allaspexgroup

Royal Festival Hall

CASE STUDY

An All Aspex Project

PREPARED BY
Smart Cow

Royal Festival Hall Toilet Refurbishment

An Allaspexgroup Project

Refurbishment of the toilet blocks at the Royal Festival Hall

January 2025 - November 2025

Project Brief

Client: Southbank Centre – Royal Festival Hall

Location: Lambeth, London

Sector: Public Cultural Venue / Heritage Building

Contractor: All Aspex

Project: Full refurbishment of public and back-of-house toilet facilities

allaspexgroup

INTRODUCTION

Opened in 1951 for the Festival of Britain the Royal Festival Hall is one of the UK's most recognised cultural venues. Located on London's South Bank, the building welcomes thousands of visitors every week. Concertgoers, students, tourists and families all pass through its doors. As a Grade I listed building, it carries both historic value and heavy public use.

Maintaining such a space is never simple. Every change must respect the building's heritage while also meeting the needs of a modern audience.

In the Beginning

In 2023, the Southbank Centre began planning a major refurbishment of the toilet facilities at the Royal Festival Hall. The existing facilities were more than fifteen years old and no longer met the expectations of a modern public venue. The project would become the largest capital works programme at the venue in five years.

Following a competitive tender process involving five companies, All Aspex was selected to deliver the project.

Growth of Scope

What began as a modest refurbishment soon grew into a much larger and more complex programme. The work expanded from five toilet blocks to thirty-two, while the building remained fully operational.

The project required careful planning, flexible delivery and constant collaboration with the client team.

The result is a set of modern facilities that respect the building's heritage while meeting the needs of a high-traffic cultural venue.

Royal Facilities
Royal Festival Hall

Project Background

Original Brief

The original brief was clear. The Royal Festival Hall needed to refurbish both public and back-of-house toilet blocks across the building.

The existing facilities had reached the end of their useful life. They were outdated, inefficient and no longer aligned with the sustainability goals of the venue.

The project also aimed to prepare the building for future greywater systems, allowing rainwater collected from the roof to be reused for toilet flushing.

Issues to address

Alongside environmental improvements, the refurbishment needed to address several operational issues whilst refurbishing classical features:

- Ageing fixtures and fittings
- Outdated layouts
- Insufficient provision in some areas
- Accessibility improvements
- The move toward gender-neutral facilities

PLATINUM ACCREDITATION

Platinum Disability Accreditation

The project also needed to support the venue's ambition to keep their Platinum Disability Accreditation.

These upgrades would ensure that the Royal Festival Hall continues to offer an inclusive and welcoming experience for visitors.

The Challenge of Working in a Grade I Listed Building

Working in a heritage building always presents unique challenges.

At the Royal Festival Hall, these challenges were even greater. As a Grade I listed structure, the building has strict protections. Any refurbishment work must preserve its historic features wherever possible.

This meant that the team could not simply remove and replace elements freely.

Maintaining the character of the building while delivering modern performance standards became a defining feature of the project.

Many original features had to remain in place. In some areas, ensuring historic fittings such as original cigar holders in the ladies' toilets had to be retained.

Every design decision therefore required careful coordination between architects, project managers and contractors.

Expanding Scope

The project began with a relatively modest brief.

Initially, the refurbishment covered five toilet blocks and was expected to take around four months.

However, as planning progressed and the benefits became clear, the project expanded significantly.

In the end, the scope grew to 32 toilet blocks across the venue, with a delivery timeline of 11 months.

While this increased complexity, it also created efficiencies through scale. Delivering such a large project within an active venue required exceptional coordination

Three Phase Program

The team worked through a three-phase programme, ensuring that facilities remained available to visitors while work progressed.

Each phase was completed within the allocated budget.

A Live Public Venue

Unlike many construction projects, the Royal Festival Hall refurbishment took place in a building that never truly closes.

The venue hosts concerts, performances, conferences and large public events throughout the year. It also welcomes thousands of daily visitors even when no performances are scheduled.

On major days such as graduations, the building can see up to 10,000 visitors.

This meant construction work had to be carefully scheduled around the venue's busy calendar.

These included:

- The BAFTA events programme
- The Meltdown Festival
- Major performances
- Security closures for dignitaries and royal visits

Even small changes could affect progress.

On Site Project Manager

At one stage, lifts in the building were temporarily taken out of service at the same time work was underway on the east side of the building. This created unexpected logistical challenges.

Stephen Taff, the Senior Site Manager Manager for All Aspex, recalls the experience vividly.

> *"Working inside a live venue like the Royal Festival Hall requires a very different mindset. You are not just managing construction. You are managing the experience of thousands of visitors at the same time. Our team stayed flexible and made sure the work never clashed with events or performances."*

Stephen Taff - Senior Site Manager

The project required constant communication between contractors, venue management and event planners.

Health and safety remained the highest priority throughout.

Design and Specification

All design decisions were led by the project architect, who was responsible for ensuring that the refurbishment respected the building's listed status.

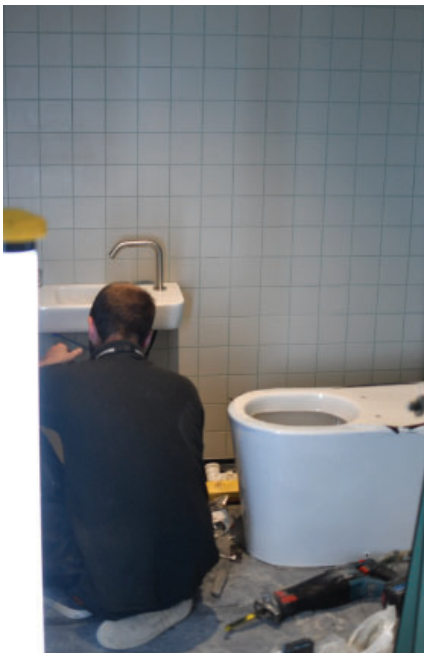
This meant that product selection had to balance several requirements.

Urinals

The cubicle system needed to provide:

- Strong durability
- Moisture resistance
- Anti-vandal performance
- Easy maintenance
- Visual quality that suited the architecture

At the same time, the refurbishment had to support the venue's sustainability goals.



Works in Progress

Water efficiency became a key consideration, particularly with the future greywater system planned for the building.

Andy MacHugh of All Aspex emphasised the importance of choosing the right system for such a demanding environment.

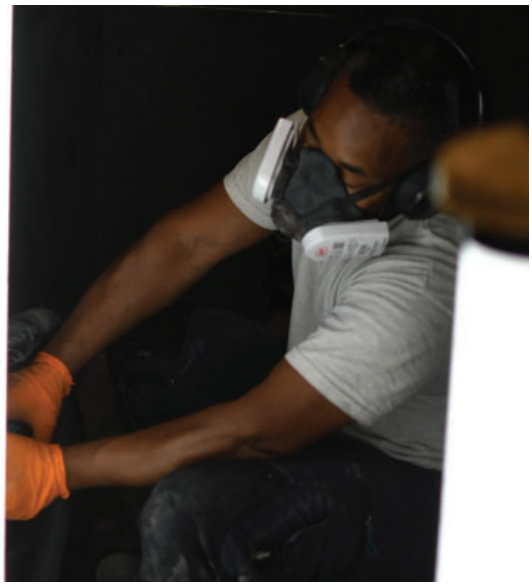
"When you are designing facilities for a venue like this, durability and reliability are essential. These toilets are used constantly. The systems need to perform day after day while still looking great. Our role was to ensure the specification delivered both."

Andy MacHugh

Works in Progress

The final design also further developed colour schemes to improve navigation within the building.

The blue and green tones used to support visual wayfinding were further developed in some blocks, helping visitors move more easily through the facilities.



Installation and Project Delivery

The installation programme was carefully structured to minimise disruption.

Work progressed in phases, allowing other areas of the building to remain operational.

Despite the complexity of the site, the project achieved a remarkable result.

The refurbishment was completed on schedule and exactly within budget.

This success was the result of close collaboration between the contractor, the client team and the project architect.

Charlie Fanning believes adaptability was the key to delivery.

"The environment was constantly changing. Events would appear in the schedule, access routes would shift, and sometimes we had very short notice to adjust plans. The team responded quickly every time, which is why we were able to keep the project on track."

Charlie Fanning
- Senior Project Manager

This flexible approach allowed the project team to navigate the many operational constraints of the venue.

Collaboration with the Client

A strong relationship between the contractor and the client team was essential throughout the project.

Luke Barbeler, Planning and Licensing Manager at the Royal Festival Hall, was particularly impressed with the proactive approach taken by the All Aspex team.

"What stood out about All Aspex was their willingness to deal with challenges head on. They were transparent, proactive and always ready to find solutions. If an issue came up, they addressed it immediately rather than ignoring it."

Luke Barbeler

Luke also highlighted the importance of communication.

Stephen Taff's role on site created a direct link between the venue and the contractor.

"Having a direct line with Stephen on site made a big difference. He went above and beyond throughout the project. Whenever something needed attention, he jumped on it straight away."

Luke Barbeler

This collaborative approach ensured the project continued smoothly despite the complex environment.

Visitor Experience

For public buildings, success is often measured by visitor feedback.

In the case of the Royal Festival Hall refurbishment, the response has been overwhelmingly positive.

Interestingly, the most telling feedback has been the absence of complaints.

"In a venue like this, no feedback is often the best feedback. The new facilities work well and visitors simply get on with their day. That tells us the refurbishment has done exactly what it needed to do."

Luke Barbeler

The new facilities now provide a welcoming, modern environment that aligns with the identity of the Southbank Centre.

They also support the venue's commitment to inclusivity through gender-neutral spaces and improved accessibility.

Sustainability and Efficiency

Environmental performance was an important goal for the refurbishment.

The project included preparation for a greywater system, allowing rainwater collected from the roof to be reused for flushing toilets.

This change will reduce water consumption significantly over time.

The new facilities also improve operational efficiency through durable materials and easier maintenance.

This helps reduce long-term maintenance costs for the venue.

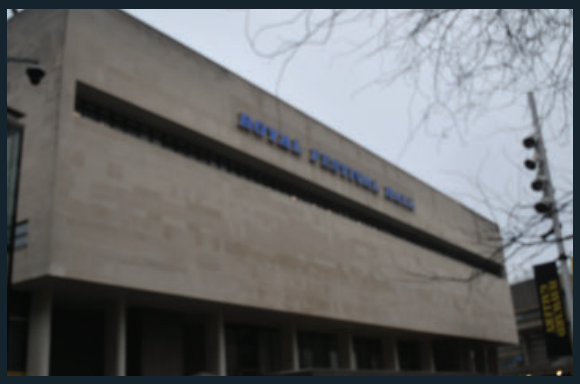
High Traffic Performance

Few venues experience the level of daily use seen at the Royal Festival Hall.

Luke Barbeler, Planning and Licensing Manager at the Royal Festival Hall, was particularly impressed with the proactive approach taken by the All Aspex team.

"What stood out about All Aspex was their willingness to deal with challenges head on. They were transparent, proactive and always ready to find solutions. If an issue came up, they addressed it immediately rather than ignoring it."

Luke Barbeler,
Planning and Licensing Manager
Royal Festival Hall



Royal Festival Hall - Southbank

Luke also highlighted the importance of communication.
Stephen Taff's role on site created a direct link between the venue and the contractor

This collaborative approach ensured the project continued smoothly despite the complex environment.

The Result

The Royal Festival Hall toilet refurbishment has delivered a major improvement to one of the UK's most important cultural venues.

The project achieved several key outcomes:

- 32 refurbished toilet blocks across the building
- Modern, accessible facilities
- Gender-neutral layouts
- Improved visitor experience
- Preparation for greywater sustainability systems
- Full compliance with heritage requirements
- Completion on time and within budget

Most importantly, the refurbishment was delivered without disrupting the day-to-day operation of the venue.

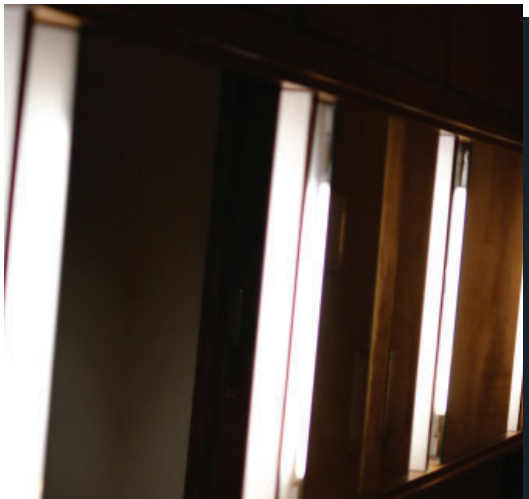
A Complex but Rewarding Project

Reflecting on the experience, the client team describes the project in simple terms.

It was complex, challenging, unique and rewarding.

For All Aspex, it also demonstrated the company's ability to adapt to difficult environments and deliver results.

Luke Barbeler summarised the partnership clearly.



"Working in a Grade I listed public venue is not easy. spex understood the challenges and adapted quickly to the needs of the building. Their flexibility and willingness to work around events made the whole process much smoother. We would absolutely recommend them."

Luke Barbeler

In Summary

The Royal Festival Hall refurbishment stands as a strong example of what can be achieved when technical expertise meets collaborative working.

Delivering construction work inside a busy cultural venue is never straightforward. Add the complexity of a Grade I listed building and the challenge becomes even greater.

Through careful planning, flexible delivery and strong client relationships, All Aspex successfully transformed outdated facilities into modern, sustainable spaces.

The project highlights the company's ability to work in complex environments, respond to changing conditions and deliver projects that meet both architectural and operational demands.

For venues, heritage sites and public buildings facing similar challenges, the Royal Festival Hall project offers a clear message.

With the right approach, even the most complex refurbishment can become a success

allaspexgroup

PREPARED BY

Smart Cow

CONTACT INFO

01883 342 424

www.allaspexgroup.com

77 High Street
Caterham
Surrey
CR3 5UF