

6 November 2009 **NEWS & EVENTS**

Rendering of the beleaguered Firstsite building in Colchester



Major new UK gallery set to open three years late

Work has ground to a halt on the Firstsite project in Colchester

Article courtesy of The Art Newspaper

By Martin Bailey | From issue 204, July/August 2009
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LONDON. One of England's major regional art centres is set to open three years late, with a cost overrun of more than 50%. The Firstsite project in Colchester, Essex, received planning permission for its Rafael Viñoly building in February 2006. At that point the opening was scheduled for autumn 2007. In March 2007, Tessa Jowell, then secretary of state for the Department of Culture Media and Sport, described it as "an exemplary new cultural model". It was costed at £16.5m, for completion in spring 2008.

Costs, however, have risen to £25.5m. The major funders are Arts Council England (£7.75m), Essex County Council (£6m), the East of England Development Agency (£6m) and Colchester Borough Council (£3m).

Work has now ground to a halt on the building, after Colchester Borough Council (overseeing the construction) sacked the contractor. Councillor Paul Smith told us that Banner Holdings Ltd were "not complying with their contract". The building was supposed to have been watertight by May, but it is still missing its windows. A Liberal Democrat, Mr Smith also blames the previous Conservative council for not running the project properly. The next stage will be tendering for a new contractor to finish the building.

Mr Smith now promises that Firstsite will be open by December 2010. Last month an Arts Council spokesman said that they are satisfied that "everything possible" is being done to keep costs stable, and "major new build projects often take longer than initially estimated".