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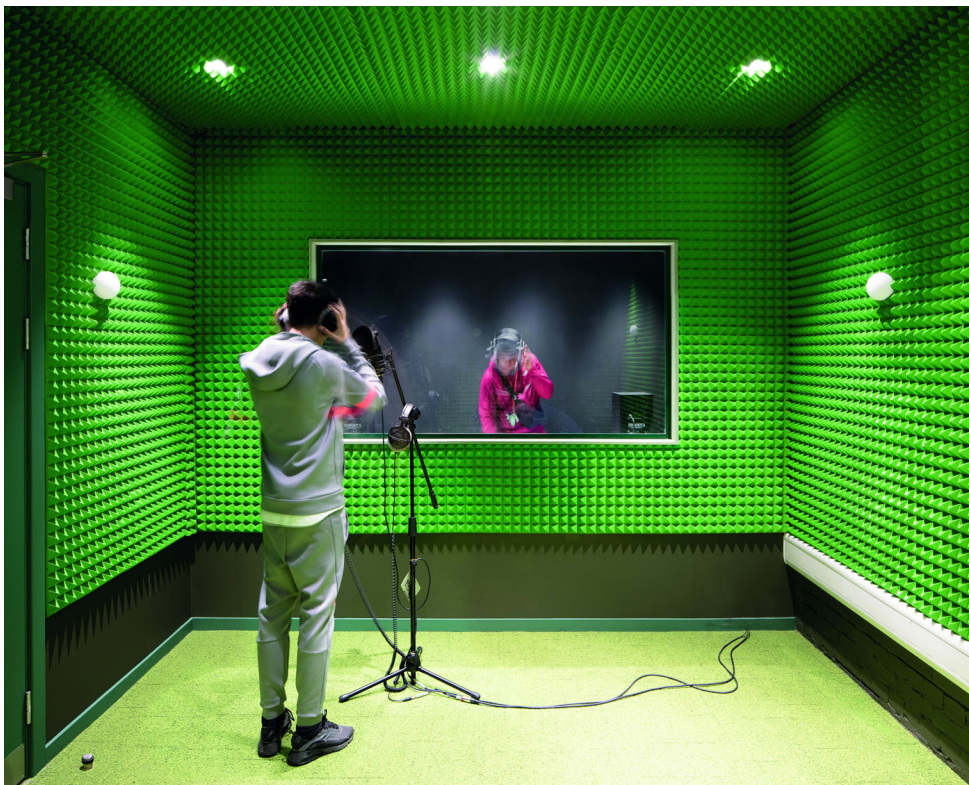
BUILDING STUDY

Freehaus and JA Projects, working closely with the area's local youth and Haringey Council, have led the creation of a vibrant new kind of youth centre. Words by *Shamiso Oneka*, photography by *Ben Blossom*

23 OCTOBER 2023 • BY SHAMISO ONEKA

Rising Green is not a place that is stumbled upon unwittingly. It is slightly off the beaten track on a pedestrianised side-road off Wood Green High Road, a dense, multisensory thoroughfare of fast fashion retailers, the smoky haze of Turkish restaurants, busy cafés and gridlocked traffic. What was once a 1,000m² retail space has now been refreshed as a centre for young people, made for and by them. At 4pm on any given day it is pumping with teenage spirit and ambition.

The Department for Culture, Media and Sport announced a funding boost for upgrades to 44 youth centres across the country as part of a £70 million Youth Investment Fund in August, and as many as 300 projects are expected to be built or renovated over the next two years. After 13 years of Conservative government and its austerity policies under George Osborne's chancellorship, 750 youth centres have been closed and more than 4,500 youth work jobs have been cut – a 69 per cent decline overall. In the same period, funding for schools fell by 9 per cent in real terms.



Rising Green, a youth centre for 11 to 19-year-olds and those up to 25 with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, opened in August 2022. The project is a response not only to the long-term withdrawal of vital youth services, but also to the lack of agency that many young people have in the built environment at a time when they have been under-protected and over-policed. As is evidenced by the increased use of Stop and Search in Haringey and across London during the pandemic, this disproportionately affected those from minority backgrounds.

'I've lived here all my life and I've never seen anything like it ... it offers things you wouldn't even dream of doing, like producing music in a free space'
Yasmin, member of Wood Green Young Voices

Nestled in the ground floor of the original space, the centre's logo glows, a warm sunset announcing its presence with spotlights illuminating the readograph signage. The visual nod to cinema design suggests there is a new narrative forming here, articulated by its message: 'It is uplifting, like we are lifting up our community'. It is a testimonial quotation from a local young person, reflecting on both the outcome of the project and the design process that they were proud to be part of. So, from the very threshold, this space is projecting a new image for Wood Green.

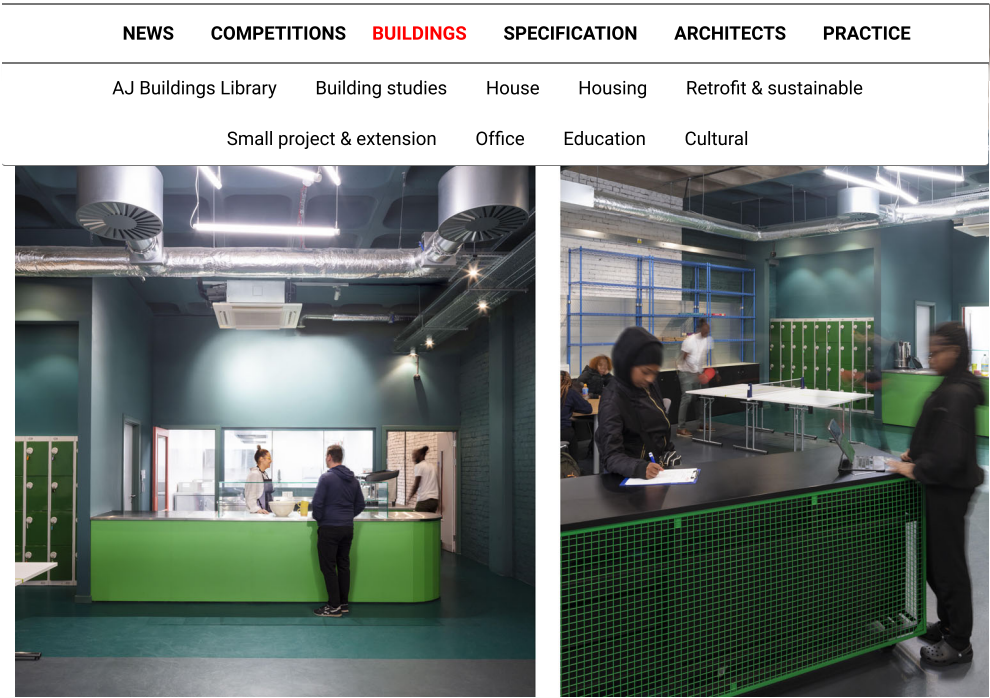


The brief for the £1.1 million commission, led by Freehaus with JA Projects, was to retrofit the former BrightHouse furniture store into a youth centre for the 21st century, working in collaboration with young people in Wood Green, the future users of the space. The approach – stripping back elements that had reached the end of their life and clearing the visual noise in the space – cost little, yet delivered significant changes. Multiple layers of false ceilings were removed to expose the original coffered concrete soffits and generous 4m floor-to-ceiling heights, celebrating the building's Brutalist identity. The waffle-textured ceiling is highlighted and refreshed with harmonious green and turquoise paint from the colour palettes which encode the different use zones within the building. Contrasting pops of coral and bright yellow bring the space to life. The colour and graphic schemes – which are energetic yet refined – were among the elements directly influenced by the participating young people, who demanded aesthetic sophistication from the design.

The challenges of this project were many. The scale of the space and discovery of unknown elements as the building was stripped out, combined with the relatively modest budget, meant



A single shopfront window gives the space a negligible daylight factor and, through co-design discussions, the design team learned that the lack of privacy at the entrance made many of the young people, some of whom are at risk of violence, feel unsafe and unlikely to come into the space. Through a series of workshops, the team gained a deeper understanding of how the design could respond and create a sense of safety. This intelligence informed a choreography of layered thresholds within the street-facing section of the ground floor to mediate and soften the approach from public space into the building. To achieve this, a reinterpretation of the 'shopfront' with suspended polycarbonate screens creates translucency and screening from the street. Behind it sits a café and lounge area, offering a noncommittal, informal space of welcome. This open plan area features loose, moveable furniture that invites adaptation and gives choice and agency back to the young people using the space. An impressive training kitchen facility is also located at ground level, glazed on all sides to showcase and share the activity within.



Freehaus director Jonathan Hagos talks about the project as a collaboration with young people. This co-design approach was directed by the client brief from Haringey Council’s Regeneration department, which had laid the ground by establishing and up-skilling a group of young people aged 13-17, called Wood Green Young Voices. The group was formed to bring young people to the decision-making table as part of the council’s commitment to listen and work differently with local people. Primed and empowered to express their views, they worked with JA Projects, the co-design leads for the project, to define the kinds of activities that would take place in the space and how they wanted it to feel. These included a professional recording studio, multimedia computer room, two multipurpose rooms for small group classes, a games lounge and a padded sensory room to support people with disabilities or anyone in need of some downtime.

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It has received good feedback so far. ‘Now that I’ve seen the youth club, I feel like it’s a really good opportunity for the people in this area. I’ve lived here all my life and I’ve never seen anything like it ... it offers things you wouldn’t even dream of doing, like producing music in a free space,’ says 15-year-old Yasmin, a member of Wood Green Young Voices.

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This process of co-authorship opened the design process to people usually excluded from architect-led, top-down processes. In some ways, Rising Green puts Lefebvrian ideas on ‘the Right to the City’, such as access to public space and participation in urban governance, into practice. Such ideas are shaping design and city-making and producing spaces that put occupants’ needs before the presiding genius of the architect. But at Rising Green, the visual references come from popular culture, not Marxist sociology, taking as their cues brands such as Nike and Off -White, or video games such as Grand Theft Auto. As a result, its spaces feel a little like contemporary concept stores or music video sets, a tangible departure from the tired municipality of youth centres of the past.

‘I’ve loved being part of Wood Green Young Voices. It has provided me with so many amazing insights into people’s views on Wood Green, as well as London as a whole, and the diversity of the group ensures that all views are represented,’ says Jasmin, 14. ‘The group has meant a lot to me. It has been amazing to see the youth hub grow from a mere concept into something really quite amazing and I will 10,000 per cent be visiting.’



‘There was a strong design sensibility within the client team, and we felt responsibility for maintaining that trust with the Wood Green Young Voices,’ Hagos adds.

Rising Green sits within the historic Wood Green Shopping City, designed by John Laing, the prolific UK contractor. The 90-acre masterplan and regeneration scheme was intended to lift the borough’s spirits with retail therapy and, in turn, transform Haringey Council’s economic fortunes with the projected upturn in business rates. However, the new youth centre is a definitive departure from Haringey’s past and it breaks the mould in many ways. It disrupts the marginalisation of children and young people and challenges prejudice by giving them space in the heart of the town centre. It demonstrates that community spaces can be part of an invigorated, equitable, future-forward high street. And it realises value through a sustainable, retrofit approach.



'This is not a space for young people to burn time and play PlayStation; it's a transformational space. I'm always thinking, who can I bring in that a young person will bump into and have a transformational conversation with?'

***Lindani Njie, youth service manager,
Haringey Council***

Facilitated by the clear spans and flexible fit-out, there have been numerous events in the space, such as a free, four-week Creative Exchange entrepreneurship programme for 16 to 25-year-olds, featuring workshops with industry experts and start-up founders. Young rapper Mazza Abz proudly tours the building's spaces to promote a careers fair on Haringey Council's Instagram with seemingly no damage to his reputation. Rising Green feels owned, endorsed and, ultimately improved by the young people who co-designed and continue to shape it.

Having received £100,000 from the Mayor of London's Good Growth Fund, Rising Green embodies Sadiq Khan's vision of the high street as part of civic and community life. Taking the process of change as an opportunity to embed community participation, it has created something that is driven by, and responds to local needs.



Haringey Council's youth service manager, Lindani Njie, receives daily requests to use the space, but his mission-driven approach ensures the hire activities align with the aims of, and create benefits for, the young people. Njie is palpably motivated by his vision for a new kind of youth provision that leverages a wider network and draws in opportunities and learning experiences for young people by forging partnerships.

'This is not a space for young people to burn time and play PlayStation; it's a transformational space. I'm always thinking, who can I bring in that a young person will bump into and have a

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SITE PLAN



Architect’s view

Initially intended as an interim space, the early ambition for the youth centre was to serve as a prototype for future youth provision in the borough. As such, circular economy principles are embedded in the design brief, informed by an environmentally conscious youth collective –The Wood Green Young Voices group of local 13 to 17-year-olds who authored the project alongside us.

Our design prioritises flexibility and employs reusable and agile structures and materials that are fully demountable and can be redeployed at future alternative sites. In addition, adaptable furniture and multifunctional spaces ensure that the youth centre functions dynamically and efficiently, responding to day-to-day needs of youth service providers and local partnering charities who use the building.

Embodied carbon was minimised through strategic material selection. Materials were specified with a priority on 100 per cent recycled content and salvaged materials or, where that was not possible, materials with the ability to be fully recycled at end of life.

An approach to environmental design was also embodied by thinking more broadly about sustainability and working with the operational brief and end-users to ensure the youth centre’s longevity. Our design intent hinged on creating a resilient space, supported by the community’s input, garnered through extensive consultations. Key stakeholders sat side-by-side with the design team, ensuring capital expenditure directly correlated to gains and efficiencies in short- and long-term operational expenditure, thus safeguarding the building’s future to meet local need.

Collaborating with Haringey Council, we’ve created a forward-looking youth hub that provides a positive and nurturing space for Haringey’s young residents – one that exemplifies the potential of retrofits to contribute to the London Mayor’s Adaptive Strategies for High Streets and Town Centres.

Jonathan Hagos, director, Freehaus



GROUND FLOOR PLAN



Client's view

Rising Green supports the economic diversification of Wood Green's town centre now and in the long term – and it is having a wider community impact, helping the young people of Wood Green reach their full potential.

The local council has set out its ambition for the area in Shaping Wood Green, – a high-level vision for the future. Participation of young people in the revival of Wood Green High Road is a key feature of the plans. Rising Green represents the personality and ambition of Wood Green's youth by putting co-design at the forefront, giving them agency for change in their community, where they are at risk of gun and knife crime and residing in one of the most deprived parts of London.

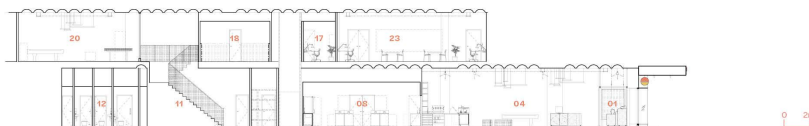
The project challenges Wood Green's traditional retail model and recognises the need for diversification due to changing patterns of use. It also contributes to making Wood Green an attractive and vital place to work and live.

Rising Green will provide essential services and support for young people in the centre of Wood Green, offering a gesture of invitation to young people and lending dynamism to the public realm through the active frontage.

The retrofit design embraces circular economy principles – equally driven by the voices of the young people, who have continually expressed concern for environmental principles and careful material application to safeguard longevity.

Pippa Gueterbock, head of area regeneration for Wood Green, Haringey Council

SECTION A-A



Consultant's view

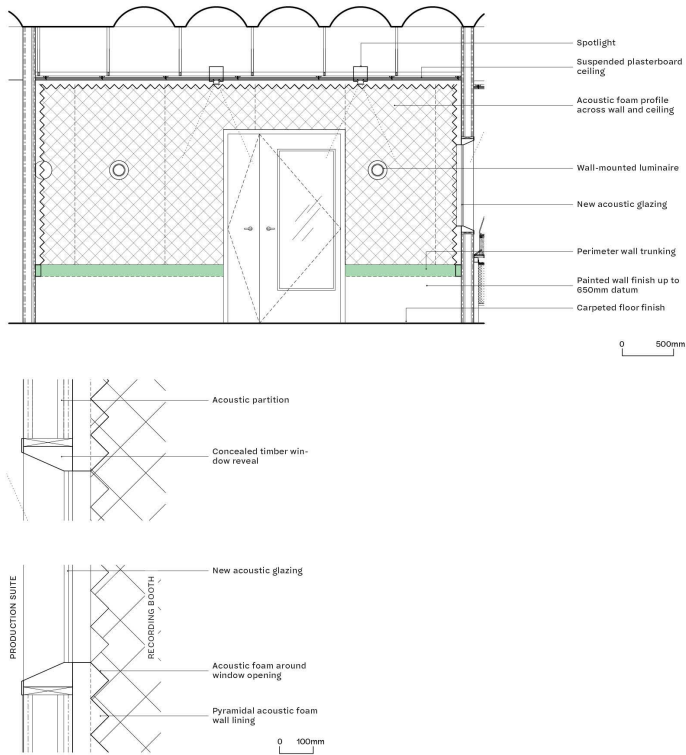
Our approach to engagement prior to the project was based on a collaborative approach to the design, development, and delivery of place in Wood Green.

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partnership approach to the co-design and delivery of the Rising Green youth hub.

The young people also found the process and outcomes hugely beneficial, and the approach has shaped the council’s methods of youth participation in other projects. It has also impacted the operational life of Rising Green, via a new cohort of Young Voices. *Maureen Juliana-Harvey, Wood Green community engagement officer, Haringey Council*

RECORDING STUDIO INTERNAL ELEVATION AND WINDOW DETAIL



Working detail

Architectural gestures and details are concentrated within key spaces in the youth centre, such as in the new recording studio, the ground floor welcome space and the new staircase and feature lighting on the first floor. These each take a cue from references put forward by the Wood Green Young Voices, with influences drawn from across contemporary youth culture, music, fashion and film, as well as design-led retail spaces and brand identities.

Originally coined the Wood Green Youth Hub, alongside the architectural delivery we also helped shape the hub’s identity and supported a wide branding exercise for the centre. As part of a tailored co-design programme local young people helped to craft the youth centre’s new logo and, most importantly, its new name – Rising Green.

The new name for the centre was born out of the desire for young people in the area to take back control of the narrative associated with Wood Green and a desire to uplift the community through the youth hub. The branding directly ties into the aesthetic of the hub, with a complementary palette of sunset tones and neon gradients, which were influenced by the 1980s gaming aesthetic of popular video games and music videos identified within the various discussions and design workshops held with young people.

The refurbished shop front proudly signposts the new name and brand to the street and the secondary cinema-style signage allows for further broadcasting opportunities to passers-by.



Project data

Start on site: February 2022 | **Completion:** July 2022 | **Net internal floor area:** 900m² | **Construction cost:** £1.1 million | **Construction cost per m²:** £1,222 | **Architect:** Freehaus, in partnership with JA Projects | **Client:** London Borough of Haringey | **Executive architect:** Freehaus | **Structural engineer:** Tisserin Engineers | **M&E consultant:** OR Consultants | **Quantity surveyor:** Baker Mallett | **Principal designer:** Freehaus | **Approved building inspector:** LABC | **Main contractor:** Diamond Build | **CAD software used:** MicroStation | **External signage:** AldeSIGNS | **Kitchen fabricator:** Lee Projects | **Metalwork contractor:** Metalfab Engineering | **Joinery:** Interior Joinery Contracts | **Vinyl signage:** Onward Display | **Café and welcome counter joinery:** Comet Catering Equipment | **Predicted design life:** 15-20 years

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