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Redeveloping the world's largest Social Science library for the 21st century

Keynote Item

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Redeveloping the world’s largest Social Science library for the 21st century

Jean Sykes
Librarian and Director of Information Services
Feasibility and fundraising

- 1916 former book warehouse
- Became LSE Library in 1978
- By 1990 needed major changes
- 1994 feasibility study by Foster
- 1994 to 1999 lots of fundraising
- Money received from government, heritage lottery fund, and many individuals
Early planning

• Project manager and architects appointed summer 1998
• Steering group and Library Planning Group set up
• There were two large projects: Redevelopment Temporary move out
Planning the move

• Work around or move out?
• Search for temporary building(s)
• “The Library is closing” rumour
• Persuading the academic community
• Department by department
• Two buildings found
• One nearby and the other not
Moving out

• Planning was difficult
• Less used materials went further away
• Move took 14 weeks at twice normal speed (June-September 1999)
• Library staff assisted at both ends
• Full library service was maintained
Maintaining library services

- Lots of consultation with users
- Services parameters agreed
- Extra money required and agreed
- Communication plan was essential
- Explaining constraints and managing user expectations
- Involving all library staff
- Publicly available action plan agreed
The redevelopment

• Aims:
  Modern research and learning environment with much more IT
  Redesigned circulation around the building
  Expansion space for print
  Improved storage conditions
  Improved environmental conditions
Building features

• Library on 5 floors covering 15,000 square metres
• 8% increase in floor area but much higher increase in space efficiency
• Central atrium with spiral stepped ramp and two glass lifts
• Glazed north-facing dome at the top
More building features

• Double-height lower ground floor
• Computer-controlled natural ventilation
• Presence-detection lighting
• Staff offices arranged in vertical stack with goods lift and loading bay for deliveries
Services and facilities

• More of the space is for users
• 95% of the library is open access
• 1600 study spaces, including 500 IT spaces and 226 laptop points
• Service counter, course collection, and copy shop (ground floor)
• Archives and IT helpdesk (lower ground)
More services and facilities

• Information desk and visitor PCs (first floor)
• Two IT training rooms
• 14 group study rooms, 2 for disabled students
• 50 kilometres of shelving – enough to stretch the length of the Channel Tunnel
The planning process

• Weekly meetings with architects from July 1998
• Many library sub-groups set up
• Architects visited library departments
• Much consultation with users
• Final plans ready February 1999
Major issues

- Shelving; choice and layout
- Design of service points
- Heating and ventilation
- Lighting
- Acoustics (open plan building)
- Study space and IT zoning
- Signage and colours
- Furniture and fittings
- Layout of staff offices (18% less space)
Construction

- Began in September 1999
- All internal walls demolished
- Most of ground floor removed
- Full internal construction according to design
- Fitting out the building
- Completion March 2001
The move back in 2001

- January/February move from one temporary building
- To save money on rent
- New building not yet ready
- March to May: main book move with dual site operation
- Very close to exams
- 12 March: switch to new library as main site
Was it worth it?

• £30 million and two massive book moves
• There were lost of problems along the way
• The project went over budget, mainly because of structural defects
• There had to be compromises
Was it worth it (2)

• Sorting out the problems after the move takes a very long time (we are still doing it…)
• But library staff quickly settled in
• And usage by students doubled in the first year
• It is a wonderful building
• One of the most photographed in London (also featured on BBC TV)
Some words from users

• ‘First rate…I use the library about twice as often as before’
• ‘It not only looks terrific but it is also very well organised and user friendly’
• ‘A wonderful energy efficient space’
• ‘Great building …but not enough toilets’ (true)