

THE DOWN

A proposal for a new home for skateboarding and action sports in Bradford. Produced by the Twentieth Century Society and Ian Chalk Architects





Bradford 2025

This proposal has been developed by the Twentieth Century Society – the national charity for the protection of Britain’s modern architecture and design heritage – and Ian Chalk Architects – an award-winning architectural practice who focus on creating space for old buildings to tell new stories

in art, culture and life. The Dunn is a new home for skateboarding and action sports in Yorkshire. Located under the ‘big top’ of the iconic Grade II listed Richard Dunn Centre in Bradford, 2025 City of Culture, the centre would provide young people with opportunity and fulfilment through sport.

The Richard Dunn Sports Centre rises dramatically over the nearby Sunny Bank Road allotments, glasshouses and cricket pitch. Illustration by Trevor Skempton (1976/78)



Twentieth
Century
Society

Background

Bradford 2025

Bradford in West Yorkshire, has been named as UK City of Culture 2025. Awarded every four years by government, the UK City of Culture title has had a transformational impact on host cities (Coventry 2021, Hull 2017 and Derry Londonderry 2013), securing millions of pounds of investment and acting as a catalyst for creative place making and culture-led regeneration.

Bradford district's year of culture is set to deliver more than 1,000 new performances and events including 365 artist commissions, a series of major arts festivals and major national and international collaborations.

As the UK's youngest city (29% of the population are under 20 and nearly a quarter under 16), young people will help deliver a year of culture that is recognisably Bradford. Bradford's history of fierce independence and of progressive social reform and its spectacular cultural heritage, offer a powerful launchpad for a UK City of Culture celebration in 2025 that could only happen in Bradford.

**Our time, our place:
Young Bradfordians
celebrate winning the
City of Culture 2025.**





The 'big top' of Richard Dunn Sports Centre on the Bradford skyline, with the chimney of the 1873 Lister Mills in the foreground.

Background

1976

Richard Dunn Sports Centre is built, the same year the skateboarding craze hits the UK

1st

The Centre is reputedly the first building in the country to make use of Computer Aided Design

40m

The height of the Centre's pioneering 'big top' roof, a landmark on the Bradford skyline

£1.8m

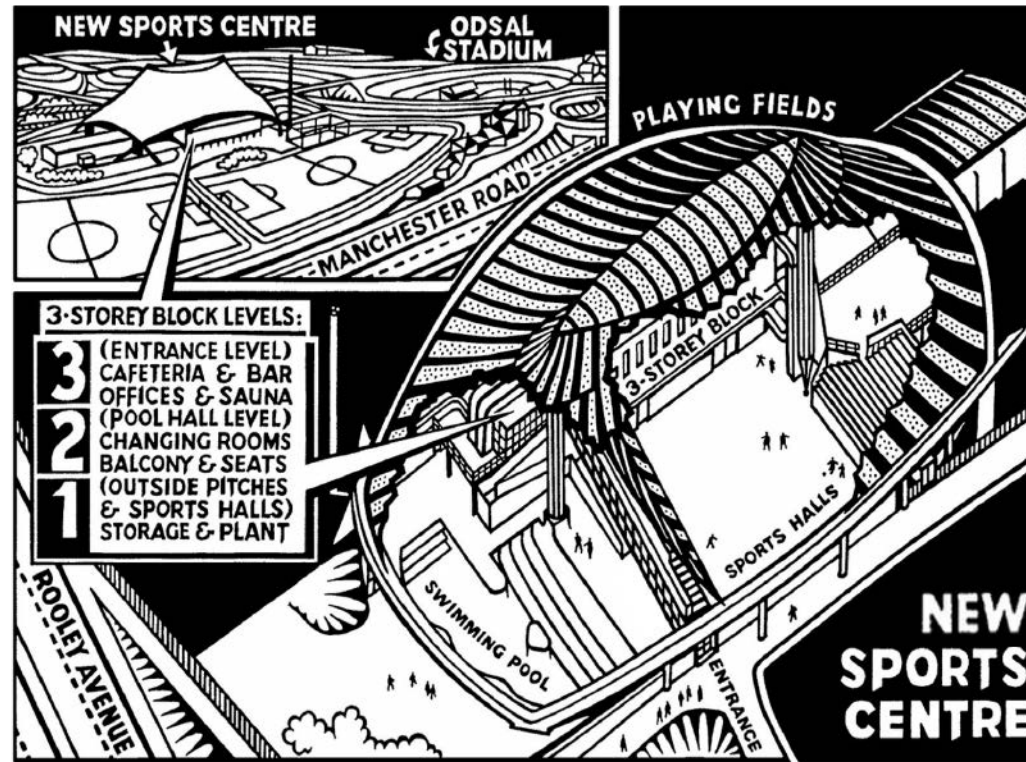
The project cost in the 1970s for the 'vision of the future' sports centre

History

The Richard Dunn Sports Centre in Bradford is real 'Roy of the Rovers' architecture: Built in 1974-78 by the local authority architects department, it was named in honour of the hometown boxing hero and scaffolder, who fought Muhammad Ali for the Heavyweight Championship of the World. Its tented 'big top' is a landmark on the city skyline and it was a popular regional amenity for over 40 years, containing a leisure pool, sports halls, squash courts, fitness studios and more.

The Centre is distinguished by its structurally pioneering roof, which drew inspiration from Japanese architect Kenzo Tange's gymnasium venue for the 1964 Tokyo Olympics, and the cable stay structures of German architect and structural engineer Frei Otto, such as those for the 1972 Munich Olympics. It was also reputedly one of the first buildings in the country to make use of Computer Aided Design.

However, faced with rising maintenance and energy costs, the Centre permanently closed in 2019 and replacement leisure facilities were built at nearby Sedbergh. The Richard Dunn site was earmarked for redevelopment by landowners Bradford City Council, with the building placed on standby in 2020 as a temporary mortuary facility during the Covid-19 pandemic. Faced with the threat of imminent demolition, C20 submitted a listing application for the building in late 2021, and in April 2022 it was designated at Grade II by DCMS - one of the first leisure centres of its type to be nationally listed.

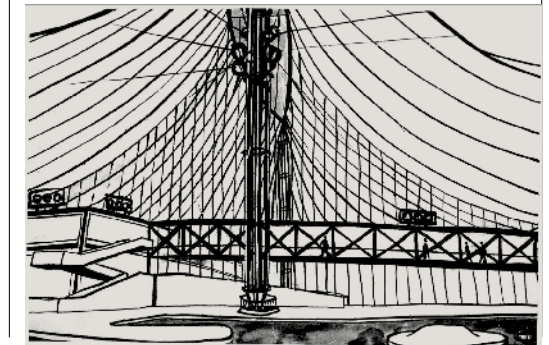


A cutaway diagram from c1975 showing the range of facilities provided by the new sports centre.

Testimonials Protection and opportunities

"I was just 25 years old when I joined Bradford City Architects in 1970, and started work on the new Sports Centre. Some 50 years later, I'm confident that the notion of adaptable social spaces under a permanent 'landmark' roof could be re-applied to new uses."
Trevor Skempton, original architect

"It is centres like these that make sportspeople. It's a good place for kids and there could be another Richard Dunn or Jessica Ennis-Hill come through the ranks. I hope that it will be put to good use for people that need it the most."
Richard Dunn





The elliptical concrete arches of the pioneering roof at the Richard Dunn Sports Centre, under construction in 1975.



Kids playing in the leisure pool at Richard Dunn Sports Centre in 1979

Background

55%

The majority of residents agreed the building should be preserved in a recent survey

No.1

The most popular response to how the building should be repurposed was as a skatepark

29%

Percentage of Bradford's population under the age of 20, making it the UK's youngest city

3

The number of skate facilities in the city, the lowest for any comparable UK city of its size

The building and skateboarding

Though listing spared the building from the bulldozer, the centre has since remained empty and fallen prey to vandalism and arson attacks. Without a new vision, its long-term future is far from certain.

Unusually, the listing designation excludes the internal structures (i.e. the pool, flumes, hardcourts etc), presenting a unique opportunity to reimagine the centre and accommodate new uses underneath the pioneering roof.

The Richard Dunn Centre is a landmark building, woven into the social and sporting heritage of Bradford; it would be only fitting for this legacy to continue, and an exciting new chapter written.

Heaven is a half pipe?

Following news of the Centre's listing in 2022, the Telegraph and Argus ran a public survey on its future. Of the nearly 3,000 respondents, well over half agreed the Centre should be preserved. When asked for suggestions on how the building could be repurposed, by far the most popular response was as a skatepark

Skateboarding in Bradford

Further research with Skateboard GB, the national governing body for skateboarding, confirmed that the city is chronically underserved with suitable facilities. Bradford is the seventh largest local authority in England (population 546,400 - 2021 census), yet



Above: exterior of the building and above right its iconic original signage

there are only 3 skate parks within the wider district - all of which are outdoors and would be classified as micro sized (less than 150m²). The nearest indoor facilities are an hour or more away, in Leeds and Halifax. Compare this with a city like Cambridge, which is only the 149th largest local authority in England (population 145,674), yet has 13 separate

skateparks of varying sizes. Added to the fact Bradford is Britain's youngest city (29% of the population are under 20 and nearly a quarter under 16), and will become UK City of Culture in 2025, and the opportunity to redress this imbalance of facilities while providing a dynamic new use for the listed leisure centre is clear.



Bradford speaks Public feedback on the building

"A stunning building. It was way beyond its years when it was built. Save it, use it and value it."

Peter Tate

"Indoor skatepark, please. Bradford needs one desperately."

Zee Ali

"Swimming pools make great skateparks."

Kane Holmes

"It's iconic and a landmark that can be seen from miles."

Angie Petty

"Definitely an indoor skatepark. Bradford still needs one"

Sean Barber

The Dunn, Bradford

Developed in collaboration with specialists Ian Chalk Architects, and with expert advice from across the skate and action sports community, C2o Society is presenting the following proposal to Bradford Council and the 2025 City of Culture team.

The Dunn: A new national home for wheel and action sports located in Bradford, West Yorkshire, offering young people opportunity and fulfilment through sport. Our vision would adaptively reuse the spaces currently occupied by the empty leisure pool, flumes and sports hall, by inserting a unique indoor/outdoor skating arena, with climbing walls, a café and studio suites, creating a versatile new multi-use facility within the existing building.

The UK currently has no permanent international and Olympic level skate arena that combines both Street and Park style courses (i.e. different skating terrains and obstacles), with adequate spectator and competitor facilities. Bradford has the potential to provide all of these, housed under the iconic 'big top' of the former Richard Dunn Sports Centre - rebranded as The Dunn.

- A community focused action sports centre that offers activities for the whole family and caters to kids of all ages. Including skateboard, BMX, scooter, parkour, bouldering, dance, cheer and exercise.
- A regional pathway and elite training facility, helping develop the next generation of

Yorkshire talent in skate, wheel and action sports.

- Studio space to support digital photography, video and podcast production - all strongly associated with wider active sports culture.
- Commercially viable, with facilities geared towards schools, kids parties, team away days, hospitality and private hire.

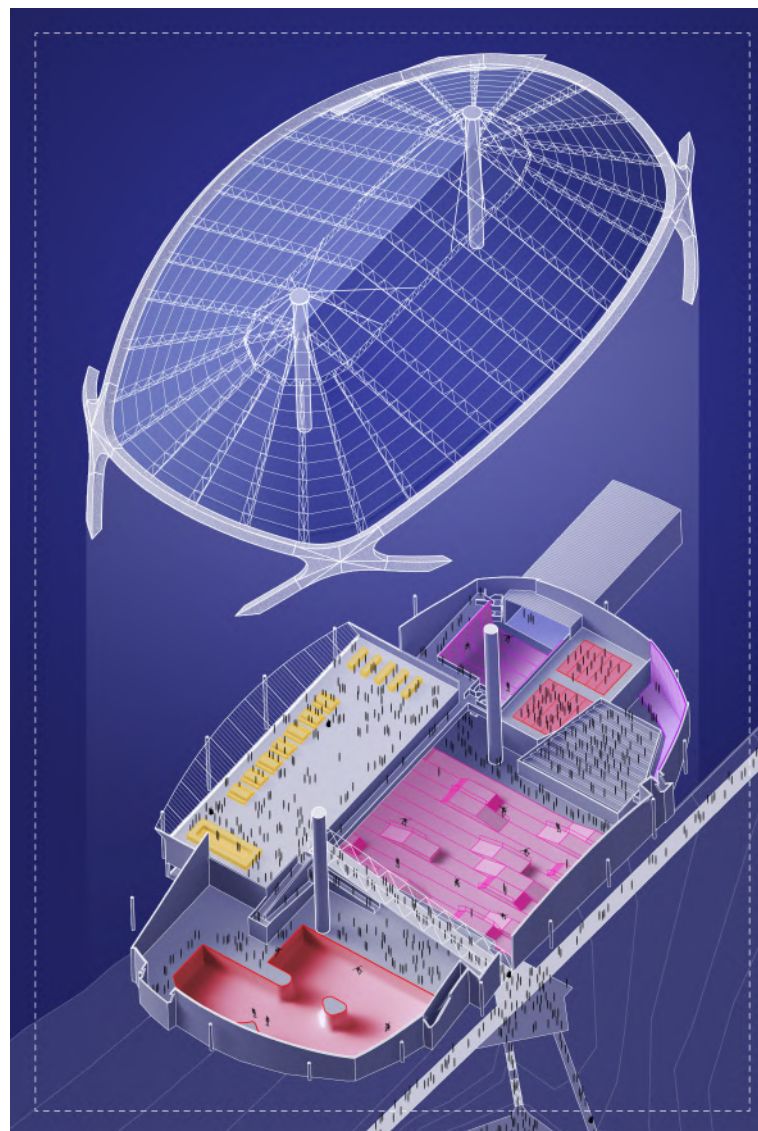


Diagram shows new skateboarding arenas created within the former Sports Hall area (pink) and Leisure Pool (red), with cafe / bar and supporting facilities on the bridge block (yellow).



**THE
DUNN**

Ian Chalk Architects'
vision for the new
action sports centre

Vision

Main features

1. Landscape

A welcoming approach to the main entrance, with picnic tables, food kiosks and wildflower planting. Enhanced pedestrian connectivity with the neighbouring Muff Field Cricket Club and Sunny Bank Road allotments.

2. Skate Bowl

In the former Leisure Pool, creating a 555m 'park style' concrete bowl for indoor skateboarding and wheel sports, following the contours of the original pool.

3. Skate Arena

In the former Sports Hall, creating a unique 1475m² indoor/outdoor 'street style' arena for skateboarding and wheel sports. Adding timber ramps, rails and obstacles in the hall, and transitioning outside through the former service area.

4. Climbing

A 297m² indoor climbing and bouldering wall, located along the existing outer wall.

5. Half Pipe

Located in the former Squash Courts, foam drop-in pits and a classic half pipe, to safely practice airborne moves.

6. Hospitality

An 832m² panoramic café/bar overlooking both indoor and outdoor skate areas. Providing a comfortable space for visitors to enjoy the action below and providing private hire opportunities.

7. Studios

In the former offices, adding 800m² of studio space and digital labs, to support digital photography, video and podcast production.

8. Facilities

The recently refurbished shower and changing facilities would be reused.





The former sports hall would become a 1475m² indoor/outdoor arena for skateboarding and wheel sports, with timber ramps, rails and obstacles.



The former leisure pool would become a 555m² 'park style' concrete bowl for indoor skateboarding and wheel sports, following the contours of the original pool.

Vision

Principles of the proposal

- Sustainable: Creating a new facility, rooted in the needs and interests of the local community.
- Environmentally Responsible: Imaginatively re-using existing spaces, structures and materials wherever possible.
- Welcoming: Making the points of arrival, entry and the environs of the centre more welcoming, active and attractive.
- Heritage: Respecting and celebrating the Grade II listed building.

Skateboard GB classification

Regional and national level skateparks will typically feature a very wide variety of skateable terrains, catering for all styles of skateboarding, and able to accommodate over 100 users at any one time. They typically feature large transitioned areas, half pipes, bowls and street obstacles suitable for high level championship competitions. They will typically be indoor venues to allow all year skateboarding in a dry and safe environment, should include suitable facilities for athletes and spectators, and meet the competition criteria for the specific disciplines they intend to serve.

Skateboarding and Action Sports in the UK: Affordable, Accessible, Cultural, Diverse

Including: Skateboards, BMX, Other bicycles, WCMX (adapted wheelchairs), Scooters, Roller skates (traditional and in line)

Skateboarding has been in the UK since the early 1960s and today it is widely practiced across just about every village, town and city nationwide. These riders are extremely diverse in age, socio-economic background and



ethnicity, and bring with them a rich range of cultures and lifestyles. For some, skateboarding is a central defining part of their lives, often over several decades, while for others it is more of a casual activity, or a way to get from A to B. Some skaters are highly competitive and at Tokyo 2020 Games, skateboarding featured for the first time.

- Skateboarding in the UK is currently experiencing its highest participation figures ever, with approximately 750,000 active

skaters across the country.

- Although the average skater profile is predominantly young and male, the biggest growth amongst younger age groups is women and girls specifically, who are empowered and confident in their skateboarding
- The skate community is known for being welcoming and highly engaged
- Supportive of new participants keen to get involved
- A physical space to skate is a fundamental need for skateboarders, whether that is at

Britain's youngest ever Olympian, Sky Brown, at the Tokyo 2020 Games, on her way to winning a bronze medal.

home, the street, or in the safety of a purpose-built skatepark. There are thousands of street or DIY spots for informal skating and approximately 1,700 skateparks in the UK - of those only 75 are indoors, the rest outdoor.

- The vast majority of skateparks in the UK are owned by local authorities, though their overall quality is generally poor. There are insufficient indoor skateparks of a size and standard to support either keen beginners or future World Champions.

Vision

50%

Around half the adult population of Bradford have activity levels less than the minimum recommended

2020

Skateboarding became an Olympic sport for the first time at the Tokyo 2020 Games

750k

The number of active skaters in the UK – it is one of the fastest growing sports in the country

£30

Skateboards start from just £30, making it one of the most accessible and affordable sports

Why Bradford needs action sports

Physical activity

Being physically active is paramount to improving the physical and mental health of the population; it also brings with it social, economic and environmental benefits.

Data from the organisation Born in Bradford has shown that around half the adult population have activity levels less than the government's minimum guidelines and over one in three people are classed as inactive, taking part in less than 30 minutes of activity each week. There is a similar picture for children and young people; not enough children are active in their Early Years and by the time they reach 9–10 years old, around two thirds don't meet the current guidelines for levels of regular activity.

Furthermore, 77% of 5–11 year olds in their cohort study don't do the recommended 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous activity each day, while the local Public Health England National Child Measurement Programme shows that 38% of children in the District left primary school in 2017 overweight or obese.

Put starkly, Bradford remains one of the most physically inactive places in the country. In 2018, Active Bradford published their Living Well: Physical Activity strategic framework. In line with the actions recommended in Public Health England's 'Everybody Active, Everyday' report, this pledged to deliver 'Improved places to be active and play.'

Benefits of skateboarding

● **Affordability:** Skateboards themselves cost £30–£150 and often need little maintenance or other equipment. In addition, most outdoor skateparks are free-to-access facilities. This makes skateboarding easy to take up and to continue with.

● **Accessibility:** As with other 'participant sports' (surfing, cycling, parkour, BMX, etc.) individuals can ride without the need for team mates, training schedules, match fixtures or pitch/court bookings. Riders typically set their own achievement goals, without having to rely on winning, competitions, matches, etc. for a sense of satisfaction. Just roll up, ride and enjoy.

● **Culture:** Qualities and labels like 'cool', 'alternative', 'subcultural' and 'rebellious' are often associated with skateboarding, frequently attracting riders who are deterred from more organised or institutionalised kinds of sport. Other skateboarders are more mainstream, sporty, techie and brand conscious. Either way, skateboarding has a broad cultural landscape, appealing to riders of varied approaches and attitudes.

● **Diversity:** Skateboarders and other skatepark users are often highly varied in age, gender, ethnicity, bodily ability, socio economic background, etc. This inclusivity in turn allows more riders to feel able to engage in their chosen activity and engenders a general feeling of inclusivity at skateparks

Explainer The health benefits of skateboarding

1. Core

Having a strong core is essential to having good balance and effective hip movement. The core provides the strength to stabilize the body and balance it when riding on uneven surfaces

2. Gluteus Maximus

A huge muscle in the body that extends from the hips to hamstrings. The glutes are frequently

used when transitioning from the crouched to upright position and when propelling forward on flat surfaces

3. Quadriceps

The quads are heavily worked when performing movement that involve extending the knee – like accelerating and ollies

4. Calves

These muscles play a big

role in shifting weight to the front or back of your body, which helps turn the skateboard in different directions



Case studies

£17m

The total project value of F51 Folkestone

£1

The cost per-month for younger persons membership at the centre

600

The capacity of the building in-use, with 170 people per floor

40

Local schools partner with the centre to provide discounted access

The world's first multistorey skatepark.



F51 Folkestone

Classification	Area
Regional and national level	3250m ²
Architects	Year
Holloway Studio	2022

The award winning F51 in Folkestone is the world's first purpose built multistorey skatepark. Run by a local sports charity, it exists to provide young people with opportunity and escapism in an area blighted by high deprivation. Its design, location and conception aim to revolutionise the way we look at town/city spaces and how we can incorporate more facilities for sport and young people within urban centres.

- RIBA South East Regional Award 2023
- RIBA South East Building of the Year 2023
- RIBA South East Client of the Year 2023
- Shortlisted for RIBA Stephen Lawrence Prize 2023



Case studies

£1.5m

The total project value of Graystone

200

Capacity in the on-site bar and restaurant

100%

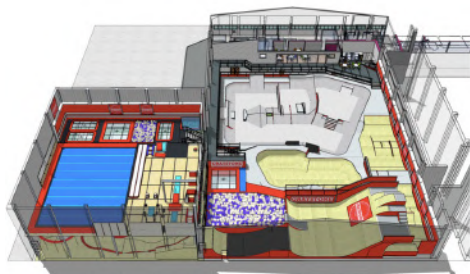
Powered by renewable energy

Graystone, Manchester

Classification	Area
Regional and national level	3251m ²
Architects	Year
Four One Four Skateparks	2018

Graystone Action Sports Academy took a vacant Salford warehouse and transformed it into the North West's premier indoor action sports arena. The facility was developed to be a pathway and elite training facility for British athletes, and caters to the growing interest in urban sports after their recent inclusion in the Olympic Games. An on site restaurant, shop, digital labs and classrooms extend its appeal for educational, family and private hire opportunities.

Laptops, lattes and live action sports at Graystone in Manchester.



Case studies

£1.5m

The total project value of Source BMX Park

1925

The project converted a historic 1920s concrete swimming baths

30

New jobs created in the area as a result of the centre

70k

The centre has had 70,000 visitors since it opened

Below: the repurposed bowl in action.
Below left: the original swimming pool

Source BMX Park, Hastings

Classification	Area
Regional and national level	4000m ²
Architects	Year
Saville Jones Architects	2016

Source BMX converted the derelict 1920s White Rock Baths building underneath Hastings promenade – which once housed swimming pools, seaweed and saltwater baths, saunas and Turkish Baths – into the world's largest subterranean skatepark.

Attracting regional and national funding, Source restored the reinforced concrete structure, and constructed a 4000m² wooden skate area, café and shop. Since opening, it is estimated that more than 70,000 people have visited the park, which has space for 600 spectators. The project has generated 30 permanent jobs in an area with high unemployment.

- Historic England Angel Award for 'Best rescue of an Historic Building' 2017
- Queen's Award for Enterprise 2018



About us

About C20

The Twentieth Century Society (C20) is the national charity for Britain's modern architecture and design heritage. For over forty years, our campaigns have saved countless landmarks for the nation: From iconic red phone boxes to modernist lidos, brutalist bus stations to pop art murals even helping the redundant Bankside power station to become the cathedral of art, Tate Modern. It was C20's listing application in 2021 that saved Richard Dunn Sports Centre from demolition, while our association with wheeled sports goes even further back. In 2013 the Society enthusiastically backed the 'Long Live Southbank' campaign to save the skaters undercroft at London's Southbank Centre from redevelopment, and in 2022 supported a listing application for the pioneering 'Livi' Skatepark in Livingston, Scotland.

We believe twentieth and twenty-first century heritage is an integral part of Britain's rich and varied landscape. Our programmes and publications celebrate and study this legacy, while our campaigns lead public debate on the built heritage of tomorrow advancing environmental arguments and championing community focused solutions.

For more information and to support our vital work, visit c20society.org.uk



About Ian Chalk Architects

Ian Chalk Architects are an award-winning architectural practice who focus on creating space for old buildings to tell new stories in art, culture and life.

As specialists in sustainably adapting existing and heritage buildings, we believe that imaginative designs come from respect for what already exists, a thorough understanding of the users aspirations, interrogation of how buildings can best function and consideration of people's experience of the space.

Their work at Richard Dunn, builds on the practice's work on a number of significant 20th Century buildings, which have been brought back into meaningful use. Previous projects have included the conversion of the brutalist former Camden Town Hall Annexe at King's Cross, into the 266 room Standard Hotel, and the delightful Art Deco Poplar Baths in East London, which was transformed from its ruinous state into a new and much loved community leisure centre

For more information, visit ianchalkarchitects.com



Advisors

Skateboard GB

Skateboard GB is the National Governing Body for skateboarding in England and the home of Olympic skateboarding in Great Britain. The organisation exists to give skateboarders the opportunity to "Skate More, Skate Better" ensuring they are skater focused in everything that they do; aiming to lead, support, empower and facilitate. Skateboard GB celebrate and champion everything that is positive about Skateboarding's heritage and culture and work with the Skateboarding community to develop more opportunities and better environments to skate, inspiring future generations of skate boarders as a result of success on the world stage.

Maverick

Maverick are a skater run business specialising in design and installation of spray in situ concrete skateparks. They have installed some of the best Skateparks across the UK including the RIBA award-winning F51 in Folkestone and continue pushing boundaries to improve both design and quality of skateparks for the future.

Pier to Pier

Pier To Pier provide development advice to the rapidly growing action sports sector, with 25+ years management and advisory experience in the sector. They work with proposed, new or existing facilities to help create more viable and sustainable operations for the benefit of the users and the future of the sports.

Trevor Skempton

Original architect of the Richard Dunn Sports Centre, Trevor Skempton is now a retired architect, artist and urban designer, based in North Wales and Liverpool.



Trevor Skempton, lead architect on the sports centre while at Bradford City Architects Department.



**THE
DUNN**

Woven into the social and sporting heritage of Bradford, it's time to write an exciting new chapter for Richard Dunn Sports Centre.

JONATHAN TAYLOR



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Bradford 2025

C20