

Globe Theatre Case Study

At the heart of Stockton High Street is the Globe, a theatre steeped in history. After decades of decline, Build UK Contractor member Willmott Dixon is midway through bringing it back to its former glory. Construction manager Mark Wolverson explains how we are operating safely while abiding by COVID-19 requirements:



The site as of April 2018

The Globe has seen it all! Opened in 1913 as Teesside's first purpose-built cinema, it was destroyed by fire and rebuilt in classic art deco architecture, reopening in 1935. During the fifties, sixties and seventies, it hosted the biggest acts in music, including The Rolling Stones, The Beatles and Cliff Richard. However, during the 1980s, the Globe fell into disrepair before closing in 1990.

Now a new dawn beckons, and the former venue for music superstars is hosting construction's superstars as Willmott Dixon's team brings this iconic place back to life.

Working with Stockton Council, renovation of the Grade II listed Globe will see it re-born as a 3,000-seater music and comedy venue that will bring over £18m into the local economy each year. This is part of a dynamic high street trend across the UK to revitalise heritage buildings to bring new prosperity to communities.

Heritage specialists

This project is similar to many other heritage renovations Willmott Dixon has undertaken, such as Darlington's Hippodrome, Ally Pally's east wing, The Design Museum and Colston Hall in

Bristol. And like them, restoring the Globe poses difficulties that require innovation to overcome, even before COVID-19.

Mark Wolverson explains, *"The venue has been derelict for over two decades and there has been a lot of damage to the structure and interiors. The stage is uniquely positioned so it sits eight meters below ground, yet with this design, the collection of water is naturally a problem. A pumping system had been used when the building was occupied, however as it fell into decline, various pumping equipment was stolen, leaving water to collect. This is just one of several areas we have had to make safe before starting work."*



The site in November 2018, ahead of extensive restoration works

Working safely

The project is halfway and work is continuing as the UK battles COVID-19, with the Construction Leadership Council's (CLC) [Site Operating Procedures](#) implemented. Mark explains *"Through monitoring the COVID-19 prevention measures across Europe, we were expecting similar social distancing measures to be announced by the Government, so it wasn't a surprise. Immediately after the announcement, there was some confusion among supply chain partners as to the role of the construction industry and what constituted a key worker, consequently our numbers on site dropped by over 70% for the first few days."*

Mark continues, *"This reduction allowed us to quickly implement the CLC's COVID-19 Site Operating Procedures across the project. Our first action was to review who needed to be on site and who could work from home. This led to the reallocation of design and commercial personnel to home working environments."*



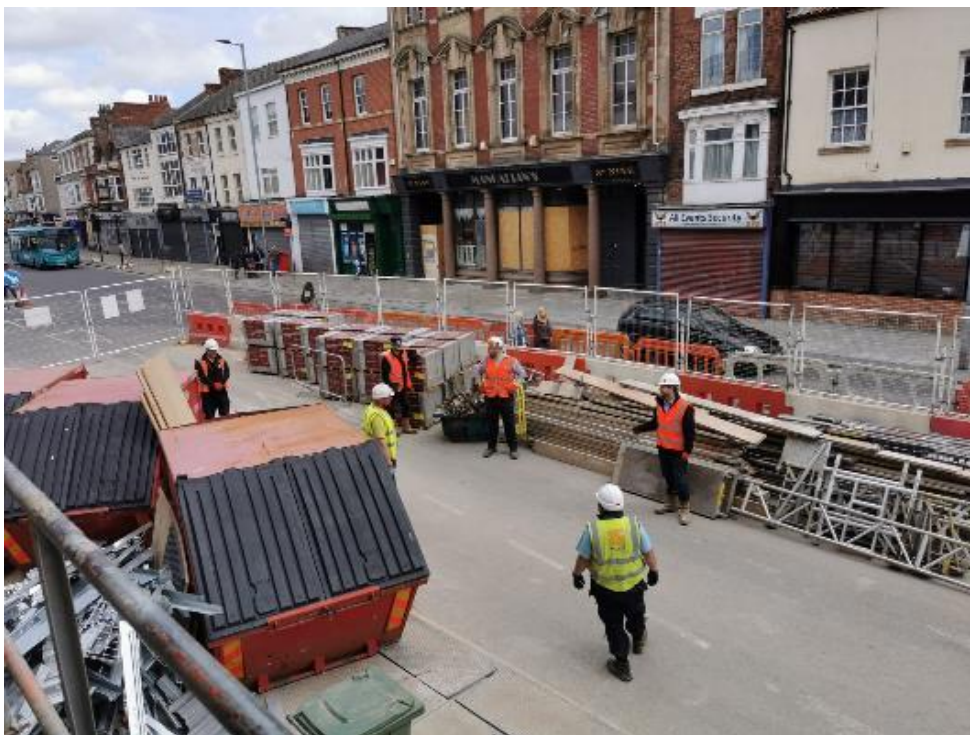
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"Also, our site's offices are in a large building adjacent to the Globe, so this allowed us to space desks to abide by the 2m social distancing requirements. Within the theatre itself, one-way systems were implemented on staircases to avoid paths being crossed and two metre spacings were marked for safe working. To further the social distancing message, we installed motion activated voiceover systems to remind operatives to abide by social distancing when entering the site. Hand sanitiser is plentiful and available in meeting rooms, on desks, and all site entrances and exits."

Communication is key

Mark talks about the extensive communication now taking place, *"Each morning we hold 'toolbox talks' with our people and supply chain partners. We use these meetings to explain the latest guidance and operating procedures, ensuring everyone knows how they are expected to work within the guidelines. The talks are held in large open spaces, allowing everyone to abide by the two-metre rule. If anyone shows symptoms of the Coronavirus or needs to self-isolate, they are empowered to do so, and it is critical they abide by this directive."*



Social distancing during the site's 'toolbox talks'

Safety is the number one priority

Mark continues, *"The safety of our people and supply chain is paramount, and this extends beyond the project's boundaries. Each operative has been provided with a letter explaining their need to be outside their house in case they are questioned by law enforcement. We have also attached the guidance to our site entrance; this has been used by the local press to communicate the message to the wider community."*



Keeping the local community up to date with how the site is operating in line with Government advice

Revamping the project's plan

The biggest challenge is the supply of materials and the availability of supply chain partners, who are empowered to make their own decisions about continuing to operate. One key supply chain partner lost has been scaffolders, whose industry body to this point have been slow to provide clear guidance on how they can operate while abiding by social distancing, when erecting scaffolding. Consequently, any tasks that require the use of scaffolding have been put on hold.

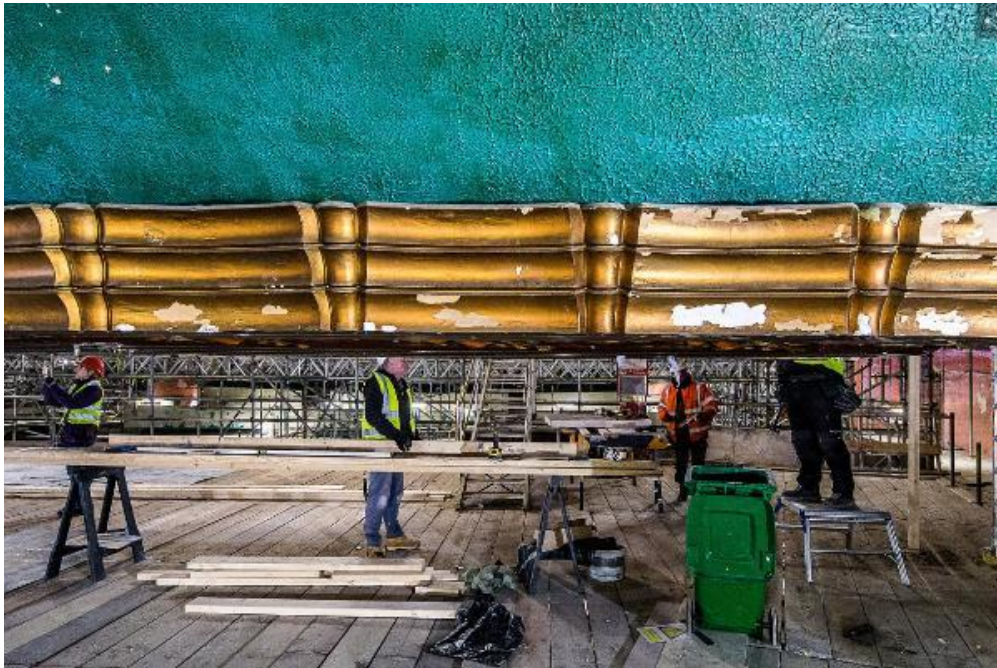
Innovation is key

While this is a blow, the team has used the opportunity to be innovative. Mark explains, "We reviewed the project's plan, looking at the supply chain resource we have and the tasks that can be brought forward. This has included changing the construction of key walls to masonry, as the metal decking contractor furloughed their work force before the roof was completed. Taking this action has allowed our brickwork partner to keep their team employed. We actively engaged our supply chain partners who were able to continue to work on site, ensuring we prioritised activities that kept them going whilst maintaining the 2m social distancing rule. Through doing this, we hope we can catch up on the project's schedule further down the line."



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Social distancing whilst continuing with the project

"Through our safe working practices, we are seeing more supply chain partners returning on a weekly basis, which is enabling more tasks to be completed. We have had supply chain partners comment they feel safer on site in comparison to their local supermarket, and are pleased to be able to continue their work."

"The supply of materials has been a challenge, as heritage projects require many specialist materials. As the Government increased social distancing measures, some builders' merchants and specialist suppliers temporarily close. However, there is an upward trend in openings, and Stockton Council have been very supportive, with the Globe critical for the local economy, in helping obtain materials."

Working with the community

Mark finished by adding a small accolade about how the project team is helping the local community. *"While working at the Globe, we see a duty to be a good neighbour. Whilst many businesses on the high street are closed, one grocer remains open. When hearing the store had been robbed twice in the last month, we provided the vendor with a radio, allowing a call for help to be made if ever needed. The shopkeeper was very grateful for this and has chosen to coincide their opening hours with the site's operations."*