

Better places to work



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RECEPTION

STAIRS TO CAFÉ
COUNCIL CHAMBER
COMMITTEE ROOMS



Foreword

The best employers have long since recognised that a well-designed and planned workplace can bring huge benefits. The 20th century saw major strides in terms of the functionality of workplaces – such as the assembly line or the open-plan office - but often failed to create a place where workers felt valued. Now that employers are increasingly seeing their workers as their single biggest asset, and see a good-quality environment as a key ingredient in attracting employees, the need for built-environment professionals to create workplaces where people want to work becomes more and more vital to a successful economy. We are pleased that the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) and the British Council for Offices (BCO) have produced this publication.

Recent reports by CABE have found that increased standards of design can have a significant positive effect upon the productivity of the occupants of workplaces. People who work in well designed and well located workplaces naturally feel more valued as employees and, as a result, are more productive and less likely to be thinking of moving on. Conversely, employers who provide badly designed and located workplaces are more likely to have a severely demoralised workforce and thus face significant recruitment and retention issues.

While there are examples of excellent workplace design from all eras across the country, many employees still spend nearly half their total waking hours in artificially illuminated boxes situated on soulless out of town trading estates. This is bad for workers and also bad for long term economic sustainability.

However, as the examples in this guide show, with a clear commitment from the employer and a favourable planning environment, it is possible to create better workplaces. This guide demonstrates that far from being in opposition, the needs of the employers and the economy, the local environment and the quality of life of the neighbouring communities can all be met by making workplaces better. This guide is concerned with how well designed workplaces can be delivered through the planning system. It explores issues around location, public realm, architecture and linkages, but not interior layouts of detailed specification. Excellent workplaces are places that perform their function efficiently, enhance the local environment and provide local employment in a place where people want to work. We should all be aiming to make these workplaces the rule rather than the exception.



John Sorrell
CABE Chairman



Simon Ward
BCO President



Ian Coull
President of BPF

Six principles of better places to work

- Formulating the principles
- The principles



2.1 Formulating the principles

Discussions with planners, designers, developers, occupiers and those responsible for procuring workplace developments, led to the identification of six principles that contribute to a better place to work and can be influenced through the planning system. A review of previous research on the topic and a wider urban design guidance also contributed to the development of the principles. Developments achieving planning permission, and successful workplaces in general, will exhibit many of these principles, and the best aim to meet all of them.

These principles, which are explained in more detail in the following section, are a direct interpretation of the characteristics that *By design* (DETR/CABE, 2000) identifies as being common to successful streets, spaces, villages, towns and cities. They are:

- character
- continuity and enclosure
- quality of the public realm
- ease of movement
- legibility
- adaptability
- diversity.

This means that there is a clear link between *Better places to work* and *By design*. The advice in *By design* remains relevant to the workplace context, but the guidance within this publication is much more focused on the particular requirements of the planning and design of workplaces that have specific requirements in areas such as:

- use of and take-up of space
- public access
- servicing
- procurement
- pollution
- need to be near markets.

The principles of better places to work:

Ease of movement and legibility

Workplaces that are located to be accessible by a wide range of transport modes, including foot, cycle, public transport and car.

Character, quality and continuity

Workplaces that exhibit a strong positive relationship with surrounding areas, services and facilities.

Diversity Workplaces that contribute to the vitality and viability of their locality by providing, adding to, and supporting a mix of complementary uses.

Sustainability Workplaces that minimise energy use through design, both during construction and in occupation.

Adaptability Workplaces that are able to accommodate changing requirements, including responding to changing market forces practically and cost effectively.

Management Workplaces that are designed to accommodate systematic management and maintenance regimes so that quality and consistency are maintained.

2.2 The principles

Ease of movement and legibility

Workplaces that are located to be accessible by a wide range of transport modes, including foot, cycle, public transport and car.

- Users can easily access a site, and find their way around the site without difficulty.
- The workplace is easily and conveniently accessible by public transport, reducing reliance on the car.
- The site is well laid out and carefully integrates pedestrian movement, vehicle movement and parking to create people-friendly public spaces.
- There are good-quality interchanges between transport modes nearby.
- There is a co-ordinated environment where the built form works with the transport network.
- Users can easily access services such as shops, cafés and banks.
- Locations outside urban centres pursue measures to reduce car use, such as provision for cycling, encouraging car-share, reducing parking spaces and providing bus links to public transport interchanges, articulated in a Green Travel Plan.
- Services and service access are sited in functional, unobtrusive, locations.

Character, quality and continuity

Workplaces that exhibit a strong positive relationship with surrounding areas, services and facilities.

- The design of the workplace contributes to, and is an integral part of, the quality of the wider public realm, sitting comfortably within the surrounding spaces, streets, buildings and communities.
- The workplace has a positive impact on the local economy.
- The workplace is a visually pleasing environment with a strong sense of place.
- Functional requirements such as parking ratios, highway requirements and building footprints are integrated into the creation of a successful place and are not allowed to predetermine design decisions.
- Materials and the detail of external spaces and buildings create a coherent and attractive whole.



Fig 2.1 Vodafone's UK headquarters in Newbury provides a legible environment for easy orientation



Fig 2.2 Cannon Avent's production facility in Glemsford, Suffolk uses glazing and curved walls in a successful reinterpretation of the industrial 'shed'