved in every stage of the design and construction, extremely unusual in the PFI sector. The team consisted of representatives on both sides.

A destination in itself. The building should inspire, excite and welcome, but not intimidate through a sense of grandeur or self-importance."

WLHC Design Statement 2007

The vision of a truly integrated building and service remains true and although challenging, the partnership still adheres to its original vision and principles:

- Inspiration
- Connection
- Aspiration
- Learning
- Integration
- Inclusivity
- Enduring values
- Well-being
- Sustainability
- Visibility

The building itself contributes to these principles and won BREEAM Outstanding for its environmental impact and sustainability; it runs on a water cooling system and Biomass boiler and has one of the most sophisticated Building Management Systems in the country. We have won several awards including recognition from RIBA and RCIS amongst others. Out of 46 awards applied

for we have won 23, many for customer service and for work with the community as well as for the iconic, gold-clad building.

Service delivery and impact

Since opening in 2012, The Hive has gone from strength to strength, with:

- 4 million visits
- 62,780 new members, 40,800 children or young people
- Over 4 million issues
- Over 10,000 school children
- Student satisfaction risen 13% in the National Student Survey (NSS)
- University staff satisfaction with library services 98%
- 8,690 logged enquiries (2015-16), 51% by university members

Alongside these facts and figures, we also get great qualitative feedback from our users and visitors:

“The library was a big 'selling point' of the course for me” – NSS response, 2016

“I would like to highlight the fact that we have a wonderful library in Worcester. Great workspace, friendly staff and tons of resources.” – NSS response, 2016

“It’s a wonderful, amazing placeThis is a dream place for me; it’s perfect and I’m very jealous.” – Michael Rosen, Children’s Laureate 2007-9

Our staff make all of this happen. Simply put, they are the best asset we have. We have around 200 staff in The Hive, and we ask a tremendous amount of them. A member of the front of house team might be running Bounce and Rhyme in the morning, supporting a first time computer user at lunchtime, and helping students discover reading list materials for their assignment in the afternoon. They work with each customer in the same positive and friendly way and because of this we consistently receive great feedback from our users.

The nature of the building means that we have a huge number of opportunities for people to get involved. Alongside our paid staff, we have around 110 volunteers in 15 different roles, contributing 20,000 hours this year alone. Volunteers can sign up as digital champions, meet and greeters, or work with events, code club, work club, children’s activities or more besides.¹

We also take on students on work placements, both those who are studying for library qualifications and students from a variety of courses at the University of Worcester. In the last few years, students have written social media campaigns for us, planned our textbook rescue event, the Great Hive Book Rescue, and undertaken research about study spaces.

Alongside this, we have a vibrant arts programme designed to bring our communities together, with all of our activities being open to all of our users.² For example, events such as professorial lectures, exhibitions of students’ work, and events like the Research School’s ‘Images of Research’ competition offer a window into the world of the university for our local community, showcasing and celebrating our work and potentially sparking a curiosity to join the university as a student. Similarly, members of the university community have a host of opportunities to them, from links

¹ <http://www.thehiveworcester.org/jobs.html>

² <http://www.thehiveworcester.org/whats-on.html>

with local businesses in our Business Centre, to activities for them to enjoy with their families, from Bounce and Rhyme to Harry Potter night.

What's next?

The Hive continues to evolve and one of the many lessons learned has been that we have to remain flexible; adapting to changing circumstances and customer needs. A new 5 year Strategic Plan is in development, looking at prioritising and building on our many achievements, but also identifying where we want to grow our audience and improve our facility. There are plans to develop the exterior site, something that will add to the regeneration of this area of Worcester and to work more closely with the LEP and Economic Development on measuring our impact on the city. We are also looking at evaluating other areas with regard to The Hive's influence on our education providers, literacy and our social impact on visitors. We also aim to continue to be a frontrunner in terms of design, building functionality and the service we provide and to continually improve our service for those who use our facility both now and in the future.

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