

## Didcot's £7.3m Arts Centre

South Oxfordshire District Council's new Corner Stone arts and entertainment venue opened during August 2008. The venue is aptly named, being at the heart of the creation of a new town square, and it is scheduled to host everything from live music and stand-up comedy acts to Shakespearian plays, opera, ballet and children's puppet shows.



The Arts Centre is a one-off bespoke steel frame building combined with a reinforced concrete structure with integrated cladding and large areas of structural glazing allowing daylight deep into the foyer space. Storey height trusses support the auditorium roof, providing a fully accessible space for lighting and rigging.

The auditorium is a 248-290-seat flexible space with fully retractable seating; the venue accommodates four multi-purpose arts education spaces, a visual art exhibition space and a café-bar. The accommodation includes dressing rooms, a green room, scenery and technical stores, public foyer, box office and staff office accommodation.

One acoustic design challenge was to provide an auditorium that presents conditions suitable for a wide range of uses, from art house cinema and theatre productions, to orchestral rehearsals - there had been a dearth of suitable space in the area for local arts groups, so the demands upon the space will be extensive. The end result is a space with extensive use of profiled timber wall panels, producing a warm acoustic which was praised during the opening ceremony, attended by the Princess Royal, for having excellent speech intelligibility.

Another key challenge was to provide a building shell that could attenuate potentially high levels of internal noise from rock bands and discos, such that the local community would not be disturbed. This has been successfully achieved by use of double skin isolated structures and a highly built up roof construction.

Client: South Oxfordshire District Council  
Architect: Ellis Williams Architects  
Contractor: Leadbitter