

BCO launches guidance for office design reflecting hybrid working patterns and net zero transition

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In first update since 2011, the third edition of the flagship Guide to Fit-Out offers advice from leading UK experts on the next generation of office interiors – from smart tech and AI to well-being- enhancing amenities and minimising climate impact

The British Council for Offices (BCO) has launched the third edition of its flagship *Guide to Fit-Out*, which sets out best practice and expert advice on office interior design for occupiers and built environment professionals.

The *Guide* is an important resource for occupiers and their design teams seeking to attract and retain talent amid changing working patterns and environmental regulations. It offers recommendations for every stage of the fit-out process, from the selection of materials and procurement processes to regulations for the management of office spaces in-use. It is intended to be used in conjunction with the BCO's *Guide to Specification*, which offers a framework for delivering best-in-class workplaces tailored to occupier needs.

Key guidance for best-in-class office fit-out includes:

- Facilitating hybrid working – through the design of a variety of flexible spaces
- Adopting human-centric design – to help people feel comfortable and able to do their best work
- Embedding AI and smart building technology – to enable intuitive interaction with building systems

- Minimising life cycle carbon – through circular design and efficient operations to support the net zero transition
- Enhancing well-being – by providing a healthy and productive workplace

This is the first new edition of the *Guide* to be published since 2011, which now includes standalone sections on health and well-being, fire, acoustics, vertical transportation and structural engineering. These changes reflect the increased importance of these areas for occupiers seeking greater flexibility, adaptability and connectivity from their workspaces.

The *Guide* highlights the growing importance of offering a variety of amenities and spaces to help meet the changing needs of diverse workforces. In particular, it notes a shift in workspace design in reaction to hybrid working patterns, whereby space previously allocated to desks can now be used for collaborative and social spaces, as desks are made to 'work harder' through a hot-desking approach.

The *Guide* likewise offers a checklist for multisensory design interventions to promote occupier health and wellbeing. These include connections with nature through the introduction of plants and natural materials. The promotion of active working is covered, through a mix of spaces and furniture for standing, walking and sitting. The *Guide* also recommends spaces for quiet work and rest, and the use of sports facilities and artwork to alleviate stress and stimulate thought.

The growing integration of smart technology is reflected throughout, with recommendations included on its application for a host of operational needs, from security and maintenance to managing space and helping to attract talent.

The *Guide* offers comprehensive guidance on setting clear, KPI-driven sustainability briefs aimed at reducing the life cycle carbon of offices. Along with monitoring energy use to identify areas for improved efficiency, it encourages occupiers to consider their environmental and social ambitions before deciding on a brief for fit-out.

To help with the reduction of embodied carbon, the *Guide* outlines the benefits of a circular economy approach to fit-out, whereby incoming and outgoing occupiers can work together with building owners to minimise waste and maximise reuse and retention of furnishings and fixtures. The adoption of materials passport systems is also singled out as a means of increasing opportunities for the reuse of building materials.

To help the industry access case studies of best practice, the *Guide* includes examples from BCO Award-winning projects. The interactive digital publication links to a rich online library that will be updated on an ongoing basis.

The production of the *Guide* was led by Neil Pennell, Head of Design Innovation and Property Solutions, Landsec and Peter Williams, Senior Technical Advisor, Stanhope – Chair and Deputy Chair respectively of the BCO Technical Affairs Committee. Over 100 industry professionals contributed to and supported the creation of the final document, through participation in working groups or peer reviews.

Neil Pennell, Head of Design Innovation and Property Solutions at Landsec, said: "The new edition of the *Guide to Fit-Out* reflects the evolution in the way people use offices over the past decade. When

developing the insights and recommendations shared in the *Guide*, we paid close attention to what people want from their workspace today, and what they are likely to demand in the future. This starts with a healthy environment that features less desks and more amenity spaces that create valuable, fulfilling experiences. With sustainability increasingly influencing business decisions, reducing embodied carbon in the fit-out process is more important than ever and the advice on circularity principles shows how multiple stakeholders can play a part in helping to cut waste during the fit-out process."

Peter Williams, Senior Technical Advisor at Stanhope, said: "The *Guide* is ultimately a tool for attracting and retaining the best workforce possible. The pandemic accelerated changes that were already in train in the sector, meaning that office spaces now need to work harder to set themselves apart. By creating sustainable, human-centric and tech-enabled workplaces, office occupiers can offer an experience that simply can't be recreated in the home working environment. The increased flexibility we're seeing in office design is recognition that offices are ultimately spaces for people to come together, spark new ideas and collaborate."

Richard Kauntze, Chief Executive at British Council for Offices, said: "The BCO *Guide to Fit-Out* is not just theoretical but highly practical. In today's climate, the importance of health, wellbeing, and sustainability cannot be overstated. Encapsulating the latest industry trends, the new edition of the *Guide* is an indispensable resource in the current era of rapid workplace transformation. This is essential reading for anyone involved in office design and fit-out, reaffirming the BCO's role as a leader in shaping the future of work environments."