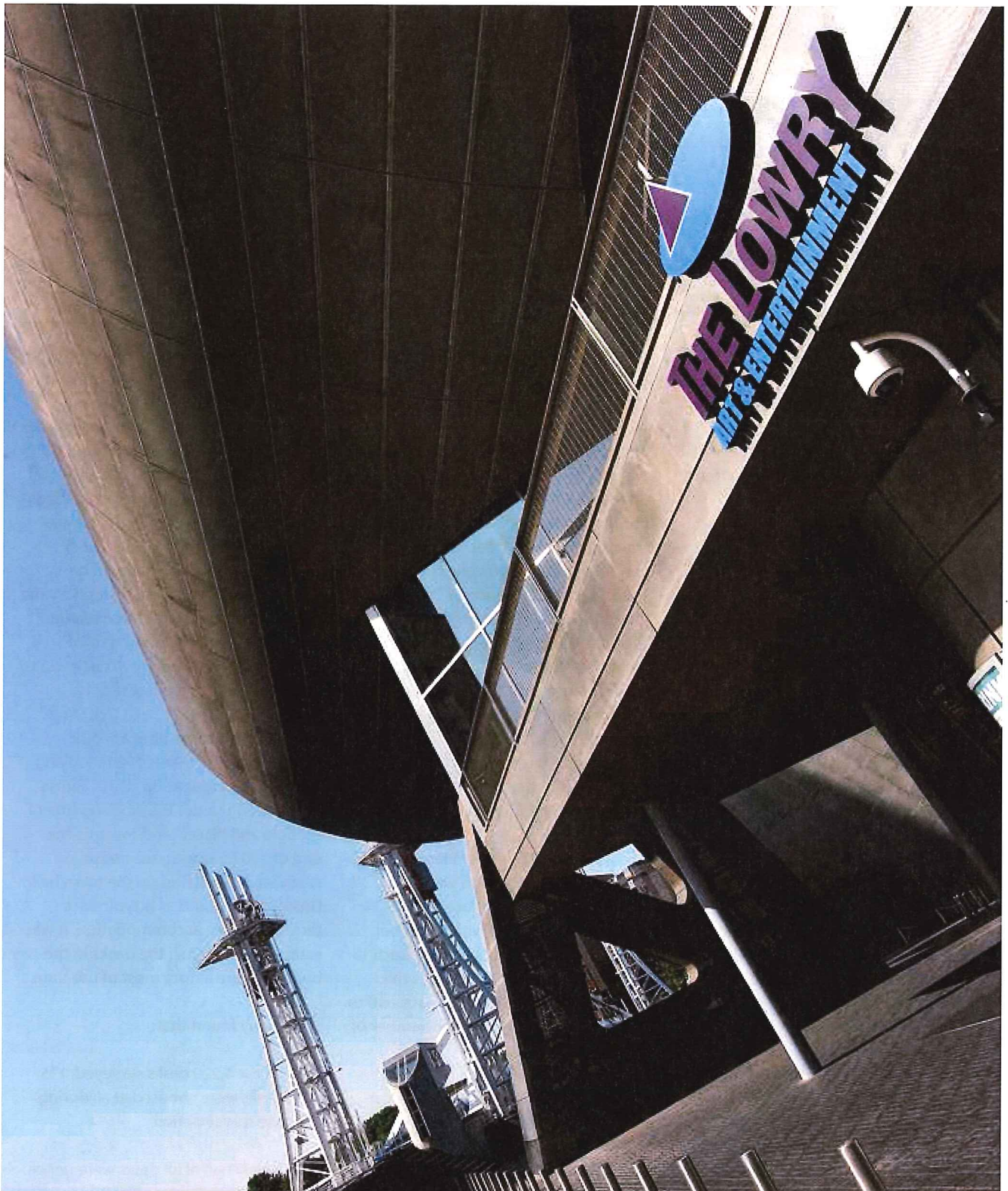


# THE TERRIER

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## ACES

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# KENSINGTON TOWN HALL UPGRADE

Keith Harper and Adam Granger BSc(Hons) MRICS



*Keith is Programme Manager at the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea. He has over 30 years' experience in facilities management and has been working on project and programme delivery since 2005. Keith is an MBA and is a qualified MSP practitioner.*

*Adam joined Pellings in 2007 as Head of Project Management, bringing with him extensive project management experience for numerous clients in a variety of sectors including local government, commercial, education and leisure. He was lead project manager for the delivery of the refurbishment of the second and third floors at the RBK&C Town Hall.*

This case study of public sector office rationalisation has all the hallmarks of effective asset management and shows how an historic building can be transformed internally to provide a dynamic workplace with a big 'wow' factor.

The finishing touches to the £21m upgrade of Kensington Town Hall overlooking Kensington High Street have recently been put in place and it is now regularly used by around 1,600 council staff who can work more effectively and more easily in a well-designed flexible workplace.

The scheme was project managed by multi-disciplinary practice Pellings and designed by architects Sheppard Robson. The overall programme delivered total savings to the council in the region of £3.79m a year, with a significant part of that total realised by releasing other office buildings in the borough. In fact it has gone one better and released space within the town hall which has been let out, in itself contributing a net gain of over £1m a year to the total savings. All of this as a result of flexible working allowing more staff to share the same facilities.

Kensington Town Hall was the last major work of architect Sir Basil Spence and was completed on 29 November 1976. Spence's previous notable

buildings included Knightsbridge Barracks and, most famously, Coventry Cathedral.

The town hall stands on an oblong site which slopes up from Kensington High Street with Vincent Harris's neoclassical library, built between 1957 and 1960, fronting the high street. The air-conditioned building constructed with a steel reinforced concrete structure and brick cladding which matches the library's red Roman brickwork, comprises administrative offices, public halls, a civic suite and public car parking ranging over 8 levels. It is laid out around a square courtyard plan and there is a giant redwood in the centre of the courtyard which was planted in memory of Sir Winston Churchill.

Like all local authorities in recent years, the Royal Borough was faced with having to put in place cost saving measures and with a number of buildings occupied by the council around the borough, there was the potential to relinquish this space and to make better use of a smaller number of buildings.

Furthermore, by 2000 the mechanical and electrical services to the building were at the end of their expected economic life. Maintaining the old plant in service was proving more difficult, spare parts were not easy to come by or

not available at all and consequently the cost of operating the plant was rising.

In 2005 a comprehensive survey of the building outlined the works required to refurbish the M&E services and the review team provided budget costings for planning purposes. A project was developed to ascertain what work was required and how it could be completed with minimal disruption and at optimum cost. The refurbishment programme was considered to be essential if Kensington Town Hall was to remain viable as an office facility.

At around the same time a senior group of council officers were looking at staff accommodation issues across the borough under the working title of "People and Places" and towards the end of 2007 a workspace utilisation study was completed on the town hall. Unsurprisingly and as is typical for territorial office accommodation, it was established that half the desks in the building were empty most of the time.

The survey found that:

- Of the 1,220 desks surveyed, 115 desks were not used at all during the survey period
- Nearly half of all desks were unoccupied for 3 days a week or more



- 280 desks were unoccupied for 4 days a week or more
- The maximum desk occupation level recorded in the study was 52%.

It was clear that this represented an opportunity to use the office space more effectively. One of the most common staff frustrations and barriers to productive working was the difficulty in finding meeting rooms and yet many dedicated offices were found to be empty much of the time. This, together with excessive paper storage, often not well organised or managed, indicated inefficient use of office space and was detrimental to the quality of staff accommodation. Arguably it also had a negative impact on staff morale and working effectiveness.

It was at this point that the officers realised that if the M&E upgrade was to take place the building could either be returned to its traditional, territorially occupied, set of hierarchical cellular offices with allocated desks and windowless corridors, or it could be the catalyst for workplace change.

The officers were aware that in public and private sectors, the approach to workplace provision was changing – hierarchies were flattening out with more open plan and collaborative working becoming the norm. ICT colleagues were delivering technology that was allowing better collaboration and releasing staff from needing to be in a fixed location; they could work in a more mobile way, not reliant on a specific location within a building or in many cases not even reliant on a building at all.

At the same time there was the opportunity to save on energy costs. Kensington Town Hall was responsible for around 23% of all council carbon

emissions. As a result, the proposed 25% reduction in energy consumption arising from the M&E works at the town hall would have a significant effect on the council's level of carbon emissions.

The delivery team's solution was to create a building with a range of "work settings" that were to be found at the council with inbuilt flexibility to cope with these settings changing over time. It was acknowledged that different teams had different work styles. For example, it was accepted that not every meeting needs to be confidential and could therefore be held in any one of a range of flexible work settings, where staff are more visible to each other in a more open environment where everything is shared.

Another key decision taken was that the council would direct the refurbishment using an external professional team of construction consultants while the 'people change' work would be delivered directly by council staff and given external support when required. This allowed the council to create residual knowledge and experience to handle future work style changes when required.

For a number of reasons the decision was taken to undertake the project in phases. Like any office refurbishment completed 'in occupation', works had to be carried out around the building users. The cost and disruption to vacate the building would have been excessive. The sensible approach was to tackle the project floor by floor – decanting people as necessary. As staff started to share space and work in more agile ways, the decanting work became easier. Also, contracting for the phases discretely allowed the council flexibility should financial or other constraints require significant changes to the proposed work.

Ultimately the project was procured in 4 discrete stages with a separate contract for each, using a full EU compliant procurement process and a framework agreement. The final phase, which required creating a separate lettable area, was separately procured to ensure a competitive price. The contracts used in each case were JCT Standard Form.

The professional design and delivery teams were each appointed directly with the council using the appropriate industry forms of appointment. The architect was engaged using RIBA forms, cost consultants, Henry Riley and project managers and contract administrators Pellings were retained using RICS forms and Butler & Young Associates, the mechanical and electrical engineers, were employed using ACE conditions. The CDM advisers were Watts & Partners.

The strategic approach undertaken by the council procurement team at the outset proved invaluable, especially with the building being in part occupation throughout the whole of the project programme. This assisted Pellings as project manager and contract administrator and enabled a smooth transition from one phase to another with the flexibility to make changes that became apparent during the programme.

The upgrade that was finally delivered on 3 upper floors and lower ground floor created a whole new working experience. Before, each floor had a central corridor running around the middle of the 4 sides of the building with cellular offices each side of the corridor. These were all scrapped in favour of shared space where all staff are more visible to each other and can collaborate more easily. This design also created more office floor space.







In addition to the main open plan floor areas, architect Sheppard Robson created a range of different size spaces from booths for individuals providing semi-privacy to break-out spaces providing meeting spaces for between 3 to 30 people.

The basement floor has been totally upgraded. Previously it was used for meeting rooms with artificial light and storage but now it acts as the new staff entrance, with bright break out spaces for relaxation and informal meetings together with a staff café that is used for meetings and work by staff.

The architect came up with a colour coding for all 4 corners of the building – orange, purple, pink and green – covering all 4 floors. These strong colours provide the real ‘wow’ factor which was really important as staff was being asked to relinquish personal desk space and the management team wanted them to have a working environment they were really proud of. The whole ethos is that everyone gets what they need to do the job when they need it, but it is all shared.

Before the upgrade the offices had over 6km of storage which was not considered efficient use of premium office space. A thorough information management initiative was completed to ensure all building users disposed of unnecessary items, archived papers where appropriate and made full use of existing electronic storage systems. The target was to provide 2.2 linear metres of storage per work station but in the event this has come in at under 2 metres. As all building users share desks each individual has his or her own locker, being their only territorial space!

The building services were totally revamped. 40 years’ worth of cabling was removed from false ceilings, perimeter air-conditioning induction units were ripped out, new chilled beam ceilings were installed and raised floors incorporated to carry data and power.

During the project it was decided to

create a space in one of the wings known as Niddry Lodge for letting out on the open market and producing valuable income for the council. Determining the right level of finish and specification for what was a speculative office letting at the time, without knowing who the tenant would be, was a key challenge. It was not known at the time of specification and design whether the accommodation would be a single or multiple let. The council appointed a well-known, successful, local letting agent who knew the local market extremely well. Pellings liaised closely with the council to agree the most appropriate level of fit-out and finishes. It was necessary to ensure the new entrance to this self-contained unit was sufficiently attractive, without over specifying, to ensure the costs were kept within budget as reflected in the robust business case. This again was done through liaising with the agent and soft market testing.

Pellings ensured the design brief built in sufficient flexibility to accommodate up to 3 tenants (one on each floor) in terms of access control, lift access, metering, alarms and evacuation. Common areas were determined, taking into consideration the need to maximise the lettable space. Ultimately, the accommodation has been let to a single tenant at a rent which was above the predicted market outcome and business case.

In conclusion the whole project highlighted the following very positive deliverables:

- A well-structured programme, with clear objectives and effective mechanisms for decision making, delivered the programme of works ahead of time and within budget
- Good staff engagement early on, and throughout, minimised disruption to services and good take-up of new technology and working practices
- The town hall remained in normal

operation throughout the works; careful planning enabled phased works across the office floors, well controlled in terms of noise etc., minimising cost and disruption

- A good design brief which drew from staff consultation has delivered a bright, contemporary office space, delivered at industry standard rates that staff like and can work in effectively
- Very good use has been made of the basement area; through creative design the area has been reclaimed as an attractive, effective set of workspaces
- 96% of all the old office materials (walls, floors, carpets, ductwork, cables etc.) removed from site were recycled
- Staff are more mobile with laptops and mobile telephones issued as standard, while a one device per person policy simultaneously reduced the organisation’s spend on ICT
- Flexible working practices, alongside staff training and new technology, are helping staff work together better, making the organisation more effective and transparent
- Tele and video conferencing technology and electronic ways of working are helping us collaborate more easily with colleagues across borough boundaries
- Early benefits of the workstation 7:10 sharing ratio made it possible to accelerate the programme, completing works both in larger tranches and consecutively, shortening the works programme
- In order to meet a very tight government deadline, the photo voltaic array on the roof of the town hall was installed as part of the 3rd floor refurbishment works.