

# Romiley Little Theatre

## An old pumphouse becomes a permanent home for theatre company

### At a glance

#### Location

Romiley, Stockport

#### Tags

Building  
repurposing  
Air source heat  
pump  
Insulation  
LED  
Sourcing local  
expertise

### Overview

Romiley Little Theatre worked on a project to convert an old council-owned pumphouse into a rehearsal and social space, and subsequently a performance space. The building works were mainly completed by the Theatre's members, often using sustainable methods, and gave the company a space to perform in their hometown, demonstrating the collective power of a community to create its own arts space.

### Background

Romiley Little Theatre (RLT) began in 1947 and has been a key part of Stockport and Tameside's cultural landscape ever since.

Originally the company was nomadic, meeting, rehearsing and performing in different spaces in the local area. However, the group decided that they wanted to be based more permanently within Romiley itself, and the organisation was able to acquire a lease on an old pumping station owned by the council.



### Challenges and Decisions Made

Due to limitations on space, RLT initially decided to repurpose the building as a storeroom and a rehearsal/social space, with the group continuing to perform in an alternative nearby venue.

The age and condition of the building posed the next challenge for the team. The pumping house is over a century old and had fallen into disrepair, with holes in the roof, pigeons in residence, no insulation and glassless windows. There was no floor slab, just earth.

Next came decisions on how to heat the building. The decision on how to do this was guided partly by sustainability concerns, but also by the lack of a gas supply to the site. In addition, space limitations meant that the team was keen to avoid radiators and had determined that underfloor heating would be a preferred solution. It was therefore decided to install an air source heat pump despite this being fairly new technology at the time. Fortunately, the building did have excellent electricity supply and space for hot water storage.

The team were able to buy the heat pump for around £3000 plus the cost of additional plumbing. Costs to insulate the building were kept down by using insulation board seconds. Because of the use of the offcuts, the team insulated the building to a very high standard, likely far higher than the building requirements at the time.

### Key Achievements and Outcomes

#### New venue

Rehearsal, social and performance space in the heart of the community

#### Temperature control

Air source heat pump which can be controlled remotely

#### Local resources

Using local resources, funding and labour



After the success of the building project, and due to the financial costs at their performance venue in the other town, it was suggested that one of the rooms be turned into a performance space. Further insulation and underfloor heating works followed and the original non-suitable staircase to the upper level was replaced to allow access to the newly fitted out dressing rooms.

The RLT decided to aim for majority LED lighting from the start, and all house lighting was installed as LEDs. The organisation was gifted some theatre lighting (mainly tungsten) but is working to change this to LED. Solar panels have since been installed on the roof, helping with further energy savings.

### **The benefits of local funding and support: knowing your local landscape**

The success of the project was down to the members of RLT who personally worked on the building project, doing most of the work themselves, and, when they couldn't do a certain task themselves, a conscious effort was made to use local tradesmen. It was helped that there was limited time pressure, the council had said the work had to be completed within two years, but that was easily achievable.

The theatre has benefitted from donations of equipment (tables and lighting equipment (mostly tungsten)). It has also benefited from both local and national funding, including government support during the pandemic.

Locally, it has funding from a local waste disposal company in two tranches, first to help towards general building costs and second to cover the cost of the solar panels. It has also received funding from ALDI to pay for new fencing, and from Manchester airport to help purchase new chairs. Both airports and landfill sites will sometimes be responsible for giving money back to the community to pay for the disruption caused by their activities. RLT also received money from a local businessman after writing to them, proving the power of accessing local resources!

### **What have the outcomes been: RLT today**

After ten years the initial heat pump failed, but a grant from the Theatres Trust allowed RLT to buy a new one. This has the additional features of being connected to the Wi-Fi, so the team can control and monitor the heating remotely. Unfortunately, it isn't possible to dial the heat up and down over the Wi-Fi with the particular system installed, but with the heating always on at a low level, it means the building can be kept warm for whoever is using it whenever. The cost is around £5-8 per day in electricity to run the heat pump 24-hours per day. This cost only occurs during the cold months (usually October to March). The remainder of the time the building only requires energy to heat domestic water and the cost per day is around £1.

RLT has now achieved its ambition of its Clubhouse at The Wharf, used to rehearse, meet and perform in. The group has a base in its hometown and has been able to fulfil its desire of performing to its local community in a community venue.

***Photographs and content provided by***

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