







▶▶▶▶and charities, including the highly successful and widely mimicked SOS Bus venture (essentially a late night bus to help underage revellers who had perhaps taken things a bit far), Graham was keen to invest in a static site that could be used as a beacon for the young people of Norwich. He'd always had his eye on the building and, after a period of negotiation with Barclays, managed to acquire it.

For the construction and future management phase the Open Youth Trust was established, and with a requirement for further funds and a desire to see local businesses and the local authorities buy in to the project, a fundraising initiative was embarked upon and a number of high profile patrons signed up. And with funding starting to come through an architectural competition for the site was instigated, resulting in a short-list of five and the final appointment of Hudson Architects. As Project Manager, Les Brown, tells us, 'This was only the start. We loved Hudson's concept of an inner layer which clings to the original architecture and which creates the array of walkways and platforms within the space, but also their sympathy for the Art Deco features. But, as with many projects of this sort, the concept they won the bid on ultimately evolved into something else.'

It wasn't just the architects who had an input in to the project, and they certainly didn't have the final say. 'The goal for the Open Venue has always been to be appealing to today's young people. It was acquired and converted for them but we

had no real idea about their tastes or aspirations so, through the local schools, colleges and papers, we invited 13 to 25 year olds to join a committee of 40, the Youth Forum, and to help steer us and the architects with defining the facilities, interior colours schemes, graphics and furniture. They really were involved with every part of the process, and, with the group having a wide variety of backgrounds and abilities, we had a first-hand insight as to how the space could work for all.

'Once we'd determined the space and appointed main contractors, we went to the market for the fit-out and ultimately used Showcase Interiors for the furniture

packages. They were great in setting up showroom visits so that, over the course of a day in London, the internal project team, including four of the Youth Forum, could see, try and test a host of different chairs, stools and furniture as well as looking at upholstery and finish options. It's been a great process to go through and, aside from the space, what is rewarding now is that some of the kids that joined the committee are now working as employees for Open.'

But what of the facilities, what's in this colossal building? Well, there's the Live Venue with a state-of-the-art sound system, lighting and stage capable of taking a standing audience of 1,200. You have no forewarning of the scale or drama of this space before you enter it – you stand riveted to the spot, trying to take in the height and scale, as well as the uniquely designed sound absorption baffles which tussle like giant Toblerones in the ceiling space. And we've never seen such a cantilevered Corian bar – the whole space seems to defy physics.

Then there's the alcohol free under 18's nightclub with a capacity of 460 revellers that would put many a London club to shame; a 12 metre climbing wall which bisects the bright and airy games room and café area (complete with indoor lamp-post no less). There's a sizeable dance studio, a recording studio; three Green rooms for acts at the club or auditorium; a drop-in Health Centre with its own discreet entrance; a fully kitted media centre where kids can come after school to get online or to do their homework; a number of charity offices and youth agencies that provide assistance▶▶▶▶▶



►►► for young people on finding employment through to teenage pregnancy; and a 150 delegate state-of-the-art meeting and conference facility which has been lovingly converted from the old bank's management offices in to some very beautiful spaces. All of this in one building. Phenomenal.

Chatting to Les about the diversity of applications and facilities that the one building provides, it becomes evident that there was a degree of disbelief felt by much of the local business community when the project was being scoped. 'Few people believed we could do it, that it would actually see the light of day. But we've done it, and what has been reassuring is that more and more sponsorship and donations have been coming in the further along the project we've got. When people and businesses saw it really happening they wanted to be part of it.'

Such a building, once finished, is going to demand a huge amount of maintenance and on cost, so how's it going to pay for itself? Les, who we subsequently find out is also one of Open's trustees, has the answer. 'Of course the building has overheads – so many areas within the space have a commercial aspect to them. Apart from making the Live Venue, nightclub and climbing wall available for hire, we also have commercial arrangements with the charities and agencies who take space within the building. They get state-of-the-art facilities in a community venue in the centre of the city instead of some poorly maintained, damp office on the outskirts.'



But there's more. 'We also have the Conference Centre, which we will be marketing to local businesses as a centrally positioned alternative to hotel meeting rooms. Part of our angle will be that not only will they be in a stunning and technologically up-to-date environment; they'll also be supporting the Open charity.'

And then there's Closed. Beneath the ground floor is a labyrinth of vaults, a veritable maze of what used to be the largest gold bullion vaults outside of London and Birmingham. Now being hired

out to organisations that need secure storage, these vaults are amazing, with more steel and concrete than you can shake a stick at and vault doors thicker than Jordan and Peter combined.

Les tells me about other revenue generating opportunities that exist for Open, but there's one in particular which brings a wry smile to his face. 'Inevitably we have a couple of cashpoint machines at the front of the building, these are hired by the providing bank. Did you notice they're Barclays?' Love it ●



## essential ingredients

Client:	• Open Youth Trust
Architect:	• Hudson Architects 01603 766220
Furniture Supply:	• Showcase Interiors 0845 833 6515
Systems Furniture:	• K+N 020 7490 9340
Conference & Auditorium Seating:	• Brunner 020 7309 6400
Task Seating:	• K+N 020 7490 9340
Breakout & Soft Seating:	• Orangebox 020 7837 9922 Vitro 020 7608 6200 Wiesner Hager 020 7490 3627