

Culture

The Royal Festival Hall

Architect: Allies and Morrison

Client: The Southbank Centre

Project completion: 1999

Context

Opened for the Festival of Britain in 1951, the Royal Festival Hall is a much loved, Grade I listed, building. An increase in expectations from national and international audiences generated proposals for a comprehensive project to provide enhanced acoustics in the concert hall and upgraded facilities throughout the building.

The client, at the outset, formed a consultation group to help identify potential access improvements. David Bonnett Associates undertook a comprehensive access audit which, coupled with group comments, helped formulate the case for change. The resultant report helped achieve funding from Arts Council England and planning approval from the local authority.

The improvements include new shops and restaurants facing the river. New step-free entrances with power assisted doors provide access into the building, while a new glazed lift services almost all public and back-of-house areas. Less internal clutter makes circulation and wayfinding easier for all. Within the auditorium, the acoustics have been improved, the seating reorganised to provide more leg room. There

is now a choice of spaces for more than 32 wheelchair users and 345 'easy-access' seats reached by only 1-2 steps from the foyer.

The external improvements have been as critical to success as internal changes. These have included an external lift, managed by Royal Festival Hall, linking street level with the embankment. The project took several years, with DBA working closely throughout with Allies and Morrison from early concept stage through to final completion.

Pictures

