

The Great Office Occupier / Developer Debate

#6 Location, context and place-shaping challenge



#6 Location, context and place-shaping challenge

It's time for landlords and occupiers to share the new challenges, collaborate on jointly beneficial outcomes and engage in the language of the future workplace.

Office premises come in a wide variety of forms from new, smart buildings to older traditional and historic stock. One thing that is common to both is the need for context and location – a sense of physical place.

Whilst older premises may not offer the sustainability factors of new, purpose-built, developments, they may benefit from location. City centre offices are likely to be positioned not only close to transport links, but within areas of local commerce that support the workforce. Shops, cafes and restaurants, gyms, crèche facilities and amenities like dry-cleaning and phone repairers all contribute to the workday experience of staff.

As the owner of a smaller single building that benefits from local support, this can be developed further to ensure the workplace has a pull for staff and occupiers. This synergy can offer the opportunity to develop beneficial partnerships within the locale. This is what we may refer to as 'place-shaping'.

We see local businesses teaming up with building owners and occupiers right across the country. Working in partnership offers reduced marketing costs to local businesses, which can be passed on through discounted services to local occupiers and their staff. The ongoing development of technology, and in particular the ubiquity of apps, provides seamless access to space booking, concierge services, ordering coffees and

discounts in local businesses.

There are a wide range of businesses looking to expand their offering through events and short term tenancies. Landlords can take advantage of local restaurants and café pop-ups coming into a building, or adjacent outdoor space, to provide variety to their tenants. This is a low-cost way of keeping the offer fresh and, perhaps, seasonal.

Cultural initiatives, art, music and community events will all add to the attraction of areas with an established, or developing, infrastructure. Whether these are private or driven by local government,

55% of corporate occupiers think there will be increases in the proportion of collaborative space in their portfolios over the next three years.

Source: Vivid Economics



the draw adds to the sense of local community and place, and with place comes opportunity.

From the experience of remote working and lockdown, we have seen numerous reports suggesting that people are missing connection and community. If the office is to re-establish itself as a place that staff want to come to, the sense of place and support can be very influential factors.

But what about larger developers and landlords creating new destination workplaces? How do you 'create' places and communities?

Developers can build new developments in many forms: from out of town parks, to newly revitalised districts like King's Cross in London. The support required for staff beyond the office walls in these instances is different. The out-of-town office park may have a smaller local offering of support premises and a larger range of in-house facilities and catering. The new offices in the city need communities to make them successful and appealing.

One of the key benefits of new

construction, is the ability to make these buildings both sustainable and smart. This in turn, creates an appeal for larger blue-chip employers as anchor tenants. With anchor tenants in place there comes an opportunity to attract start-ups and support businesses and so we see the natural formation of a business community. If you are a large landlord, you can curate the area.

However, developers do not create communities, but instead put in place frameworks for them to establish and flourish. Initially, developer involvement in leading the master plan is more 'curatorial', but this approach falls away, and their involvement becomes more low-key, as the community becomes more established. If this is successful the area becomes ingrained and embodies the benefits of more traditional city centre locations comprising the full range of amenities, leisure and retail premises that people and businesses need.

In new enterprise areas, the involvement and support of local and central government can also be of major

influence. The creation of jobs, revitalisation of areas and a blend of offices, leisure premises and residential development are attractive factors driving support. Planning policy and investment are often cited as key measures behind successful 'place-making'.

Vision cannot be underplayed in importance: the ability to establish possibilities and follow through with strategic action is vital. Perhaps this all relates back to partnership – businesses and people inventing and creating things and the uniting factors of the human need to convene.

The post-pandemic situation we are in now offers a pivotal opportunity for people to create new things – it is a challenge for all of us to adapt and to do things in a different way.

No one can accurately predict what people will invent in the next few years and how space will be used – it is a time for landlords and occupiers to share the lessons as they are learned and collaborate on new jointly-beneficial outcomes.

