

ARCHITECTURE  
INITIATIVE

# UNLOCKING POTENTIAL OF THE PAST





**AMPLIFYING  
ARCHITECTURE TO SOLVE  
SOCIETY'S BIGGEST  
PROBLEMS**

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# WHO WE ARE

## AMPLIFYING ARCHITECTURE TO SOLVE SOCIETIES GREATEST PROBLEMS

We are redefining the role of the architect as a hugely transformative force for positive change in society. Crucially, this isn't about the built environment but about how society lives. We are extending our influence in order to answer some of the biggest challenges faced by the communities of today and of the future.

By harnessing our unique vision for communities and our clients we will bring enhanced social, economic and cultural value to places we build.

Architecture Initiative was set up in 2012 with the expressed intention of promoting a new type of design practice, design focused but commercially driven, working more collaboratively with clients, acknowledging, understanding and responding proactively their specific aspirations, constraints and requirements.

We have grown into a successful award winning team of 25 highly skilled professionals focusing equally adding value at during planning and delivery stages.

### Services

- Lead Consultant
- Project Management
- Architecture
- Landscape Design
- Principal Designer (CDM 2015)
- BIM Clash Detection
- Interior Design

### 2019 Awards

- RIBA East Midland Award
- EG Awards - Creative Spaces
- Building Awards - Refurb. of the Year

A dark, atmospheric photograph of an abandoned, graffiti-covered interior space, possibly a train station or a large hallway. The walls and pillars are covered in various graffiti tags and drawings. The floor is dark and reflective. In the center, a glowing neon light sculpture, resembling a series of concentric, overlapping loops, creates a bright focal point. The lighting is low, with some light coming from windows on the right side, showing a cityscape at dusk or night. The overall mood is gritty and industrial.

**WHERE THERE'S A  
CHOICE**

**THE DEFAULT SHOULD  
ALWAYS BE TO RETAIN  
AND RETROFIT**

# RETROFIT REVOLUTION

## ARCHITECTS ARE WORKING IN A SYSTEM THAT ACTIVELY ENCOURAGES THE LEAST SUSTAINABLE BUILDING OPTIONS.

Placed alongside the commonly vilified demons of the climate crisis – freight transport, the aviation industry, fossil fuel-derived energy production, intensive agriculture – the construction industry might appear, if not lily-white, then perhaps a non-sooty grey. The truth, however, is far darker.

Construction plays a major part in climate change, accounting for nearly 40% of energy-related carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) emissions while also having a significant impact on biodiversity as demand for energy and resources – cement, aluminium, steel, plastics – cuts an ever destructive swathe through the world's natural habitats. Such unfettered consumption cannot continue and as the world heads deeper into what are shaping up to crucial decades of decision-make and action, the construction industry must adopt a new paradigm in order to play its role in arresting the coming calamity. And at Architecture Initiative we believe that a significant step in the direction of reducing the industry's future impact on the climate is through a re-evaluation of constructions past and the repurposing of exceptional buildings currently viewed as surplus to requirements.

If we can retain more existing structures through intelligent retrofit, we'll reduce carbon emissions and embodied energy costs, help conserve resources, and set buildings up for a longer life. We'll also recognise the social value of buildings – the rich and varied fabric of our built environment that is eroded in a default demolish/rebuild approach.





# REINVENTING SPACES

## **LISTEN. QUESTION EVERYTHING. DELIVER VALUE.**

The key to reimagining existing spaces lies in building in flexibility and ensuring that new-build architecture is compliant with future adaptation.

The nature of historic buildings' suitability for retrofit is their expansive volumes and predisposition towards flexibility. As design professionals we seek to ensure our cities continue to work better as systems, that their density can be maintained, that their housing needs are met, and that all this is done without further damaging the natural world. Simply put, if projects must be new-build, they need to follow a similar pattern to their ancestors – following a non-determinative approach to an architecture that is constructed with inherent flexibility.

We think flexibly in terms of materiality. Choosing high-quality, robust materials that lend themselves to future adaptation is the starting point for any project – not just retrofit. It's crucial that we become collectively responsible for understanding the re-usability and recyclability of the resources we specify.

For us, retrofit is about resisting architecture that is prescriptive and inflexible. It is about understanding that the way we use buildings is changing. By improving performance through new technology and re-thinking the meaning of 'added value' we can achieve long-term betterment rather than immediate gain.



# RETAIN. REDESIGN. REPURPOSE.

## **TO BE CLEAR: WE ARE NOT AGAINST NEW BUILD.**

There will always be a requirement for new build, particularly due to the intense pressure that exists on housing. Expansion is inevitable and new builds are unavoidable. But where new build is the best option, it should be as sustainable as possible.

It's also true that not all existing structures can or should be saved. But where the choice is between demolishing an existing building to build new in its place, or retaining an existing structure, there is a choice, the default approach should be to retain and retrofit it.

However, we are in the unhelpful situation whereby The problem is current financial and policy framework makes retrofit far more difficult than it should be. Infuriatingly, it is often cheaper to demolish and build anew, rather than work with existing structures and retrofit them for new, greener uses. Architects are working in a system that actively encourages the least sustainable building options. As such, Architecture Initiative actively supports the RetroFirst campaign initiated by the Architecture Journal.

## OUR COMMITMENT GOES BEYOND WORDS, IT'S ABOUT CHANGING SOCIETY FOR THE GREATER GOOD OF THE FUTURE.

RetroFirst calls for a change in approach from government and policy-makers and is built around three demands that Architecture Initiative fully support.

- Cut VAT on refurbishment, repair and maintenance from 20% to 5%.
- Policy: Promote the reuse of existing building stock and reclaimed construction material by reforming the planning guidance and building regs.
- Procurement: government must lead by example and insist that all publicly funded projects look to retrofit solutions as a first option.
- We need to constantly challenge new builds that are narrow in scope. We must resist inflexible architecture and we must pursue 'added value' wherever possible. And in so doing we need to create spaces that are fit for purpose and fit for the future. We need to reactivate the functionality that exists in places others view as unsalvageable. We need to see the possibilities in the environment we already inhabit and we need to unlock the potential of the past.



# CASE STUDIES

LONDON SCREEN ACADEMY, ISLINGTON  
NORTHAMPTON INTERNATIONAL  
ACADEMY, NORTHAMPTON  
THE GRAMOPHONE, HAYES

UNLOCK  
POTENTIAL  
REALISE  
**REAL  
VALUE**



Project Value: £26million  
Size: 8,050m<sup>2</sup>  
Client: Working Title Films, DFE and LocatED  
Contractor: Willmott Dixon Interiors

# LONDON SCREEN ACADEMY

## REINVENTING EDUCATION

The Schools' Founders, Working Title Films, had a clear mission for this project; to make the film industry more accessible and diverse, and to promote the art of story-telling through film. The chosen site, a former Metropolitan University building in Highbury Islington which had fallen into disrepair turned out to have a story of its own; originally built in the 1930s as a radio and television factory, the adapted use to a film school seemed ideally suited to the history of the site. By re-using the existing building, the school demonstrates the opportunities to not only enhance the cultural legacy of buildings in our communities, but also the chance to create inspiring leaning environments in non-traditional school buildings.

### The Brief

When Architecture Initiative were approached to develop a proposal for the site, the founders, Eric Fellner and Tim Bevan, were clear about their objectives; the building should not look like a school, and it should be designed to allow for collaboration and story sharing. The activities within needed to be visibly expressed through the architecture.

To achieve this bold vision our team undertook a series of research trips to London film studios to gain a better understanding for the way they operate and the range of activities taking place. Film studios are worlds of their own, with everything from creative design, costumes, sets, the studio itself and the filming crew, to accounting and catering – a self-supporting eco-system.

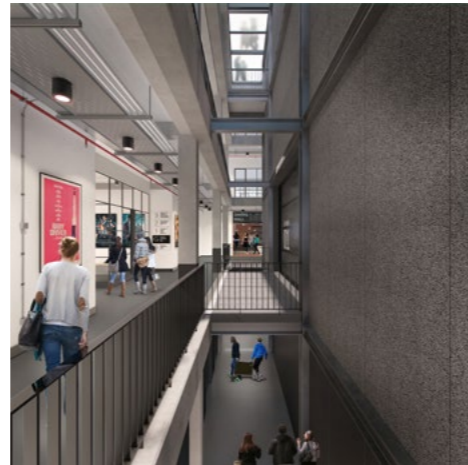
While many of these activities take place in non-specific support offices, demountable units and trailers, the studio and the sets are unique. The production studio is both highly specialized as well as incredibly generic; large sheds that come alive only when filled with sets, actors and crew, but which also contain all the specialist equipment for making films. Creating this space within an existing building was always going to be the most challenging, but also the most central intervention to the success of the project. Designed as a factory and office building, the square floor plates with regular column grid made adaptation fairly-straight forward in principle.

Image: London Screen Academy demonstrates the practice's ability to rejuvenate a forgotten community asset into a thriving hub of learning and creativity.

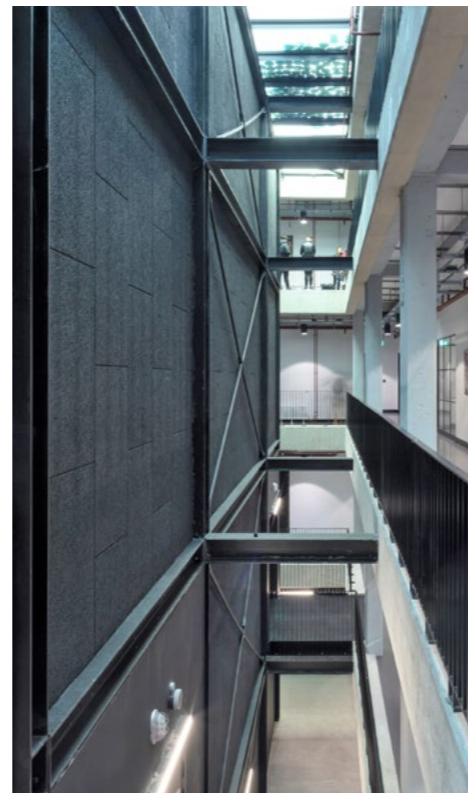
In practice, the concrete-encased steel frame construction with hollow-pot infill floors made alterations more challenging; a mix of column sizes some surprisingly deep transfer structures and level changes were discovered upon initial internal strip out, while the floors are particularly brittle and unforgiving to small alterations and new fixtures.

The team quickly arrived at a proposal to locate the new production studio centrally within the deep floor plan – where natural light was limited – and retain an outer U-shape to the perimeter, making use of the large existing windows.

With the principle of a new build in the centre of the plan, we wanted to create a clear contrast between these two elements; the exposed, rough-around-the-edges ‘old’ building, with new, specialist spaces in the centre. The design for the new production studios took its cues from our experiences on site visits to film studios. What’s particularly evident is the contrast between the bare shed-like studios, and the two-dimensional sets, propped with struts from the outside, and full of life and stories on the inside. The new production studio reflects this, with an exposed steel frame construction expressed internally, while the space inside reflects that of the film studios with exposed concrete floor, black quilted acoustic wall coverings, and lights and curtains.



Above: CGI visualisations of the four storey atrium between the new steel and existing concrete structures

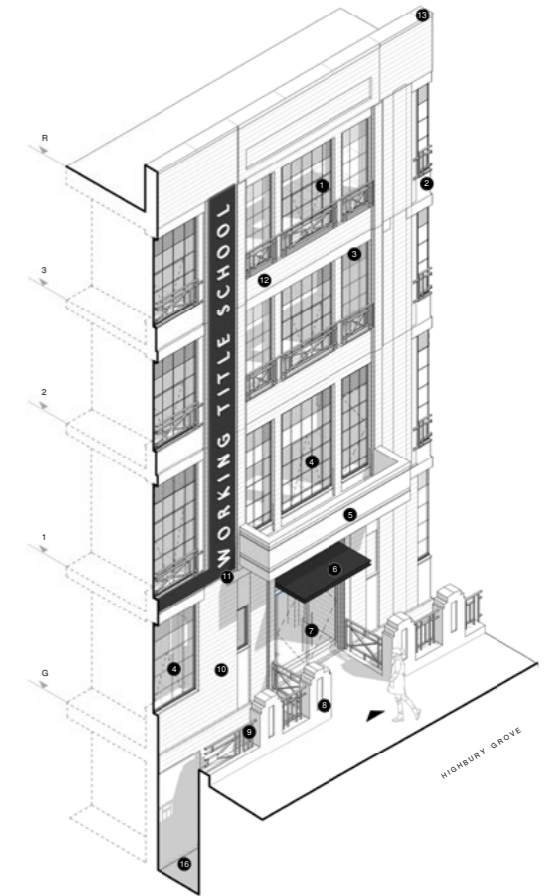


Above: Photograph of the four storey atrium between the new steel and existing concrete structures

To expose the inner workings of the school – a key part of the brief – we wanted to make sure that the production studio, as well as the other teaching spaces would not be cut off from one another. A new atrium was proposed that wraps around the studio, separating the new from the old, with roof lights bringing an abundance of natural light into the space. The main circulation wraps around the atrium with glazed partitions providing opportunities to see into all of the classrooms. At the ground level, large studio doors were installed to technically allow for the moving of sets in and out, but also as a way of making the space accessible and visible when not in filming mode. Other spaces such as the dining room are also designed more like a professional workplace canteen – always open, always set up, and available for students and staff to have group working sessions as well as relax.

### Beyond Architecture – The vision for the project and its broader cultural significance

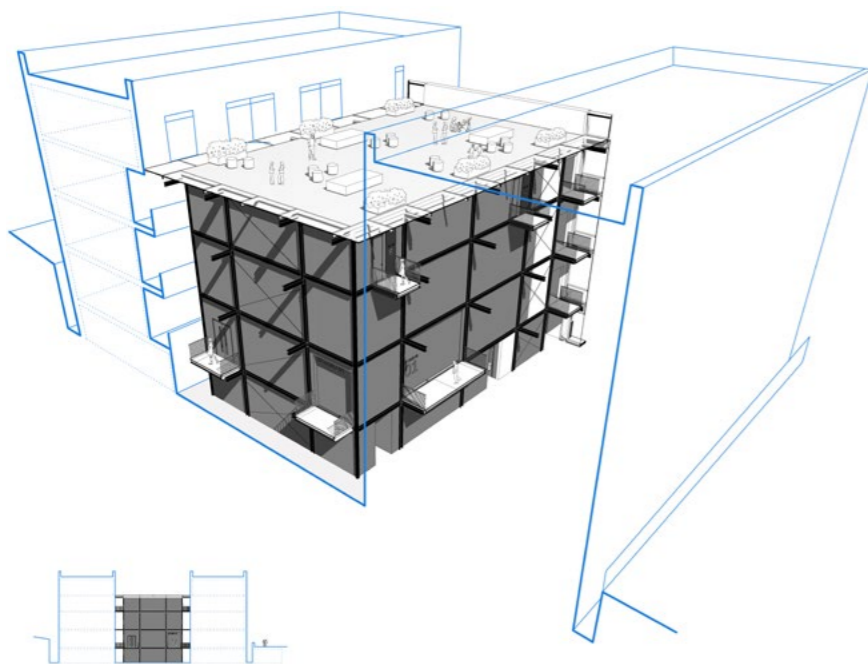
London is one of the world’s greatest cultural hubs, yet access to cultural employment is far from equal which is quickly jeopardizing the potential for future success. London accounts for more than 40 per cent of the United Kingdom’s creative sector employment. as coming from a more advantaged background.



Above: Axonometric view of external entrance to the school



Above: Photograph of the academy building from Highbury Grove

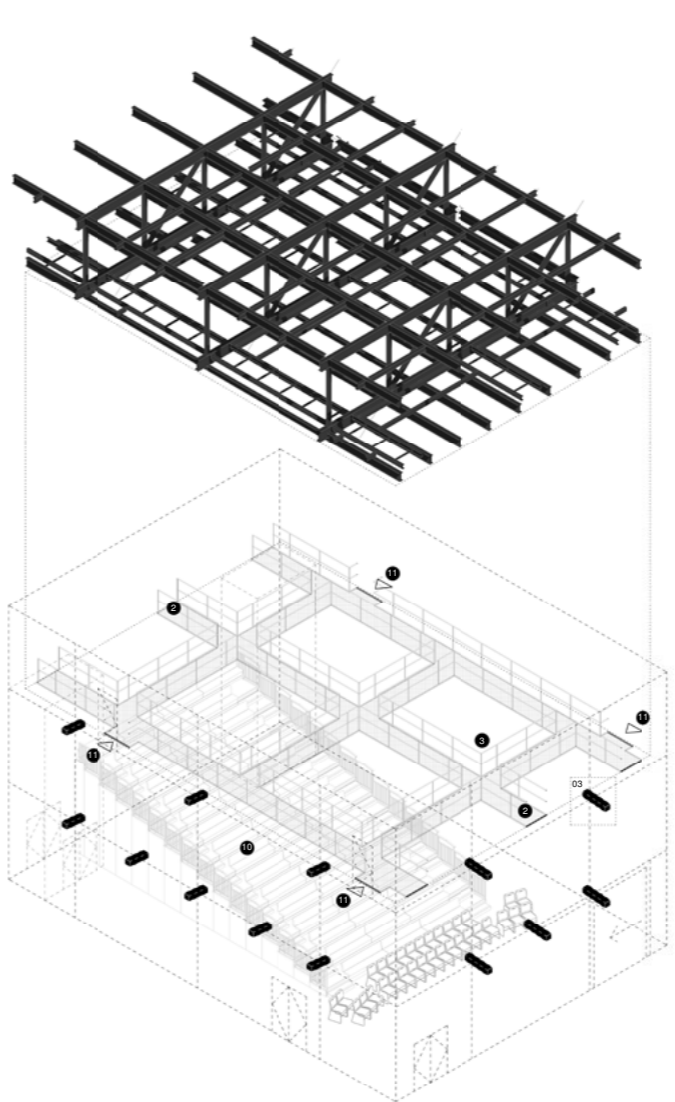


From 2012 to 2016 the number of jobs in the creative and cultural industries in London rose by 24 percent, bringing the total number to over 880,000. Analysis conducted by the Greater London Authority found that 95 per cent of employees in the sector were categorised. As a result, the Mayor of London has made culture one of his priorities and has pledged to ensure that the creative workforce becomes more reflective of the city. Since the creative and cultural industries are the most successful sectors within London's economy - and among the most resilient to automation - institutions such as The London Screen Academy offer a significant solution to tackling the known issues around a lack of diversity through broadening access to and mobility within this sector.

This is an issue of equity, but also of sectoral success; failing to make the most of London's diverse talent will weaken the city's creative output. At present, entering into and progressing within the film industry relies on possessing the social, economic and cultural capital that is more easily accumulated by privileged classes and groups, rather than simply being a question of talent and merit.



Above: Photograph of the preserved internal staircase



Above: Exploded axo showing studio gantry and truss structure



Above: Photograph of the film studio in theatre mode



Above: Photograph of the editing suites



Above: Photograph showing basement stud

**CLIENT**  
 WORKING TITLE FILMS  
 LOCATED  
 DAY ONE TRUST

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**SCHOOL AREA**  
 8,050 M<sup>2</sup>

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**COMPLETED**  
 SEPTEMBER 2019

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**SUSTAINABILITY**  
 BREEAM VERY GOOD

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**AWARDS**  
 RIBA EAST MIDLANDS AWARD 2019  
 EG CREATIVE SPACES AWARD 2019  
 BUILDING AWARDS REFURB. OF THE YEAR 2019



Above: Photograph of the film studio gantry and truss structure



Project Value: £43.3million  
Size: 22,000m<sup>2</sup>  
Client: Northamptonshire County Council  
Contractor: Vinci Construction

Image: Northampton International Academy is a multi-award-winning all through school that celebrates the heritage and industrial architecture of a former royal Mail Sorting Centre.

# NORTHAMPTON INTERNATIONAL ACADEMY

## A BIG SPACE FOR BIGGER IDEAS

Northampton's Royal Mail sorting centre was a victim of the times. Opening just as brutalist, post-war architectural aesthetic had arguably run its course and less than 25 years later losing its entire reason for being. The postal sorting processes, that once took place under the 20,000m<sup>2</sup> of concrete waffle-slab soffits, were relocated to an industrial shed on the M1.

Having stood empty and derelict for 11 years the building was subject to ongoing vandalism and decay. It became a monument to a forgotten past of urban industrial employment attracting anti-social behaviour that blighted and isolated the local community. Our client, Northamptonshire County Council needed to tackle these challenging issues for the greater benefit of the people of Northampton but due to the building's formerly dark and uninviting appearance, they found it hard to conceive how they could give this place a new purpose and lease of life. The building didn't obviously lend itself to opportunities and many prospective purchasers shied away from even attempting to reimagine its position within the community.

Looking back, the intimidating concrete and brick structure was, inadvertently, this controversial giant's saviour. Too large and too expensive to demolish, the only viable option was for refurbishment and reuse, which has ultimately led to its celebrated conservation. We leapt at the opportunity to work with a building of this type and preserve a unique part of Northampton's heritage. Responding to the significant requirement for school places in Northampton, Architecture Initiative suggested that the neglected building could offer an ideal opportunity for the development of an inspiring education facility.

Northampton International Academy placed the community at the heart of its ambition to regenerate not just a civic building but an entire area. From positively impacting the future of 2,220 local children to transforming a moribund building into a positive, aspirational icon, the lasting socioeconomic and sustainability benefits are extraordinary.

With a floor area of 22,250m<sup>2</sup> and generous floor-to-floor heights, Northampton International Academy, one of the largest free school projects to date, is home to over 2,220 pupils alongside other community and leisure offerings, such as external play and social space and a generous public plaza. The internal floor area exceeded the requirement for a new-build school of this size, allowing for the creation of larger and enhanced teaching spaces.

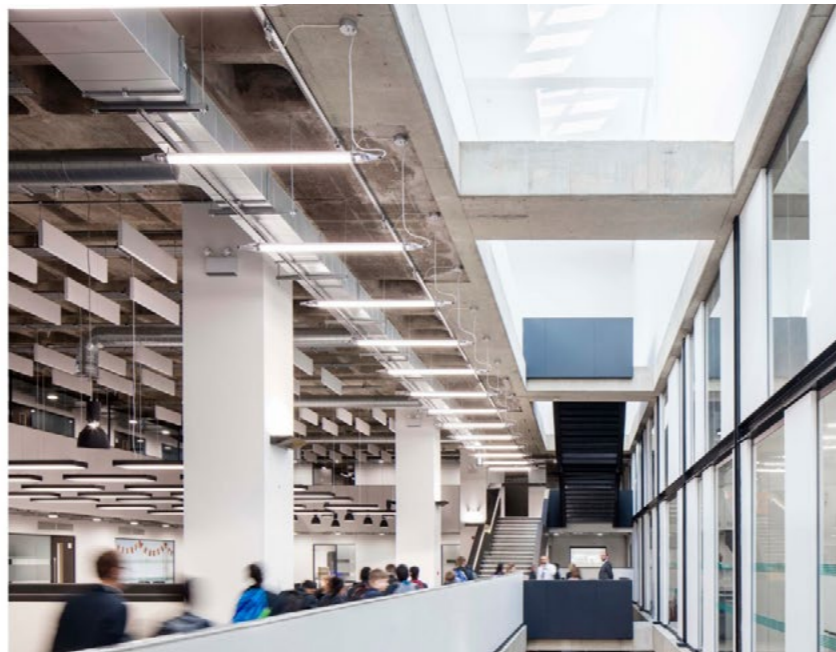
The existing structure of the building has been respected, with a clear distinction between old and new. The concrete waffle-slab structure remains exposed providing an underlying grid to the space and vast voids bring daylight deep into the interior providing open vertical circulation and visual links between floors. These openings were created along the main circulation routes that run on an east-west axis through the building and branch out into teaching and social spaces. New windows in the façades create naturally bright and well-ventilated classrooms with any unused openings infilled with a complementary brick.

The front elevation is clad in perforated metal, reflective of Northampton's brogue making heritage, and landscaping works to the front and rear address level changes to ensure the building is fully accessible. The public plaza creates a shared gathering space and civic square, bringing the building back into the local community. Offering both facilities and design far beyond a typical new build school, the thoughtful refurbishment of this once forgotten place also allows for out-of-hours community facilities.



Above: Large voids were cut into the building to bring light in the heart of the space.

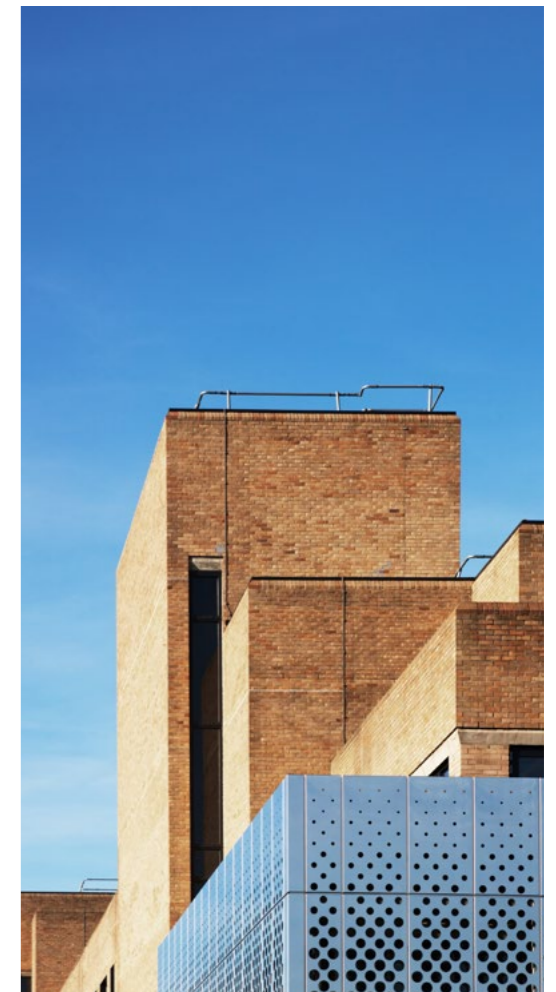
Below: sketch of the interior circulation spaces (left) demonstrating the vision that has then been realised in the final building (right).



The combination of a modest acquisition and an intelligent, cost effective conversion means this school is less expensive than an equivalent new build, yet unlike many modern educational spaces it provides a truly inspiring teaching environment for pupils and staff alike. Within the current economic climate and considering the restraints and lack of public funding for school buildings, the outcome at Northampton International Academy sets a benchmark for the future of educational spaces.

Amid the escalating climate crisis, the project celebrates the design expertise behind the vital renewal and repurposing of existing buildings, slashing the industry's carbon footprint at a time when it is more crucial than ever.

NIA has brought life back into the site and local community offering an extensive, high-quality, sustainable and architecturally impressive piece of civic infrastructure. A hub of learning, employment and community activity has been created through a process of positive placemaking, sparking the wider regeneration of the area. In collaboration with the local council and DfE Capital, who funded the project, we have preserved a significant building in Northampton's industrial history that can now be enjoyed and embraced for generations to come. Having only recently opened, the development of the site is already having positive social and economic knock-on effects.



Above: Photograph of the completed scheme demonstrating the retained brick work and new facade cladding.



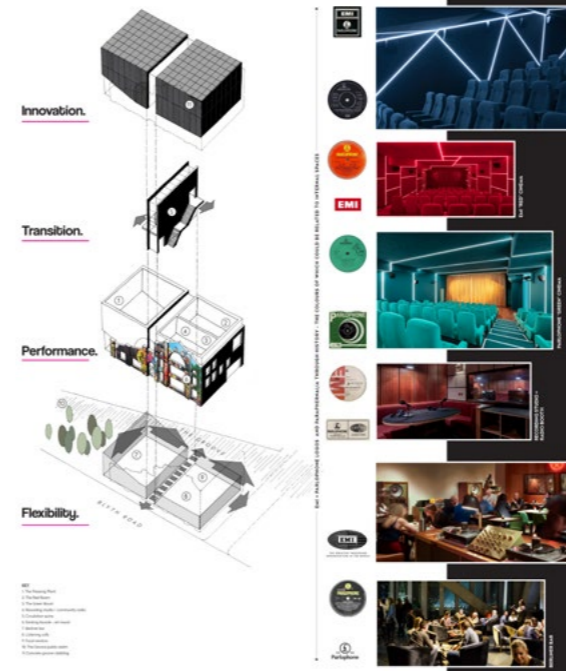
Above: Photograph of the academy building from Barrack Road



Project Value: £5 million  
 Size: 1,500m<sup>2</sup>  
 Client: Really Local Group

# THE GRAMOPHONE

## Symphony of Spaces



'NOT ONLY DO WE WANT TO SUPPORT NEW AND INTERESTING BUSINESSES SUCH AS THIS INDEPENDENT CINEMA AND COMMUNITY SPACE BUT WE WANT THE PEOPLE WHO LIVE AND WORK IN THIS NEW PART OF LONDON TO BE EXCITED ABOUT THEIR NEIGHBOURHOOD AND WHAT IT HAS TO OFFER. THE GRAMOPHONE WILL ADD TO THE BUZZ AT THE OLD VINYL FACTORY AND WE CAN'T WAIT FOR THEM TO OPEN THE DOORS.'

REBECCA SELBY, SENIOR DEVELOPMENT MANAGER

U+I

## THIS IS NOT A CINEMA

The Gramophone is a new world class cultural, creative and community hub for Hayes featuring an independent multiplex cinema, live music venue and an interactive exhibition gallery sitting at the heart of The Old Vinyl Factory masterplan. Our project for the Really Local Group celebrates the site's unique heritage as the former headquarters of EMI and His Master's Voice - a key part of music history.

On the site of the 18-acre EMI record plant, where groundbreaking records by The Beatles and Pink

Floyd were pressed, a one-of-a-kind neighbourhood is taking shape. The Old Vinyl Factory is a mix of re-imagined Art Deco office buildings, new homes, innovation and educational hubs, restaurants, shops, gym, cinema and a live music venue led by regeneration developer U+I.

The Gramophone will retain key elements of the former pressing plant building, an iconic industrial component of the global music trade, where grooves were stamped onto heated vinyl, producing millions of records that shipped around the world.

Image: Our proposals for the building include; a four screen cinema, community spaces, EMI archive and interactive exhibition and a listening café/bar. The project has received a £1.2m funding boost from the Mayor of London's Good Growth Fund.

**RETROFIT  
IS ABOUT RESISTING  
THE PRESCRIPTIVE AND  
INFLEXIBLE**

**THE WAY WE USE  
BUILDINGS IS CHANGING**







RE-THINKING  
THE WAY  
ARCHITECTS  
ENGAGE IN THE  
PROCESS