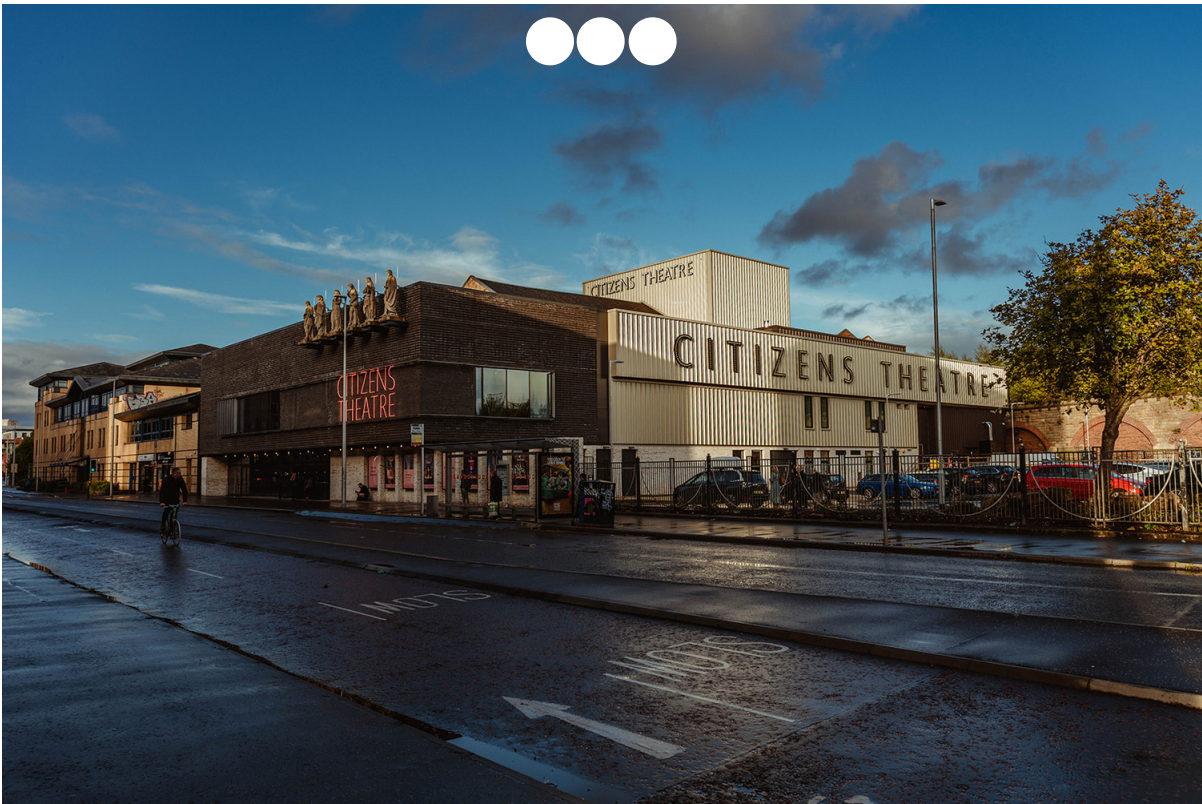


FIRST LOOK

Bennetts completes revamp of Glasgow's Citizens Theatre

1 OCTOBER 2025 • BY FRAN WILLIAMS



1/35

Source: Mark Liddell

Glasgow's world-famous Citizens Theatre has finally reopened to the public after going dark for a seven-year makeover

In a project backed by Glasgow City Council, Bennetts Associates has renovated the Citizens Theatre's Gorbals home, improving its rehearsal spaces, public areas, learning facilities and administrative offices.

Historic parts of the building have been improved and later additions that are no longer fit for purpose demolished.

The building's façade on Gorbals Street has also been transformed, and its rooftop statues of Shakespeare, Burns and the Four Muses restored by Scottish sculptor David J Mitchell.

At the heart of the design is a reimagined court and close, as a reinterpretation of the original passageways and courtyards that once defined the site. This creates a direct visual and physical connection from the street all the way through to the back-of-house, backstage and production areas.



This allows glimpses through windows to show its inner workings – including fly tower and historic stage machinery, as well as one of the last remaining original and still-operational Victorian scenery-painting frames.

The Victorian auditorium remains essentially unchanged in appearance. A new 150-seat studio theatre and rehearsal room have been added, allowing for more productions.

Other interventions include a new street frontage and foyer spaces, revitalised front-of-house area and enhanced access.

The building's original sandstone walls and exposed historical details – such as joist pockets and arch tops – have been left exposed.

Bennetts Associates was **chosen to redevelop the theatre back in 2012**, selected from an impressive shortlist comprising Page\Park, John McAslan, Malcolm Fraser, Haworth Tompkins and cr8 Architects with RHWL to win the high-profile job, originally planned to cost £6.5 million.



The following year, **the project received a £4.9 million funding boost** from the Heritage Lottery Fund. It ended up costing £29.8 million.

Glasgow City Council funded a feasibility for the project prior to Bennetts taking its designs further, and **the project won planning for the rework in 2016**.

The rubble stone-built auditorium is world-renowned and has stood through changes in the Gorbals. This project is the most significant upgrade of the building since it was opened 135 years ago.

The Citizens Theatre repertory company was founded in 1943 and moved into the theatre in 1945 when it was renamed to reflect its occupants. It is known locally as 'The Citz'.

In 1977, a fire razed the neighbouring Palace Theatre. The Citz team quickly salvaged Victorian fittings. The last parts of the Citz' original foyer and bars were torn down in 1988 and replaced with a new entrance and foyer spaces in 1989.



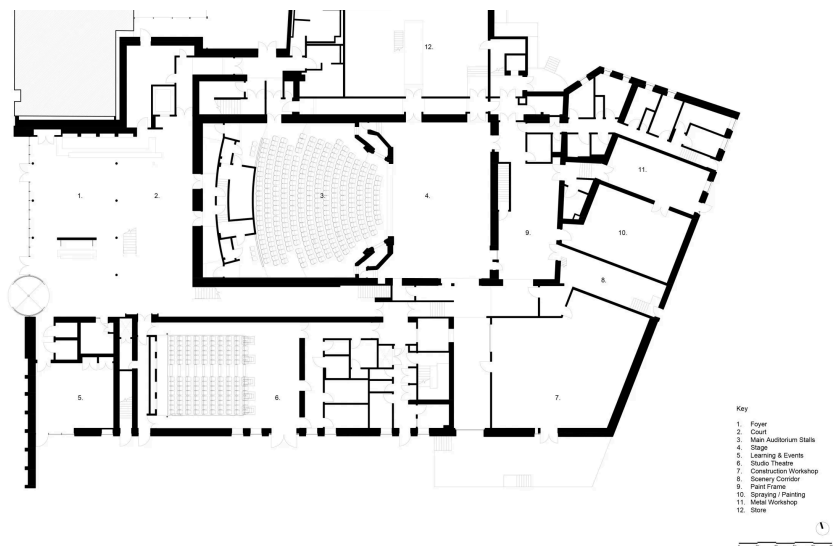
Architect's view

At the heart of the redesign of Citizens Theatre is a reimagined court and close, a contemporary reinterpretation of the original passageways and courtyards that once defined the site. The design creates a direct visual and physical connection from the street, all the way to the back of house.

The auditorium, a gem of Victorian theatre architecture, remains virtually unchanged in appearance, with Bennetts Associates maintaining the intimate scale and warmth much loved by audiences, while also delivering essential upgrades. A new 150-seat Studio Theatre and rehearsal room has been added allowing more productions from theatre-makers at all stages of their careers. Other design interventions include new street frontage and foyer spaces, a revitalised front of house area to create a vibrant, accessible and social gathering place, and strategic enhancements to accessibility including levelled floors and new circulation routes.

Bennetts Associates also led the architectural strategy to reintroduce two-tonne statues above the theatre's entrance on Gorbals Street, Greek goddesses representing tragedy, comedy, poetry and song, and dance. The figures are joined by the literary giants Robert Burns and William Shakespeare.

James Nelmes, director, Bennetts Associates



Clients' views

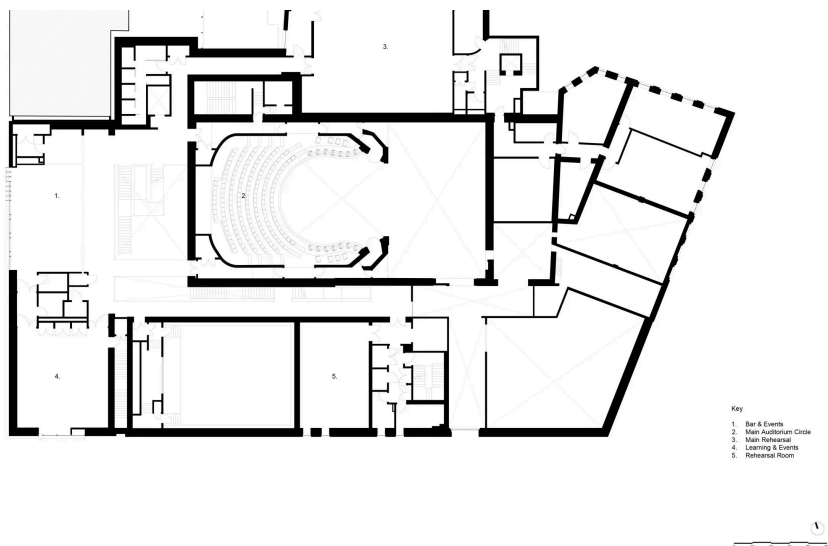
The redevelopment of the Citizens Theatre has been transformative in every way. The design by Bennetts Associates has delivered a building that allows us to return as a creative powerhouse that is accessible, welcoming and inclusive for all of our community. The theatre has stood on Gorbals Street in Glasgow for more than 150 years, and thanks to the incredible work put into this project, it will continue to stand proudly in that community for many years to come.

Dominic Hill, artistic director, Citizens Theatre

This transformation is one of the most significant moments in the Citizens Theatre's history. The architectural redesign doesn't just restore a much-loved building, it completely reimagines how the theatre can serve its community, both now and for generations to come.

For the first time, the full range of what the Citz does – from world-class productions and technical craftsmanship to participation and community engagement – is visible and accessible to everyone who walks through its doors. This new chapter secures our future as a one of Scotland's leading producing theatres and redefines how we connect with audiences, artists and our neighbourhood.

Kate Denby, executive director, Citizens Theatre



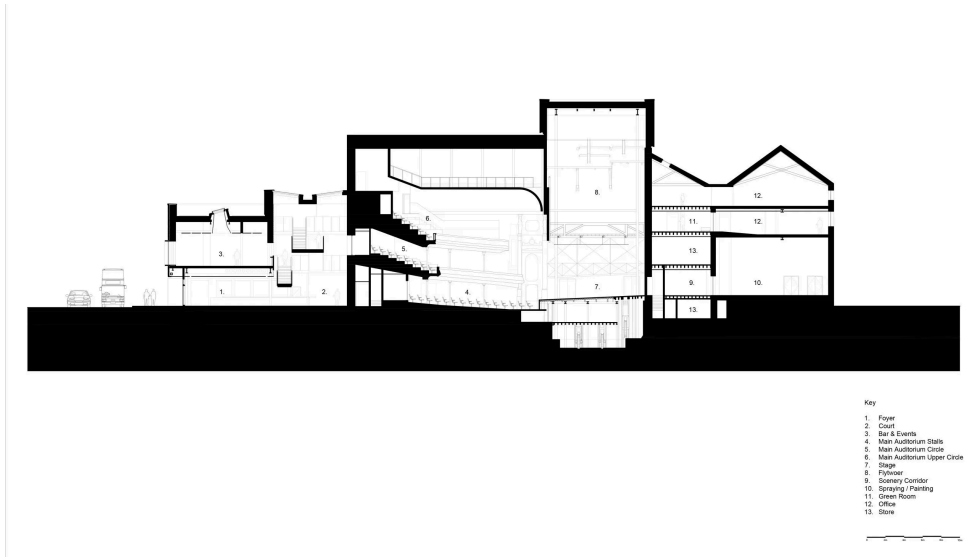
Engineer's view

With sustainability at the heart of the renovation, we worked with the staff understand the theatre's aspirations, work practices, and opportunities to promote sustainable operation and behaviours. The existing theatre's fabric and MEP systems needed significant repair and replacement to be efficient and provide a comfortable internal environment for staff and visitors. Upgrades to the existing building fabric including modern windows and thermal insulation, and the energy efficient new foyer spaces will help reduce the building's operational energy use.

New ventilation systems combine the benefits of natural ventilation with MVHR to provide low energy cooling and heating. In the Victorian theatre, under-seat ventilation ensures even distribution of fresh air and improves the comfort and air quality of the theatre space by moderating temperature and removing CO₂. Intuitive energy metering systems allows Citizens to monitor and moderate energy use associated with performances or activities. Max Fordham also designed a dynamic lighting scheme throughout the building to highlight significant architectural elements and support clear wayfinding.

It's wonderful to see such an important Glasgow landmark come back to life for the performing arts and for the community. It's been a long process, but we're very happy with the result. The lovingly restored Victorian theatre keeps its iconic historical value, while offering a state-of-the-art performance space for future generations.

Duncan MacLennan, principal engineer, Max Fordham



Project data

Location Glasgow, Scotland

Start on site February 2020 (enabling works from June 2019)

Completion March 2025

Gross internal floor area 7,306m²

Gross (internal + external) floor area 1,830m²

Form of contract or procurement route Traditional SBC/Q/Scot (Standard Building Contract with Quantities for use in Scotland)

Construction cost £29.8 million

Construction cost per m² £3,955

Client Citizens Theatre

Architect Bennetts Associates

Project manager tX-2 Project Management

Conservation architect Ian Parsons

Structural engineer Struer Consulting Engineers

M&E consultant Max Fordham

Acoustic consultant Sandy Brown

Principal designer Principal CDM

CDM co-ordinator Principal CDM

Theatre specialist Theatreplan

Cost consultant Turner and Townsend

Fire consultant Atelier 10

Clerk of works Sentinel Clerk of Works

Interpretation design consultant Nomad Exhibitions

Main contractor Kier Group

CAD software used MicroStation, Revit

Environmental performance data

Percentage of floor area with daylight factor >2% Not calculated

Percentage of floor area with daylight factor >5% Not calculated

On-site energy generation 3%

Annual mains water consumption 2,100 m³/yr (estimated)

Airtightness at 50Pa Not calculated

Heating and hot water load 157 kWh/m²/yr

Operational energy 56 kWh/m²/yr

Total energy load 213 kWh/m²/yr (before PVs), 211 kWh/m²/yr (after PVs)

Average area-weighted U-value 0.21 W/m²K (extension only)