

# The National Space Centre



The National Space Centre was designed by Nicholas Grimshaw and Partners of London. They won the right to design the Landmark Building after a competitive process involving five firms in 1996. The process of choosing a design to submit within the bid to the Millennium Commission involved the Leicester public, with consultation days and community meetings held to gauge public opinion.

It's main feature is the 42 metre high "Rocket Tower", which dominates the local skyline. The semi-transparent tower, which is clad in high-tech ETFE "pillows" manufactured by specialist suppliers Skyspan International, was designed specially to house the attraction's largest artefacts, including huge rockets. The tower has been designed in such a way that the side of the tower may be partly detached again in the future to allow easier access during replenishment of large exhibits. Several "decks" placed at various heights up the tower, connected by a series of staircases and lifts, have been incorporated.

The rest of the Space Centre's visitor experience has been housed within the main body of the building, which is built partially below ground level within the walls of the old storm water tanks. The entrance to the Space Centre is reached off a courtyard, in which the Challenger Learning Centre building is located.

The National Space Centre has been built on a 14.5 acre brown field site on Exploration Drive in the Abbey Meadows area, a mile north of Leicester city centre.

The site previously housed the Abbey Tanks, a sewage treatment works, and was donated to the Space Centre project by Severn Trent Water. A council tip was also formerly operational on part of the Space Centre site. This was relocated before construction works commenced, and the Space Centre leases the section of land from Leicester City Council.

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The site is located in an under-utilized area of Leicester in need of regeneration, between the A6 and the River Soar. It is a largely residential area, with a number of industrial and retail units lining the main road.

Construction on the National Space Centre began at Abbey Meadows in April 1999, when Derek Mapp, chairman of the East Midlands Development Agency, dug the first sod of soil.

During 1999, Morrison Construction Ltd and their subcontractors completed the first, enabling, phase of site works, including the demolition and stabilizing of the old storm water tanks in which the Space Centre is built; putting in a damp proof course to separate the old tanks from the new building; sealing entry points; inserting drainage; laying foundations and casting the ground floor slab.

During that first phase of works around 20,000 cubic metres of "muck" was removed from the tanks, with 15,000 cubic metres going back in as part of the stabilizing process. The rest was retained for use later in the project - mainly for landscaping purposes. In total, around 5,500 cubic metres of concrete was poured into the site.

The second phase of construction began in December 1999, with Sir Robert McAlpine Ltd undertaking the £12m contract to construct the Space Centre building, a project which took until April 2001 to complete.

