

A Profile of the Audio Visual and webcasting installation

Staffordshire County Council are continually striving to improve its services and have received several major awards for innovative projects and excellence awards for highways, children's services and recycling among others. Part of this modernisation programme included the refurbishment of County Buildings to provide cutting edge Audio Visual facilities for Members, staff and outside organisations.

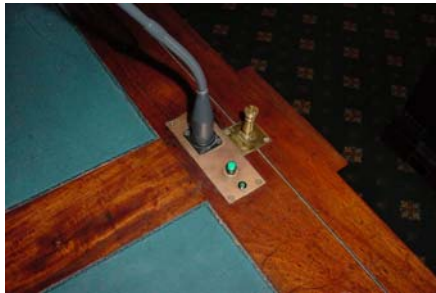


The Council Chamber and committee rooms are housed in a Grade II* Listed Building dating back to 1895 with some walls 24" thick and seamless wooden panelling. As well as being the main meeting place for members, it is also used as office accommodation and for Civic functions and ceremonies. In addition, it is used by the Borough Council for events including the Mayor Making ceremony and has the potential to accommodate major inquiries and court proceedings.

The Council Chamber is designed to seat 100, in a horseshoe layout, with a public gallery to the rear of the Chamber and a press table in the centre.

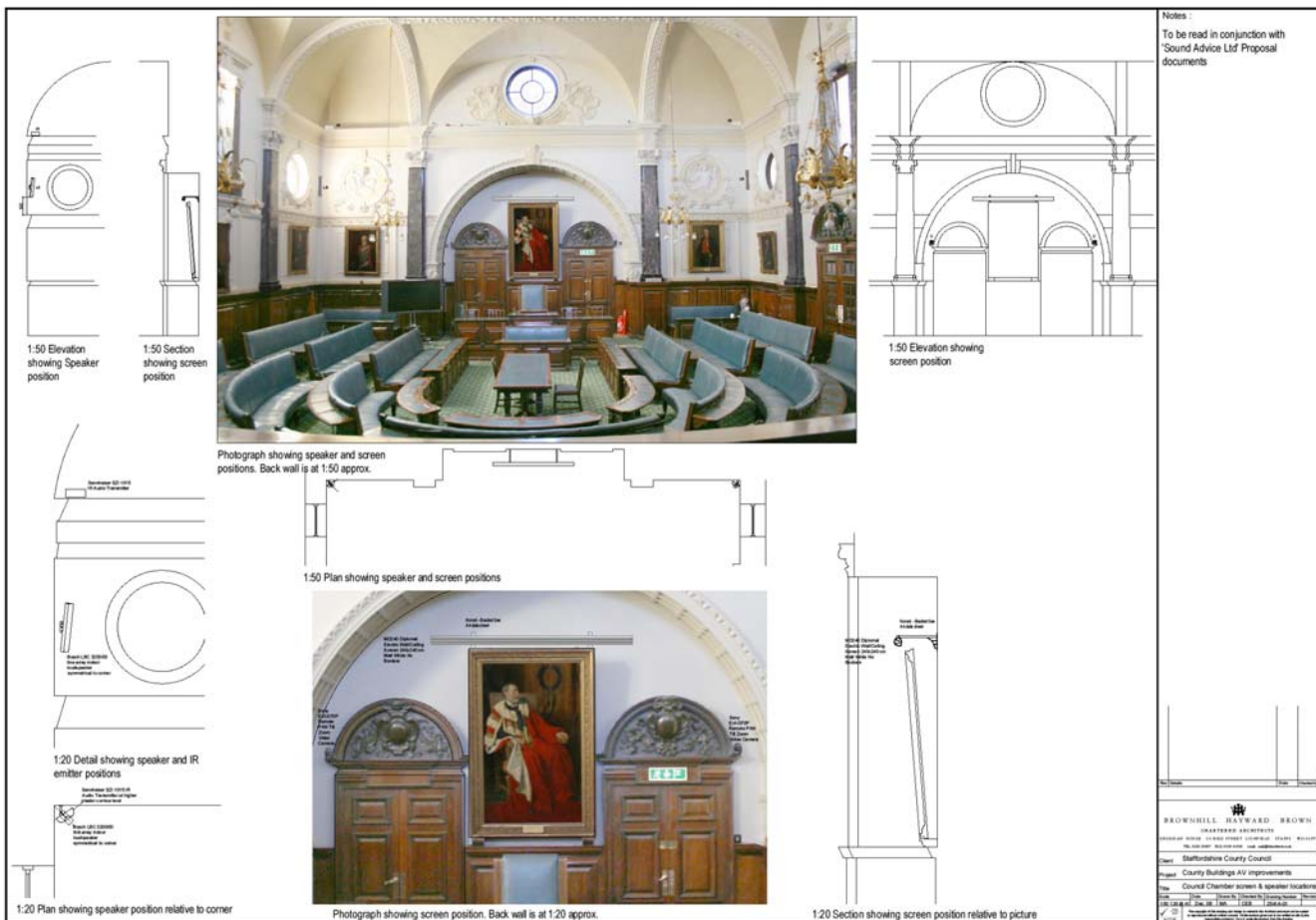
STAFFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL, AUDIO VISUAL REFURBISHMENT

Whilst the Listed status protects the furniture and fabric of the building, it also ties the hands of the system designer as the new microphones had to be fitted in the same positions as the old system with no additional holes or “easing” allowed. It became quickly obvious that the only product that could be flexible enough to provide a digital system with custom brass plates was the DIS 6000 series.



The original design had one “push to talk” button and microphone shared between two delegates, left. The new installation, right, still has one microphone shared between two delegates, but each delegate has a PTT button enabling easy identification to enable the waiting to speak list, synoptic layout and camera follow function for video recording and webcasting to function properly.

The Listed Building Consent took around three months and with Sound Advice providing the technical input, valuable and helpful advice from the Council’s Listed Building Officer, English Heritage and project Architects Brownhill Haywood Brown of Lichfield, the application was approved by the Secretary of State at the first attempt. Below is one of the drawings produced of the main chamber showing the final locations of the equipment which formed part of the application.



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What no one saw during the installation was the intricate chases in the wall, the lifting of the floors and benches, the fitting of custom brackets and the final painting and French Polishing that was done to bring the Chamber back to an “as new” condition after all of the new equipment was installed, left. The finished wall with the new screen housing and cameras, right.



The 5,500 ANSI lumen projector, below, is located in the public gallery and throws the length of the room to provide bright images on the tab tensioned screen. The picture is shown on the 5 flat panels for officers and top table delegates.



There is no room at the delegates positions to locate individual loudspeakers so a BI amp Nexia CS provides the digital processing and audio control. QSC amplifiers provide the power to 4 Bosch line array columns.

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The Oak Room, the largest of several committee rooms, below, is used for Cabinet, Scrutiny and Performance Panel meetings and Planning Committee. The room is panelled to a height of eleven feet in wainscot oak. Three autotrack cameras, loudspeakers and infrared hard of hearing emitters are fitted just above the panelling with the cable hidden on the ledge.

A 30 way Bayer digital radio cableless conference system provides the delegates with audio around the table with radio microphones used for presentations. The Bayer system has combined charging and transport cases so the system is easily transported to any of the other committee rooms or for off site meetings as required.



There is an AV link to the Oak room from the chamber to enable members of the public to view the proceedings in the chamber on plasma panels, below left.

Sound Advice manufactured a cabinet to house the AV equipment in the Oak room to match the existing furniture and decoration, far right



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The audio and visual feeds from the auto track cameras in each room are fed to an AV switcher located in a cupboard in the foyer between the chamber and the Oak Room, below left. Using the master touch screen controller, below right, the operator can select which signal, i.e. Chamber or Oak Room is chosen. This signal is then fed to the Public i encoder where the subsequent webcast can be viewed by the public on www.public-i-staffs.com

The Chamber and Oak room are both licensed for weddings and civil ceremonies and it is technically possible to webcast these events.



The Clerks control position, right, with the master touch screen controller that operates all of the AV including the screen and projector



Sound Advice's Project Manager Phil Bailey said "Every now and again, you get the opportunity to work in a "real" building. Walls with Spanish Mahogany panelling, the dark stone is Devonshire Marble with solid mahogany furniture, the committee room is English Oak panelled, all complemented by Old Master oil paintings on the walls and Antique furniture.

Suspended ceilings and raised plenum floors are now all the rage in modern buildings which is handy for losing bundles of cables but doesn't strain the imagination like this one did"

Lynne Coates, the Project Manager from Staffordshire County Council Member and Democratic Services commented "The historic chamber and committee rooms are a source of civic pride and we had to be sure that the contractor who supplied the system had a proven track record in similar installations and Listed Building work. A rigorous tendering exercise was instigated and after careful consideration and several references later, Sound Advice was awarded the project. The Tender panel were particularly impressed with Sound Advices previous experience in working in Listed Buildings."

"Members and colleagues are delighted with the equipment and the way Sound Advice have supported us right through the whole process of choosing the equipment, applying for Listed Building consent and the final training and support. The quality of the installation and finishing is exemplary and you would never have guessed that any installation work had been done".

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Deputy Leader, county councillor Robert Simpson said: "Making local government more transparent and accessible is one of our top priorities as a county council.

Webcasting means that the public can take part in important decision making.

It also increases the accessibility of events to members of the public and staff who cannot travel to an event or who miss it due to other commitments.

The more meaningful information we can put online, the more we can encourage public involvement and participation."

More information is available from;

Member and Democratic Services Unit www.staffordshire.gov.uk

System design and installation www.soundadvice.co.uk

DIS digital Conference system www.cuk-audio.com

Beyer radio conference system www.polaraudio.co.uk

Webcasting <http://www.public-i.info>

Architects <http://www.bhbarchitects.co.uk/>