

PROJECT 2

Plumstead Centre by Hawkins\Brown

Improved libraries, a cafe, collaboration space, a gym and badminton court, and flexible-use spaces are all to be found in this renovation/extension

THE UK PUBLIC LIBRARY is not in great health: according to a 2019 report from the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, more than 773 libraries have closed since 2010, with many more still at risk of closure. With this in mind, architectural projects that contribute to their survival are most welcome. One of the latest examples is Hawkins\Brown's renovation and extension of an underused library building in Plumstead, in the Royal Borough of Greenwich. The new Plumstead Centre provides improved libraries for children and adults, but these are also joined by a cafe, collaboration space and – perhaps less obviously library-related – a gym and badminton court. The creation of flexible-use spaces was important to the scheme, and these include two large studios, which might be used for activities such as performing arts, yoga, or to host exhibitions.

The existing library building on Plumstead High Street is Grade II listed, dating from 1903. Its main entrance has been preserved, still proudly displaying its original carved 'Public Library' signage, while accessible via a side street is the new two-storey extension. An illuminated sign here, also visible from the main road, announces its presence as 'The Plumstead Centre'. Between the old and new parts is a glazed transparent entrance, providing level access to the building. Upon entering, the visitor can look in either direction to see what the centre has to offer; to the right, a view into the cafe on the ground floor, and through an internal window to the activity studios above, and to the left into the new extension. Here, the open and unimposing entrance gives way to a stair/seating hybrid – referred to here as the 'book mountain', for reading, working or relaxing; an informal introduction to the library function before you reach the main library spaces. >



KEY SUPPLIERS

Joinery (inc. shelving, cafe seating – designed by HB)
Raphael
 raphaelcontracting.com

Furniture supplier
Day2
 day2.co.uk

Chairs & tables
Hay
 hay.dk

Existing chairs & tables refurbished
Ercol
 ercol.com

Main library table
Facit table by Icons of Denmark
 iconsofdenmark.dk

Library lighting
Ringo Star Slim – Lightnet
 lightnet-group.com

Polished concrete
Lazenby
 lazenby.co.uk



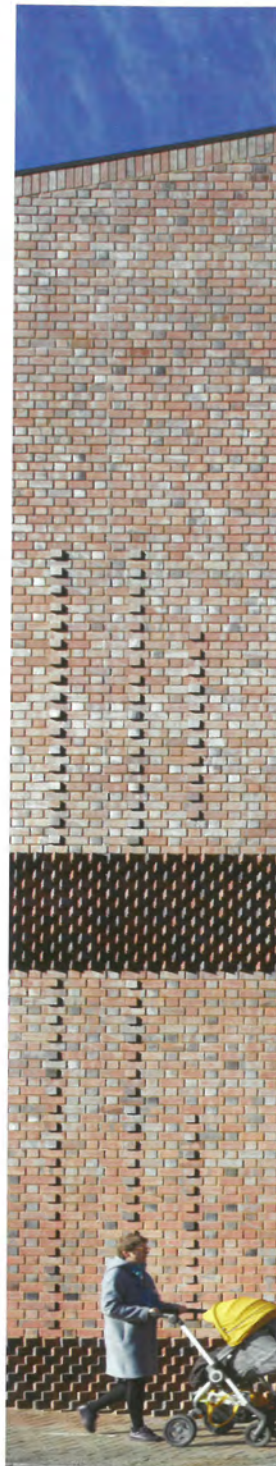
Previous page The facade features a textured brick band, and has stories by local school children written into it

Above left Barrel-vaulted skylights create light-filled multi-use studio spaces

Left Hawkins\Brown has opened the entirety of the listed building and extension to the public, when only 30% was previously accessible

Right The extension is constructed in the same materials as the library: brick, glass and metal

Below The entrance features the stair/seating hybrid 'book mountain', offering informal seating for reading, working or relaxing



PROJECT INFO

Start on site
November 2018

Completion
February 2020

Gross external floor area
2,537 sq m

Gross internal floor area
2,329 sq m

Contract/Procurement
Two-stage design & build

Construction cost/Project cost
£11.8m/£16.6m

Architect
Hawkins\Brown
hawkinsbrown.com

Client
Royal Borough of Greenwich

Structural engineer
Stantec (fka Pete Brett Associates)
stantec.com

M&E consultant
Stantec (fka Pete Brett Associates)

Quantity surveyor
Faithful + Gould
fgould.com

Project manager
Faithful + Gould

CDM coordinator
Faithful + Gould

Main contractor
Osborne
osbourne.co.uk



Hawkins\Brown has also opened up the entirety of the original building, whereas only 30% had been accessible to the public before. The design has allowed for flexible use of many of the spaces, which is key to it being such a rich resource able to provide facilities for a range of activities for the community.

The library now benefits from new reading and working rooms and increased IT provision, but with respect to the building's original features, services are discreetly hidden behind 253m of bespoke shelving. Lighting is integrated into shelving, as well as hanging from the ceiling in elegant circular fittings by Lightnet, providing plenty of light for reading and browsing areas.

Upstairs barrel-vaulted skylights have been revealed after being hidden for 70 years, while parquet flooring throughout and mosaic tiling in the main stairwell has been restored.

In addition to an abundance of wood – parquet flooring and wooden wall panelling mixed with new shelving and furniture – a soft colour palette works well across the new and old sections of the building. In the upstairs studios, a palette of black and white sets off the cornicing and panelling, and is well-lit thanks to the large skylights above combined with a square lighting frame suspended below each one.

The extension uses materials similar to the original building – brick, glass and metal, to

be 'sympathetic, but stylistically distinct' explains Hawkins\Brown. As councillor Danny Thorpe, leader of the Royal Borough of Greenwich, explains: 'Elements of past, present and future Plumstead have been seamlessly embedded within the building, from the reinstatement of our print collection through to the stories written into the facade by local schoolchildren.'

Despite the ongoing pressures on public libraries, this rejuvenated centre with renewed purpose, which was designed through close collaboration and discussion with local residents, will hopefully welcome generations of Plumstead locals to come. **FX**