



# Markets



## Office fit-outs

# Three top office fit-out trends

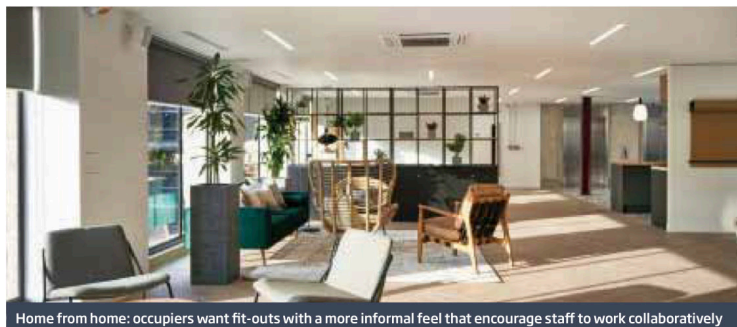
Experts share their advice on how to tempt staff back into the workplace. **Claire Robson** reports

The drive to persuade employees to come back to work is transforming the office fit-out market. In a world of agile working, employers face the challenge of providing inspiring workspaces that make staff want to travel to the office. This requires the provision of environments that facilitate collaboration, promote wellbeing and help to support talent.

Alex Hermann, head of building consultancy at property manager MAPP, which is working on refurbishment projects for a number of landlords, says: "There has definitely been a greater appetite to deliver fit-outs since Covid. Occupiers are demanding this as they adjust to new ways of working."

"The challenge is that it is no longer enough to deliver standard space - it must be best in class. That includes using lettable space to provide shared amenities and give your building a sense of community."

Landlords may balk at the expense of providing building-wide fit-outs, but the savvy ones understand that it provides a competitive edge. "It's all about leasing space more quickly, at a higher rent and with fewer incentives," says Jason Smith, executive



Home from home: occupiers want fit-outs with a more informal feel that encourage staff to work collaboratively

director at GMS Estates.

GMS has a portfolio of office buildings across London held for income and has upped its commitment to delivering category-B fitted-out space.

Smith says it costs £50/sq ft to £100/sq ft to speculatively undertake a good fit-out, but insists it is money well spent. "The smaller-floorplate market is very competitive and you've got to stand out from the crowd," he says.

"By investing in better fit-outs, we can add around £5/sq ft to the rent and probably trim off half the rent-free incentives. Added to that, the better the space, the more likely tenants are to stay."

Andrew Mercer, office sector lead at Legal & General Investment Management (LGIM), says "you should be asking what the cost is of not doing it".

LGIM uses its Capsule Fitted offer to provide occupiers with bespoke, work-ready furnished space. "It's never been as

popular," says Mercer. "We're in a two-tier market and buildings without decent amenities and attractive working environments are far harder to fill. It's all about reducing voids and keeping occupiers happy."

He adds: "We saw the opportunity to share our expertise and use our supply chain to benefit occupiers and help them secure the space they need in a cost-effective manner. Everyone benefits from working in partnership."

However, an effective fit-out is about far more than providing lines of desks in a carpeted suite. On the following pages, experts highlight the top trends in office fit-outs.



Alex Hermann  
MAPP

**“It's not enough to deliver standard space - it must be best in class”**

## Markets



Growing trend: GMS added a communal roof garden at Bridge House as part of its refurbishment and extension of the London office building

## 1 Collaboration and culture is key

Fit-outs demand a balance between offering employees the shared, face-to-face experiences they can't get at home and providing businesses with a platform to communicate their culture and brand.

"The office [may be] the only physical representation of what your company is really about and that's really feeding into space requirements," says Sascha Lewin, chief executive of W.RE. The London-focused office developer, which has a portfolio with a £750m gross development value, insists the dynamics have changed.

"We can now work from anywhere and it has to be about far more than a computer at a desk," Lewin adds, saying the

office is now "a space to support collaboration, innovation and striving for common goals".

That requires collaborative space, such as function rooms, breakout areas or zones for brainstorming, Lewin believes. He says furniture that can easily be moved and adapted to different requirements is now more in demand, as are large, column-free spaces to accommodate presentations and events.

Employees are also far more focused on shared productivity beyond their workstation. Adrian Norman, head of design at fit-out business Morgan Lovell, says: "We're putting in half as many desks as we were three years ago. As designers, we've been talking for a long time about providing more collaborative spaces and the pandemic has finally seen it move

up the agenda." He adds: "People thrive on camaraderie, especially in project-focused businesses, and be it stand-up benches around a white board or spaces with tiered seating, the office has to meet their needs."

Outside spaces are also being used to help people come together. GMS Estates, for example, has just completed a refurbishment and extension

of the grade II-listed Bridge House in Southwark, south-east London. The former hotel has been upgraded to meet the needs of modern office occupiers and the newly added fourth floor has access to a 3,875 sq ft communal roof garden.

"It is a sizeable chunk of space and involved an awful lot of work, including delivering 100 tons of soil for the planters," says GMS Estates' Smith. "We also installed a kitchen and WC facilities.

"It was well worth the effort. We were determined to make it communal and available for everyone in the building to collaborate or use for events and entertainment. That's very important from a wellbeing perspective and when you show prospective tenants around, this type of space really excites them."



Sascha Lewin  
W.RE

**“The office is a space to support collaboration and innovation**



## 3 Sustainability is high on agenda

Green credentials are high on employees' wish lists and businesses recognise cutting their carbon footprint is good for people, planet and profit.

"That has huge implications for office fit-outs," says Hamish Allan, director of technical at agency Making Moves London, which project-manages office fit-outs.

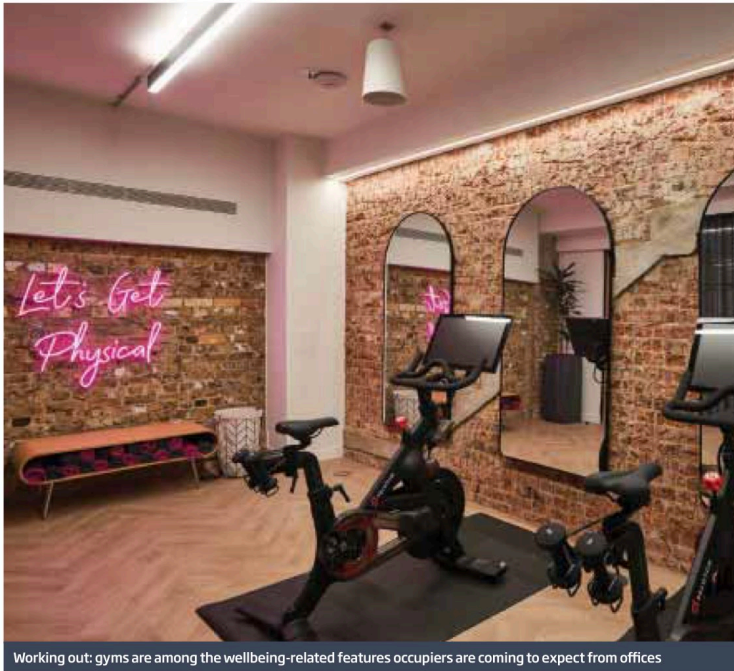
"There are real opportunities for landlords to bring work-ready, sustainable space to the market," he adds. "That can involve anything from using recycled building materials to repurposed furniture, which are now easier to source in the UK. You need to understand your supply chain and tell a positive story."

Serviced office operator YooServ has built a bar from recycled cardboard, provides recycled plastic office chairs and replaces desktops to extend furniture lifespan.

Fit-out specialists are also now more knowledgeable about sustainable alternatives. For example, Morgan Lovell recently launched a measuring tool called CarboniCa, which takes design information and shows occupiers the level of embedded carbon.

Landlords should also use fit-outs to help occupiers manage their operational emissions. Smart technology such as lights fitted with motion sensors, or AC that adjusts depending on levels of occupancy, will soon become the norm as businesses look to manage costs while using their green credentials to attract and retain the best talent.

Mapp's Hermann says: "Accreditations like BREEAM provide detailed guidelines on sustainable features and we've worked with clients to improve the performance in a range of ways, including installing ground source heat pumps, putting PV panels on the roof, introducing smart tech and providing bike and scooter storage. They offer landlords a genuine competitive advantage."



Working out: gyms are among the wellbeing-related features occupiers are coming to expect from offices

## 2 Make wellbeing an office priority

Offering a collaborative working environment also fits with the fit-out trend of promoting wellbeing. Different people require different workspaces at different times and the most effective offices provide a range of settings for different tasks.

Noisy, open-plan offices can be distracting and even stressful and it is important to provide quiet workspace booths for private calls or focused working. The key is offering choice and to consider how all elements of office design, including acoustics, lighting and materials, affect how people feel.

Space must be inclusive, whether that means offering gender-neutral toilets, different work settings to accommodate neurodiversity or the use of braille on signage.

Access to natural light and fresh air is now a prerequisite for many office occupiers and landlords now realise communal, outdoor space is also a must-have for many occupiers.

The options for wellbeing-related amenities seem endless and many are taking the lead from serviced offices, which have stolen a march on traditional landlords. Serviced office operator YooServ, for instance, has leased a number of floors at Kennedy Wilson's The Heights business park in Weybridge, Surrey, and is considering forming joint ventures to help both sides benefit from its fit-out experience.

Occupiers are drawn to serviced fit-outs and the constant innovation they offer. For instance, YooServ's space at The Heights is providing a home for 450 staff of Haleon, the

new brand name for the consumer health unit of GlaxoSmithKline.

"They wanted a collaborative working environment designed like a high-end hotel," says YooServ chief executive Benjamin Willmore. "Be it in-house chefs preparing your lunch, personal trainers in the gym, sleep pods or even robots bringing fresh fruit to your desk, wellbeing is at the heart of what we offer. We've launched another office in Reading and landlords are very excited about the type of space we can provide."

New wellbeing concepts are emerging all the time. "Just be careful it doesn't get gimmicky," says Morgan Lovell's Norman. "It shouldn't be a box-ticking exercise or a way to attract attention. These features need to be well thought out and have a real impact on people who use them."