Idea Store Whitechapel

Project description:
The Idea Store concept embodies a radical rethink of the public library in order to rejuvenate the building type and bring it up to date with modern lifestyles and attitudes. At its core is the integration of library and life long learning to provide a wide range of information and resources within a seamless service. In tandem with this concept is the desire to demystify the idea of a library by placing them in major shopping hubs and by adopting retail models in the design and management of the spaces. The emphasis is on removing barriers both real and psychological so that the widest possible spectrum of the community is encouraged to enter and engage with the institution.

The brief calls for 4,500m2 (gross) of floor space, 415m2 of which is retail. The remainder is a mix of library and education space. The building is conceived as a simple stack of flexible floor plates wrapped in a unified facade that combines transparency with colour. A curtain wall consisting of a repeating pattern of coloured glass, clear glass, and glass faced aluminium panels enclose all four facades. Information display is a key element of the facade concept and reinforces the idea of the building as a disseminator of information within the community.

On the high street is five story height atrium which extends out over the pavement to become an active collector and in conjunction with an escalator, draws people in and up. The cafe is placed on the top floor to draw people past the various facilities on offer. With panoramic views of the city and the dome of St Paul’s cathedral, the cafe terminates a promenade of escalators and staircases that rises through the building.

Funding for the Idea Stores has been raised from a variety of external regeneration funders (such as UK Online, European Regional Development Fund, Single Regeneration Budget, London Development Agency), in addition to funding by the London Borough of Tower Hamlets. Resources have therefore been highly constrained and the Council is required to closely account for all of its spending on the projects.

Assessibility Statement:
All public levels of the building are accessible for wheelchair users by means of two lifts serving the ground floor level. Both entrances at ground floor are formed level with the pavement. An independent access audit has been carried out which led to the creation, at ground level, of an inclusive entrance area. The audit has also contributed information that was used in the design of the interior fit out for both library users
The Idea Story

The Idea
Through the new Idea Stores, Tower Hamlets Council will be investing millions of pounds to create a network of adult education, library and information services, in 7 state-of-the-art buildings, all in local shopping centres.

These buildings are more than just a library or a place of learning. As well as the traditional library service, much valued by residents, they offer a wide range of adult education classes, along with career support, training, a creche, meeting areas, cafes and arts and leisure pursuits.

Meeting Local Needs

After consulting with local residents in the largest consultation exercise ever undertaken by Tower Hamlets Council it became clear that major investment was needed to prepare local library and adult education services for the millennium.

The message from Tower Hamlets' households taking part in London's most comprehensive opinion survey about libraries was stark and simple: they wanted a high-quality, modern library service which provided a far greater range of services than at present.

Overall, the survey showed that libraries are a highly valued local service. Despite recognising the excellent effort of staff on behalf of residents, customers were dissatisfied with the quality, location and nature of the service they were getting.

An Idea into Reality
The Secretary of State for the Department of Culture, Media and Sport, launched the groundbreaking Idea Stores concept in April 1999. Tower Hamlets, unveiled its plans to invest £20 million in library and learning services at a time when the national trend has been for decreasing funding.

• The idea became a reality in May 2002 when the first, prototype Idea Store opened at Bow. This was followed by the opening of a second Idea Store at Chrisp Street in July 2004 and a third Idea Store at Whitechapel in September 2005.

We aim to achieve seven-day-a-week opening – already in operation at the existing Idea Stores.
The Promise

The Idea Stores are designed to enable everyone to fulfil their promise. Here are our promises to you:

- We are committed to a major investment programme to modernise your libraries and adult education services.
- The Idea Stores will be built where people will use them – and can get to them easily.
- We will only merge existing libraries and adult education centres once the new Idea Stores are up and running.
- We will develop a truly customer-focused service.
- In contrast to many other areas of Britain, we are committed to a major investment programme to modernise your libraries – having already doubled our spend on books in recent years and invested in hundreds of thousands of pounds in new IT facilities.

Idea Store Funders

Idea Stores are funded by a wide range of different sources:

Idea Store Bow

- Tower Hamlets Council
- UK Online
- Bow People's Trust

The Big Lottery Fund (formerly the New Opportunities Fund)
Idea Store Chriss Street

- Tower Hamlets Council
- UK Online
- Leaside Regeneration
Lloyds of London Charities Trust
Idea Store Whitechapel

- Tower Hamlets Council
- Tower Hamlets College
- UK Online
- European Regional Development Fund
- London Development Agency
- Cityside Regeneration
- Surestart
Sainsbury Families Charitable Trusts
Idea Store Canary Wharf

- Tower Hamlets Council
- Canary Wharf Group
- Learning and Skills Council
- London Metropolitan University
- Barclays
- Tower Hamlets College
Sergio Dogliani
Principal Idea Store Manager
London Borough of Tower Hamlets
United Kingdom

Possible models for
Flemish Communication House
Brussels: Idea Stores
Idea Store Whitechapel, London
19 January 2007

London Borough of Tower Hamlets:
- East London borough: approx 210,000 population
- 33% Bangladeshi
- 49% from black and ethnic minorities
- One of the most deprived boroughs in the UK

Idea Stores because:
- Only 31% of the local population had access to the Internet
- Fewer than 20% of people used libraries in Tower Hamlets
- Fewer than 5% used the Council's adult education service
- 35% of population had basic adult literacy needs
Intensive Market Research:

- 98% considered libraries to be important
- Service had little of interest, old fashioned, in need of investment
- People wanted to use a quality service
- People wanted libraries to be located where they could combine visits with other activities, particularly shopping

Research: 61% would use the library more if visits could be combined with:

- Library
- Theatre
- Leisure
- Booking
- Visitor information Centre
- Journey to work/school
- Post Office
- Bank/Building Society
- Shopping

Research: The lessons

- Location, location, location
- Need to address barriers to learning
- Design service around today's lifestyle
- Image key to attracting customers, particularly younger people
- Books still central to the service
- Investment in IT
- Integrate related activities - seamlessly
Idea Stores: the offer

A cocktail of learning experiences, providing:
- Traditional Library services
- Lifelong learning, including Further and Higher Education, family learning, advice & guidance
- Exhibition space, music performance, crèche, café
- Modern ICT facilities
- Information services and study support
- Strong, branded 'retail' image

Courses & Activities

- Aromatherapy, Foreign Languages, Photoshop & Illustrator, Massage for Babies, DJ Mixing, Drama, Creative Dance, Reiki, Food Hygiene, Beadwork, English for Speakers of Other Languages, Flower Arranging, Accounting, Computing for the Terrified, Music Animation, Web Page Design, Art History, Palmistry, Financial Literacy, Mask Making, Healthy Living, Book Groups, Relaxation, Garden Design, Making Kites, Languages for Families, Driving Licence Theory, Tea Dances, Sleepovers, Reflexology, Time Management...

Impact: Education

- Widening participation & removing barriers
- Hooking people into 'ladders of learning'
- Homework clubs
- Innovative projects
- Family learning focus
- Learner-led
Impact: Regeneration

- Stimulating local shopping economy
- Promoting local cultural / creative economies
- Developing skills for employability
- Raising the profile of the borough as a good place to live and work

Children's Activities

School Holidays Programmes (delivered by staff as well as external providers):
- Clowns, Under 5s playtime,
- Make your own Pop-up book,
- Football Quiz/Penalties Shoot-out, Cartoon Workshop, T-shirt Printing, Papier-mâché: Harry Potter, Sing the World (Family Singing), and more ...

Outcomes:

- Bow: 30,000 visits/month (3 times increase)
- Chrissp Street: 38,000 visits/month (more than 3 times increase)
- Whitechapel: 51,000 visits/month (more than 4 times increase)
- Canary Wharf: 24,000 visits/month and rising
- Visits borough-wide increased by 80% since 2003 (from 1.1 to 1.96 million)
Outcomes:

- **Book and other stock loans:**
  - Bow +14%
  - Chrissp St +19%
  - Whitechapel +86%
  - Canary Wharf +18%
  - PC access at average 60%, peak 90%
  - Course enrolments doubled

Outcomes:

- **Active Membership:**
  - Bow: 7,800
  - Chrissp Street: 9,000
  - Whitechapel: 24,000
  - Canary Wharf: 5,000

Key Approaches:

- Seamless services
- Staffing & recruitment
- Retail model
- Flexible space
- User friendly policies, i.e. No ‘No Signs’