

Update on the Biophilic Office

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This article by Oliver Heath was first published as a [blog on the Interface site](#). As dissemination partners we wanted to make sure as many people as possible get to see how far this project has come.

In the article [Using the BRE Biophilic Office Project to Study the Benefits of Biophilic Design](#) published in September 2017, we discussed the aims and objectives of this ground-breaking project and why a comprehensive, credible study was needed.



Oliver Heath Design are one year into the Biophilic Design Office project at the BRE Watford Campus – designing 650 m² of a 1980's office using varying scales of Biophilic design principles. The aim of this project is to provide both qualitative and quantitative data to better understand how we can benefit from an improved connection to nature in the workplace. Companies with satisfied, engaged workers have 25-65% lower employee turnover*. Well-being is therefore becoming a strategic imperative, with 78% of multinationals deeming it a critical part of business plans**. We have been working alongside the BRE, with support from the Core Partner companies, to develop a strong concept design and office layout. We have some highlights to share with you on our progress so far.

The following Core Partners have been instrumental in providing information regarding their different innovative products and services:



- Interface – global manufacturer of modular flooring
- Biotope – designer & supplier of living wall systems
- Akzo Nobel – global paints and coatings company
- Royal Ahrend – professional work environments, furniture products and services
- Coelux – innovative skylights to reproduce natural light
- Ambius – plant design, scenting and landscaping
- Ecophon – acoustic products and systems for working environments
- GVA – real estate & project management solutions

- ***Companies that have joined this year:***
- Waldmann – innovative biodynamic lighting solutions
- Plantronics – intelligent soundscapes

Collecting Data:

Over the last year, the BRE have begun collecting quantitative and qualitative data through a variety of methods including surveys, focus groups, room sensors and wearable technology. A control environment has also been established, which will remain unchanged throughout the study.

The baseline information is being collected for a year before the refurbishment, which covers characteristics such as light (daylight and electric), acoustics, indoor air quality, thermal comfort, materials and facilities, as well as occupants' health and well-being. Understanding the end user is a crucial part of the design process and Oliver Heath Design have spent time at the BRE carrying out several focus groups with the occupants. We analysed their responses, highlighting their issues with the current office and their aspirations for the new spaces.

Through collaboration with the occupants and the core partners, Oliver Heath Design have developed an exciting concept design of the space and a coherent Biophilic design strategy.

Creating a Plan and Developing the Process:

The BRE office floor has been subdivided into three main areas, with varying degrees of Biophilic Design Interventions. The spaces have been named after influential theorists and philosophers who helped to develop the Biophilia Hypothesis and Biophilic Design principals – Erich Fromm, Stephen Kellert and Edward O. Wilson.

We have looked at the varying degrees of Biophilic Design intervention in the following ways:



Fromm Zone – Accessible

We are looking at Biophilic Design elements which could be added to the end of any standard refit or existing office. We hope to highlight design solutions which are available to all workplaces:

- introduction of pots plants, both small and medium – (direct connection to nature)
- nature inspired artwork – (indirect connection to nature)
- high backed chairs, away from desks and near windows – (retreat spaces and sense of prospect)
- an education package centred around nature – (connection to natural systems and enhancing community)

Kellert Zone – Integrated

In the Kellert area we will focus on Biophilic design solutions which could be easily adopted and integrated in the beginning of any refurbishment:

- diversity of spaces to allow agile, flexible, and activity-based working – (complexity and order)
- encouraging more movement of occupants with partially obscured views – (mystery)
- quiet working spaces – (refuge and retreat)
- variety of planting and moss walls – (visual connection to nature/views on to na



Wilson Zone - Innovative

The Wilson area is being developed with a high level of Biophilic design intervention and innovation. This space is an opportunity to showcase new products, new systems and innovative design ideas for the ideal workspace. these include:

- intelligent soundscapes – (non-visual connection to nature and minimising distraction)
- biodynamic lighting systems – (dynamic lighting, helping to support a balanced circadian rhythm)
- active air unit green walls – (direct connection with nature, improved thermal airflow variation, improved air quality and connection to nature)
- zoned spaces, diversity of spaces – (human spatial response, ecological valence colour theory, material connection to nature, wayfinding, prospect and retreat)
- social and private space with acoustic separation – (diversity of spaces)
- sheltered meeting areas – (human spatial response, mystery)

To keep a record of the existing space, a three-dimensional computer-generated model has been created by the BRE to document the building fixtures, finishes and layout.

Collaboration Space:

The BRE have expressed an interest in discovering what the Future Workplace may look and feel like. To explore this idea, we have created the Collaboration Zone. Occupants can use this area to chat, relax and eat lunch together in a shared space. We hope that by creating inclusive social spaces, we will enhance a sense of community.

Organisations, forward thinking decision makers and public bodies are starting to prioritise community, because they realise that bringing people together is not only good for staff well-being and retention but also creates opportunities for employees to collaborate, which is essential for innovation.

This area will be used to hold events and workshops, supporting an educational package focused on nature themes, health and well-being. Shared emotional connections through events, interests, and experiences bring people together. Space and time for people to gather and make connections with one another are the seedbed and sunlight of social capital³.

Next Steps:

Over the next six months, Oliver Heath Design will move forward with the technical detailed design and full specification of products and services alongside the Core Partners. We will keep you updated on the progress of this exciting project later in the year!



Looking for ways to integrate Biophilic Design in your next project? Download their new practitioner's design guide here.

References

1. <http://www.gallup.com/services/178517/state-global-workplace.aspx?ays=n>

2. http://community.virginpulse.com/state-of-the-industry2017-es?utm_campaign=2017%20State%20of%20the%20Industry&utm_source=press-release

3. Cohen, D., Prusak, L., & Prusak, L. (2001). In good company: How social capital makes organizations work (Vol. 15). Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press

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