



# THE PUBLIC, WEST BROMWICH

THE PUBLIC, AN EXCITING NEW MULTI-PURPOSE BUILDING, OPENED ITS DOORS LAST JUNE. WE LOOK AT AN FCSI MEMBER'S CONTRACT TO COMPLETE THE DESIGN OF THE IMPRESSIVE CATERING FACILITY

Photography courtesy of Mark Enstone and Julian Flannery

Continued on page 48 [↗](#)



The major focal point for a £500m regeneration of the West Bromwich town centre, The Public is a major new multi-purpose building which opened its doors last June.

Located in the Borough of Sandwell and surrounded by Birmingham, Walsall, Dudley and Wolverhampton, The Public lies in the heart of the largest provincial conurbation in the UK.

The project is a unique venue which has been described as “part town planning, part regeneration, part visitor attraction, part contemporary art gallery and part media collection”.

Change through art and participation is the inspiration for the concept; it’s a place where people take part and a place where taking part is considered and examined.

The central core of the building is dominated by ‘the ramp’, a 250 metre walkway that links the beginning of the Gallery at third floor level to ‘download’ (an interactive retail experience) on the ground floor.

On the ground floor, the main café bar has seating both internally, in large areas surrounding the counter/bar as well as externally, directly accessed from a new paved town square area.

When approached from this direction customers can see right through the impressive internal architecture of the building, right up to the top floor.

Providing further attraction there is a flexible theatre space on the ground floor which can seat up to 250 people or alternatively

can accommodate up to 500 for standing events.

This zone is served by a purpose built production kitchen, which also services significant additional event/conference spaces, via a finishing kitchen on the third floor.

#### DESIGN CHALLENGE

Tim Dunn FCSI of Tim Dunn Design with Mark Hobbs of Kendrick Hobbs Ltd tackled the foodservice design challenges presented by the structural intricacies of the unique architectural features.

“Inevitably we were presented with some constraints within the kitchen spaces. There were some quirky areas, sometimes with low ceiling heights and angular walls, earmarked for catering.

“These were not always perfect, but we developed some neat solutions that met each of the special requirements associated with such a versatile public venue.”

Kendrick Hobbs as part of a team lead by David Clarke of DCA Consultants had originally been commissioned to undertake a major strategic review of building and space uses.

As the project evolved and the design process moved into action, further refinements were made to reflect the ongoing requirements. The completed foodservice facilities comprise:

- A café bar on the ground floor serviced by an adjacent support/preparation area
- A ground floor production kitchen adjacent to theatre/events

**Above**  
For regional conferences and events there are a wide range of spaces available in the building including the theatre, exhibition space, gallery spaces and the café areas



- space
- A third floor finishing kitchen linked to ground floor production kitchen by robust goods-lift
- A third floor coffee bar serving a range of speciality beverages, cakes and sandwiches

According to Hobbs: "The strategy of linking the production facilities was critical to give the building the flexibility to respond to single or multiple events that may occur in areas on either the ground or third floor levels."

Both event kitchens include refrigeration and dishwasher capability to maximise flexibility.

Project architects Flannery de la Pole were extremely accommodating and sympathetic to the design challenges.

In fact, the collaboration between the foodservice design team and Julian Flannery produced some striking results, perhaps especially the ground floor café bar service counter, which is constructed in horizontal sheets of black and white Corian.

The counter features a subtle 'cut out' which is chilled at the left hand-end for 'grab & go' items as well as super slim chrome polished beer taps further to the right for draught beers. The vibrantly coloured yellow 'pod' behind is the kitchen.

#### POSITIVE RESPONSE

Architect Julian Flannery said: "Tim and Mark responded really

positively to the design of The Public, and overcame considerable challenges in working within a highly bespoke and complex building."

As a publically funded project the team was under budgetary pressure when it came to fit-out but, in associating with Catering Design Group who won a competitive tender to carry out the fit-out, a close focus on the end user's needs ensured costs were controlled.

In association with the client team Kendrick Hobbs appointed caterers Couture to run the facilities. Couture, as a commercial and arts venue specialist, has applied its own flair and style to the venue.

Managing Director Marc Warde has reported that the facilities are popular with visitors and that the café bar has managed to become a destination in its own right.

For regional conferences and events there are a wide range of spaces available in the building including the theatre, meeting rooms, exhibition space, gallery spaces and the café areas themselves.

The Public is entirely unique; there is no other building like it. The facility is described as "a new kind of cultural building; a first class venue, an international gallery and a great day out".

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Above Kendrick Hobbs Ltd and Julian Flannery produced some striking results such as the ground floor café bar service counter constructed in sheets of black and white Corian