



## **MEDIA INFORMATION**

### **FINAL**

#### **Northern Ballet and Phoenix Dance Theatre celebrate completion of £12 million new home in cultural quarter of Leeds**

In an unsteady climate for construction two arts organisations in Leeds have realised a long-held dream and are celebrating the completion of their brand-new purpose built home.

Northern Ballet and Phoenix Dance Theatre have now moved in to the £12 million, six storey development, designed by the Strategic Design Alliance, a partnership between Jacobs and Leeds City Council, located in a thriving cultural quarter at Quarry Hill in central Leeds. Developed by Wates Construction, the building houses the largest dance rehearsal space outside of London, featuring seven dance studios including a 230-seat studio theatre, a health suite, wardrobe facilities, office space and meeting rooms and a public exhibition space. On completion, Wates secured a Highly Commended Construction Best Practice Award for innovation for the building from the Construction Sector Network.

The stunning building is the result of public/private funding with Leeds City Council providing the site and £6.6m, together with a £4m grant from Arts Council England, over £1m raised by the Northern Ballet and subsequent agreements to lease facilities to private sector organisations including Leeds Metropolitan University.

The Northern Ballet headquarters provides an important addition to the established cultural community which includes the West Yorkshire Playhouse, the BBC and Leeds College of Music. The building is located on a prominent corner site on the main Leeds - York road and also forms a gateway development to the wider Quarry Hill redevelopment area.

Jacobs Architecture Director Nigel Hall commented: "Our key design objective has been to provide Leeds with a world-class dance facility. Early design ideas developed the potential for shared space - we were aware that it is unusual for classical and contemporary dancers to share facilities and our design encourages opportunities for interaction between the two organisations which we hope will lead to a rich artistic mix.

The dance facilities and other accommodation can be used as exhibition space and a café, but also doubles as a pre-function and bar space for performances. Upper floors provide green rooms, meeting rooms and a roof terrace which can be hired out for private functions and used in a variety of ways, encouraging access by the wider community".

The development has been designed so that all the social areas and break out spaces run through the core of the building, providing views from galleries into the studios and allowing people to observe the dancers rehearsing. The administration and staff areas reside to the north of the building and are predominantly naturally

ventilated. The dance studios are located on the south where they will benefit from the natural light throughout the day and where people passing the site can get glimpses of activity within the building. Some of the rehearsal studios have an external terrace or balcony space which provides the dancers with the opportunity for a breath of fresh air during their strenuous rehearsal routine.

The building is of a frame and panel construction, the infill panels of the new building were constructed using a timber, structurally integrated panel which provides excellent levels of thermal insulation, with a rainscreen zinc panel facade. The entrance to the building features a 20metre high glass frontage which maximises natural light to the lobby/reception and provides a strong visual link to the social and communal spaces on upper floors.

The 230-seat studio theatre on the ground floor features commissioned public art by artist Jo Fairfax who is renowned for his glass architecture pieces. An animated zoetrope print along the floor to ceiling glass frontage runs along the length of the room showing dancers moving through space. As people walk past the building so the dancers appear to move. The studio (approx 443m<sup>2</sup>) can also be divided into two rehearsal spaces by a sliding acoustic wall which gives Northern Ballet the opportunity to use the space flexibly. Northern Ballet has received a £47,439 Biffaward, a Landfill Communities Fund scheme, which will go towards equipping the Studio Theatre. The grants are awarded to projects that provide or improve community spaces and cultural facilities.

Six of the dance studios feature specialised 'Harlequin floors' - the same as those used by The Bolshoi Ballet, New York City Ballet and English National Ballet. Northern Ballet and the designers visited a number of existing facilities during the design process to ensure this critical element of the design would be delivered to an exacting specification. The Harlequin WoodSpring, known also as "basketweave", uses a counter-batten configuration comprising three layers of highly flexible softwood battens, placed on top of each other at right angles. The intermediate layer acts as a spring to the top layer with shock absorption, which gives each space not only better physical and acoustic properties, but more slip resistance which improves health and safety for the dancers.

Wates' Mark Wainhouse, Construction Manager, commented: "It was a challenging project given the central location and the meticulous attention it demanded, but the end result is this extremely impressive building which can now take its place in the city's landscape. It was also a huge achievement to receive the award from Construction Sector Network as we handed over the building to its new occupiers. I wish Northern Ballet and Phoenix Dance Theatre every happiness in their new home."

The building will allow Northern Ballet and Phoenix Dance Theatre to build on their already extensive array of education and community activities giving the dancers of the future more opportunities to perform. The building is home to the Northern Ballet Academy, which offers classes for all ages in ballet, contemporary and jazz dance, and it provides spaces for community workshops and performances. The exhibition space will further enhance people's experiences in the building and act as an additional public arts space for Leeds.

Northern Ballet's Chief Executive, Mark Skipper, said: "Our new dance centre will help establish Leeds as a powerhouse for dance in the UK, allowing dancers from across the north to access the best facilities and performance spaces outside of

London. The fact that we now have our own purpose-built home, more than ten years after setting out to make this vision a reality, is thanks to investment from both public and private sectors, and is testament to the strength of support and confidence in the future of arts and culture in Leeds and the wider region.”

The building will also serve a further commercial purpose, with meeting rooms, studios and performance space available for hire throughout the year, along with an fully-licensed bar and in-house catering team for available events.

**-Ends-**

**For further information, media opportunities and images contact:**

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### **Editors' Notes**

1. Together, Northern Ballet and Phoenix Dance Theatre have 65 years experience in dance. The two companies have performed to millions of people across the UK and overseas, and provided opportunities for thousands more people to engage in dance activities.
2. **Northern Ballet** is a touring narrative dance company whose distinctive blend of classical dance and theatre is renowned for captivating new audiences. For up to 30 weeks of the year Northern Ballet's Company of 40 dancers tour a combination of new work and acclaimed repertory pieces throughout the UK and overseas. This extensive touring schedule demonstrates Northern Ballet's commitment to providing opportunities for people of all ages to have access to excellence in dance performance and participation.

The Company's new ballet, *Cleopatra*, by Claude-Michel Schönberg and David Nixon, will tour nationally, following its world première at Leeds Grand Theatre on 26 February 2011.

[www.northernballettheatre.co.uk](http://www.northernballettheatre.co.uk)

3. Over the last 29 years **Phoenix Dance Theatre** has grown to be one of Britain's leading contemporary dance companies. From its home in Leeds, Phoenix tours nationally and internationally, bringing inspiring and entertaining dance to the widest possible audience. Under Artistic Director Sharon Watson, the Company develops exciting new contemporary dance theatre both in-house and by selected choreographers of the highest calibre, with a top-flight company of dancers hand-picked from all over the world.  
[www.phoenixdancetheatre.co.uk](http://www.phoenixdancetheatre.co.uk)

4. **Wates Construction**

Wates is one of the UK's largest family-owned construction services and development companies. Established in 1897, it remains privately owned by the Wates Family. Wates employs over 2000 people and had a turnover of £945 million in 2009. [www.wates.co.uk](http://www.wates.co.uk)

The company works across a range of sectors, including education, prisons, affordable housing, retail fit out and refurbishment, office interiors, land development and commercial buildings.

Wates has three areas of Corporate Responsibility focus: to reduce the impact of CO2 emissions from our activities, eliminate all non-hazardous waste to landfill by 2010 and boost skills and employability in areas of most need. Wates was awarded Silver status in the 2008 Business in the Community Responsible Business index.

#### **5. The Strategic Design Alliance**

The Strategic Design Alliance is an award-winning partnership between Leeds City Council's technical services team and Jacobs. Jacobs lead the design of the project, and also provided cost consultancy and structural engineering services, with Leeds City Council providing building services input. Northern Ballet is the first of three cultural facilities to be delivered by the SDA over the coming years including the refurbishment of City Varieties Theatre and the design for Leeds Arena (up to detailed design stage).

The partnership began in July 2006 to ensure the council has access to the best architectural services for its wide range of construction projects across the city. Since its formation the SDA has won many awards, most recently for its restoration of The Tiled Hall at Leeds Central Library.