Situated right in the city centre, adjacent to the splendid Centenary Square, the Birmingham Library is a state of the art centre for knowledge, learning and culture. The City Council’s aim was to transcend preconceived limitations and transform the library experience for the 21st century. To achieve this, the new building was integrated with the REP Theatre so that they shared a number of facilities, including a new 300 seat auditorium, meeting and conference rooms, and café and restaurant facilities.

The protection of the library’s collection of rare books and manuscripts was of paramount importance in this project, and required not only specialised environment and security measures, but also appropriate fire protection solutions to prevent them being damaged or destroyed in such an event. When designing these systems, our specialist team considered simple factors alongside the technical, such as how the space planning of the building could work in conjunction with the atmospheric control systems to eliminate fire risk. The result of this strategic thought process is new facilities that provide the high quality protection that these historic artefacts require.

Our integrated team were involved in numerous other aspects that contributed to the new library’s outstanding performance. Developing concepts through a series of site visits, coupled with regular technology days with industry leaders and workshops with our client and the wider design team, allowed us to understand a range of ‘personas’ and imagine how the building could best respond to their needs. In doing this, we created a dynamic, fluid space that could adapt itself to perform a variety of functions and support a broad community of users.

It was this characteristically forward-thinking, thoughtful approach to design that enabled us to deliver a facility that supports Birmingham City Council’s mission to create a global city with a local heart.