

The Mick Jagger Centre opened in March 2000 as a community arts centre located at Dartford Grammar School in Kent, southeast of London. As the school's headteacher, **Tony Smith** was pivotal in the centre's development. Here, he relates the story of how the idea for the Mick Jagger Centre was born, how that vision came into being, and how the school succeeded in raising £2.2 million to fund the project's development from start to finish.

Start me up

the mick jagger centre

The Mick Jagger Centre was officially opened by HRH The Duke of Kent, with Mick Jagger himself present, along with Jerry Hall, three of their children, his parents and brother, attracting global media attention. The technologically sophisticated centre boasts two performance areas, a recording studio, practice rooms,

a midi technology suite, exhibition areas, and a large café/foyer, dominated by a 36-screen videowall.

Genesis

The origins of the centre may be traced back to 1991, when Dartford Grammar School obtained grant-maintained status. Its position

was reviewed in the light of its new freedom and its awareness of the inadequacies of its accommodation and facilities. Music, for example, was taught at one end of the dining hall. An ambitious plan was drawn up that included the construction of a sports hall and the use of the redundant gymnasium as a performing arts centre.

The school's governors realised that their goals were most likely to be realised through the establishment of joint-use facilities so that the school's needs could be met by overcoming deficiencies in community provision. A damning report on leisure facilities in Dartford, produced for the Borough Council in 1989, proved an extremely useful document. The school's senior managers rapidly learned how to network and to make effective funding applications. By 1995, five major projects had been carried out.

The school understands that, when a project has been completed, the creative energy which it has generated is lost, so it deliberately overlaps its projects to maintain momentum. The school believes that, when a vision is clear and an idea sound, funding is always available.

Comparative benchmarks

In relation to the Mick Jagger Centre, the project that provided the most useful experience was the Becket Sports Centre. This joint-use project was the first that the school linked to town-centre regeneration, and through which it formed a number of partnerships. The sports centre cost a sum of £750,000, which was raised mainly

by successful applications to the Foundation for Sport and the Arts (£250,000), Dartford Borough Council (£250,000), the Sports Council (£69,000) and the Wellcome Foundation (£60,000). Long before the sports centre was opened by Sebastian Coe, the planning of the performing arts centre had begun.

For this new project, the school employed a consultant for the first time. It wished to seek National Lottery funding from the Arts Council of England, and suspected that this involved a more complex and less predictable procedure than any that it had used previously. The consultant employed was Brian Harris, selected for his expertise and extraordinary rate of success. With the school's assistance, he carried out a study to identify the needs of potential users of the centre. This included examination of documents and direct contact with every arts organisation over an extensive area. This led to the formation of a variety of partnerships. The deficiencies in provision were clear, and attempts were made, by analysis of the local population, to assess likely demands.

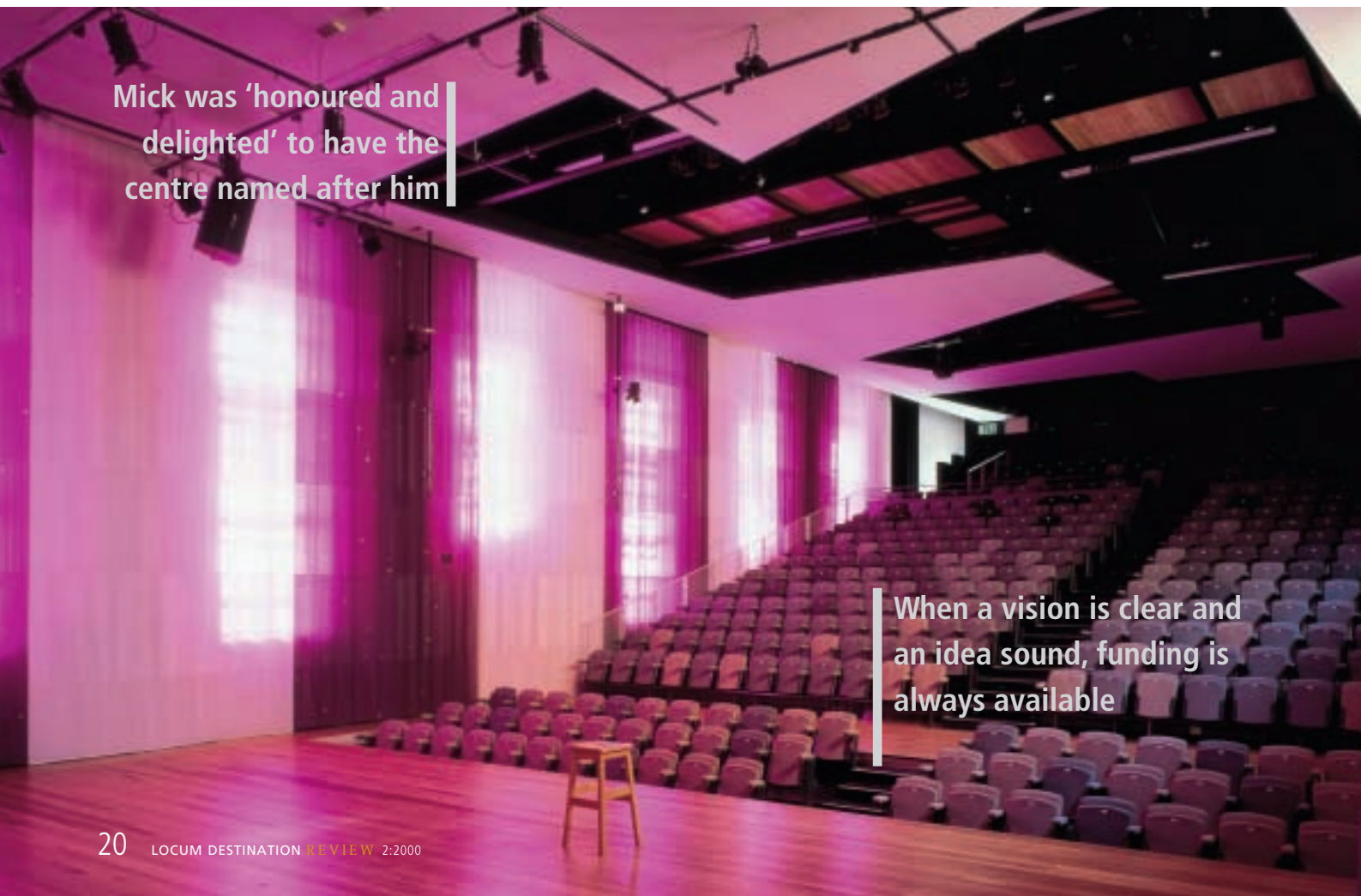
The Mick Jagger brand

Another early step was determination of a name for the centre. This had far-reaching

consequences. Consultation with students showed an overwhelming majority proposed the naming of the centre after Mick Jagger, the school's most famous former student. The Governing Body approved 'The Mick Jagger Centre' as a name, and permission was sought to use it. The immediate reply was that Mick would be 'honoured and delighted' to have the centre named after him.

Although he has been a controversial figure, in Dartford there is evidence of strong pride in his musical achievements. It remains inspiring to young musicians that a member of their community has gained international fame. The governors were aware that the name chosen would give the project an edge over others, as any grant would bring the awarding body worldwide publicity.

The name brought opportunities and challenges. Mick Jagger is a successful brand, with global recognition, and a link with it promises many advantages to the centre. The nature of that brand, however, sets up expectations. It is associated with rock music primarily, but fortunately there has been some diversification, with links to world music, community music-making (support for National Music Day and BBC Music Live), film, the visual arts and literature. The centre has created bridges to other forms: for example,



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its first ballet performance was 'Rooster' by the Rambert Dance Company, using music by the Rolling Stones. The Mick Jagger brand is also associated with technological innovation, and the centre reflects this powerfully.

The building

Having chosen the name, the school completed its initial planning, and submitted an application to the Arts Council in April 1996. It included a design by a local architect, involving the development of the former gymnasium and the construction of an adjoining foyer. In February 1997, the project received an interim award, to finance detailed planning. The assessor's report commented very positively on most aspects of the bid, but concern was expressed at the architectural design.

A competition was held for the appointment of an architect to produce a new design. It was won by Tim Ronalds, who assembled a project team of high calibre. On an early visit, he proposed the extension of the project to incorporate an intended second phase, requiring the development of the school's hall and library as part of the centre. The governors agreed to accept this suggestion, and its impact upon the budget needed.

The final submission was made in September 1997. The assessor's visit took place in the following December. In April 1998, the Arts Council announced an award of £1.67 million, the full sum requested. With a grant from the Funding Agency for Schools of £200,000 and other resources assembled by the school, a total budget of £2.2 million was available.

The centre's design is impressive. Tim Ronalds is a highly gifted architect, and produced an exciting outcome while showing a sensitive awareness of the nature of the buildings to be adapted. He complemented them skilfully with an extension containing a new entrance and foyer. He even convinced the school's governors of the advisability of a dramatic modification of the hall's ceiling, involving the cutting of a large jagged hole in it, exposing the roof space and walkways.

A key feature of the final effect is the curtaining, which brings transforming flexibility to the main performance area. This was the centre's main artistic commission, and represents the first British project for the remarkable Dutch artist, Petra Blaisse. The impact of the centre also owes much to the craftsmanship of Richardson (Nyewood) Ltd, the project's contractors.

The business

Owing to an agreement imposed on the governors by the Dartford Borough Council at the time when it made a grant to the Becket Sports Centre, arrangements for the management of the Mick Jagger Centre had to be agreed with the council. This caused a problematic delay in the formation of the company limited by guarantee with charitable status that was intended to run the centre. As a result, during the late stages of construction, Locum Destination Consulting was engaged to advise on the development of the centre's business plan. This led to the formation of base and thrust plans.

There are three strands of activity in the centre: participation, performance and education. A solid base of community participation and performance has already been established, with eager local recognition that the centre is the place to go if you want to become involved in the performing arts. It is used regularly by a wide variety of community groups, many of which are based within it. The centre has a resident professional drama company. The first three months of operation saw performances of music and dance, plays, stand-up comedy, broadcasts, conferences and three exhibitions. A series of courses is operating, ranging from pre-school music to midi technology.

The autumn programme is currently being finalised, and includes an artist in residence (a painter who uses popular music as an inspiration) and the culmination of a poetry residency. The centre will also be one of the venues for an exhibition (financed by a major Millennium Commission grant) celebrating Dartford's past as the most

inventive town in England, and promoting regeneration by showing how its innovators have changed the world. While immediate revenue support would have been welcome, the absence of subsidies has prompted creativity, and the centre has benefited from the support of South East Arts.

For the school, the Mick Jagger Centre is proving valuable. The school's relationship with the community has been strengthened and its programmes enriched. It sees entrepreneurship as part of its hidden curriculum. The school is a distinctive brand, associated with innovation and enterprise, and was able to benefit from careful management of the publicity related to the centre's opening. Its experience will enable it to contribute when the long-overdue debate begins on the nature and role of schools in the twenty-first century.

Mick's return to his old school created a story which the centre will go on telling, enhancing its appeal as a destination. The opening had many memorable moments. One came when Mick, introduced by Deborah Bull of the Arts Council, addressed community representatives, business people and students. His speech included these comments:

It is going to have a major impact on what goes on in this school. It's a recognition that a real, broad education can't leave the arts on the fringes. There has to be a balance between the sciences and the arts, between the things that feed your mind and the things that feed your imagination. This balance is not only important for each of us in our lives but it is important for the world outside too. In the world today, it's often creativity and imagination that drives success and it's through the arts and music that many of us find our creativity comes alive. I am delighted that as well as being a benefit to the budding musicians and artists here in the school, the centre is going to be available to the whole community of Dartford.