W2W

SUSTAINABLE OFFICE DESIGN AND THE EVOLVING WORKPLACE

A Roundtable Discussion Hosted by Walls to Workstations

Introduction

Sustainable Office Design

Participants explored the long-term investments required to integrate sustainability into workplace design, including the use of eco-friendly materials, energy-efficient technologies, and circular economy principles.

We discover the importance of sustainable investment not just as Compliance, but as a strategic business priority. While adopting environmental responsibility, organisations also future-proof their workspaces against evolving business and regulatory demands.

The Evolving WorkPlace

The workplace is no longer just a functional space—it has become a dynamic environment designed to foster collaboration, innovation, and employee well-being.

While hybrid work models have become the de facto standard, organisations are rethinking office design to be more flexible, experience-driven, and people-centric.

We discover how companies are responding to changing employee expectations by prioritising adaptable workspaces, wellness-focused amenities, and office cultures that enhance engagement and productivity.

Creating environments that encourage connection—both in-person and digitally—was highlighted as a key factor in attracting and retaining top talent.

The impact of technology and the growing role of **AI and automation** in workplace management was also considered.

Walls to Workstations (W2W) hosted an exclusive Industry Roundtable to discuss Sustainable Office Design and the Evolving Workplace.

The event was chaired by renowned Broadcaster and former Politician **Ivan Yates** and included select industry professionals from Ireland's and the UK's construction sector.

With his extensive background in media, politics, and business, Yates led an engaging and thought-provoking conversation, prompting participants to reflect on their experiences, the impact of accelerating climate change, the evolving workplace, and shifting market demands and trends.

Key Takeaways

1 Design for Flexibility:

- Invest in modular layouts and adaptable furniture to accommodate evolving workforce needs.
- Enable employees to reconfigure spaces based on tasks and collaboration, fostering creativity and efficiency.

2 Embed Sustainability:

- Prioritise sustainability as a core strategy with measurable goals beyond certifications.
- Implement circular economy practices, retrofit older properties, and track embodied carbon to achieve meaningful environmental impact.

3 Leverage Technology:

- Utilise AI to optimise resource allocation, streamline space usage, and enhance hybrid work models.
- Incorporate systems that dynamically manage energy and workspace utilisation for greater efficiency.

4 Foster Connection:

- Create spaces that encourage informal interactions, collaboration, and innovation.
- Design breakout areas, communal lounges, and flexible work zones to build relationships and spark creativity.

5 Promote Collaboration:

- Engage stakeholders early in the project lifecycle to ensure sustainability goals are aligned and effectively implemented.
- Foster partnerships among designers, contractors, and tenants for collective accountability and better outcomes.

6 Adapt to Expectations:

- Balance employee comfort with operational efficiency, focusing on ergonomic designs and diverse work environments.
- Incorporate amenities and adaptable workstations to meet the demands of hybrid workforces and diverse employee preferences.

Ivan Yates
Presenter, Broadcaster, Politician

Justin Treacy
Principal, Perkins and Will

Kelly Geoghegan
Sustainability Manager, Structure Tone

Caroline McCarthy
Head of Fund Management, IPUT

Roland O'Connell
Director of Offices, Savills

Robert Moher
Senior Director, Guidewire

Glenn Roche
Director, Cogent Associates

Dave Webb
Divisional Design Director, Optima Systems

Emily Knott
Sustainability Manager, Bene

Andrew Jackson
Business Development Director, Shaw Contract

Dr. William Beer
CEO, Tunley Environmental

Stuart Ramsden
Director, Walls to Workstations

Sustainability: A Strategic Imperative

Sustainability has evolved from a regulatory checkbox to a core strategic priority for modern businesses. As global concerns about climate change and environmental impact intensify, companies are adopting innovative approaches to ensure their operations, buildings, and practices align with sustainable values. The growing emphasis on sustainability is not only about ethical responsibility but also about seizing a competitive advantage in an increasingly conscientious marketplace.

■ Futureproofing Investments

Investors are increasingly drawn to properties that meet environmental, social, and governance (ESG) standards, as these buildings are seen as future-proof assets that can deliver long-term value.

"We need to be looking 30 years out, and we need to be protecting the value of our investments"

Caroline McCarthy, IPUT

Similarly, tenants are actively seeking workspaces that align with their commitment to sustainability, particularly as they aim to attract environmentally conscious employees.

Retrofitting older properties offers a dual opportunity: preserving resources while aligning with modern sustainability expectations.

Prioritise sustainability as a core strategy

By upgrading aging buildings with energy-efficient systems and sustainable materials, companies can meet environmental goals and simultaneously enhance the financial value of these assets. This not only positions businesses as leaders in sustainability but also ensures they remain competitive in an ever-evolving market.

■ Beyond Compliance

In the past, sustainability was often framed through compliance with certifications such as LEED or BREEAM. Today, the narrative has shifted toward achieving genuine, measurable impact.

Companies are prioritising strategies like tracking embodied carbon and embracing circular economy principles. These methods focus on reducing waste, reusing materials, and designing processes that minimise carbon emissions throughout a building's lifecycle.

"The mindset around sustainability has evolved significantly—it's now about more than just third-party certifications"

Kelly Geoghegan, Structure Tone

This approach signals a broader understanding of sustainability as a competitive edge.

By integrating eco-conscious practices into every project, businesses demonstrate leadership in environmental stewardship while attracting stakeholders who value tangible results.

Sustainability, when executed thoughtfully, offers a powerful way for organisations to enhance their reputation and contribute meaningfully to global environmental goals.

■ Building Trust

Transparency has emerged as a vital component of any credible sustainability strategy. Companies are increasingly relying on measurable metrics, such as embodied carbon tracking and lifecycle assessments, to substantiate their environmental claims. As sustainability becomes an increasingly vital focus, so does the risk of greenwashing—where claims of eco-friendliness are exaggerated or unsupported.

By committing to responsible sourcing and adopting clear, verifiable practices, organisations can build trust with stakeholders while advancing their environmental initiatives.

AI-powered data analytics are revolutionising how businesses monitor and report sustainability efforts. By harnessing machine learning and

"Sustainability is key to longevity and to making sure that buildings perform over the longer term"

Caroline McCarthy, IPUT

automation, organisations can perform real-time analyses of energy usage, carbon emissions, and supply chain impact with unprecedented accuracy. This data-driven approach enhances transparency, enables more informed decision-making, and ensures organisations stay on course toward their net-zero commitments while meeting the expectations of investors, clients, and regulatory authorities.

Sustainability: A Strategic Imperative

Retrofitting and Waste Reduction

Retrofitting existing buildings offers one of the most impactful pathways to sustainability. By modernising older structures to meet net-zero standards, companies can reduce waste, preserve resources, and extend the lifespan of existing assets. This approach is especially valuable in urban environments, where demolishing and rebuilding often come with significant environmental and logistical costs.

Office fit-outs present another opportunity for waste reduction. Furniture, partitions, and other materials discarded during redesigns contribute significantly to landfill waste. By incorporating recycling and reuse into these processes, companies can align with their sustainability goals while minimising their environmental footprint. AI-driven material tracking systems can enhance this effort by monitoring waste patterns and optimising the reuse of office assets.

" *Sustainability is a priority for many, but construction remains a bottom-line industry. Change is happening, but financial incentives are still lacking at the scale needed* **"**

Glenn Roche, Cogent Associates

Collaboration

One of the most pressing challenges in sustainable construction relates to materials. Commonly relied-upon materials such as aluminum, steel, and glass have significant carbon footprints. While low-carbon alternatives exist, systemic changes in the supply chain are required to make these options widely accessible and affordable.

Collaboration can play a pivotal role in overcoming these barriers. By working together, manufacturers, designers, and contractors can foster innovation, streamline access to sustainable materials, and make eco-friendly options the norm rather than the exception.

" *Sustainability must be accessible—by combining affordability with innovation, we can make it the standard choice rather than the premium option* **"**

Stuart Ramsden, Walls to Workstations

By embracing circular economy principles—where materials are reused, repurposed, or recycled we can minimise waste and reduce demand for new resources further.

Sustainability: A Strategic Imperative

■ Optimising Efficiency with AI

AI's ability to learn and adapt to patterns of occupancy and usage has revolutionised the way office spaces function.

By analysing real-time data, AI systems can optimize resource allocation—adjusting lighting, heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) systems based on actual occupancy levels. This capability not only reduces energy consumption and costs but also supports broader sustainability goals, making offices more environmentally friendly.

For example, AI-driven building management systems can:

- Monitor and adjust energy consumption in real time, ensuring that power is used only when and where it's needed.

- Predict and optimise maintenance schedules, reducing unnecessary waste and extending the lifecycle of building components.

- Enhance water and waste management, identi-fying inefficiencies and helping organisations meet sustainability targets more effectively.

> **Incorporate systems that dynamically manage energy and workspace utilisation for greater efficiency**
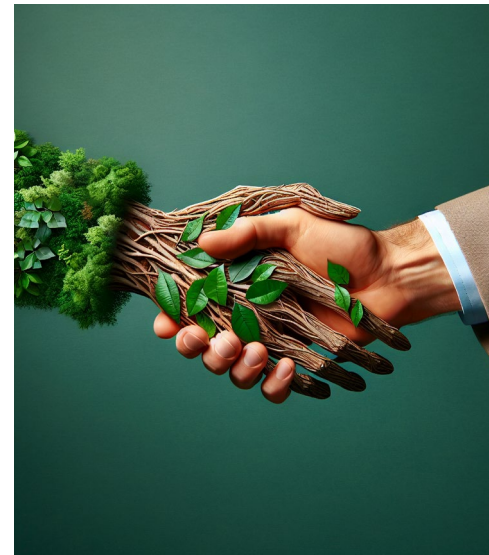

> " *Collaboration in construction and property is evolving with data transparency. AI enables faster analysis, removing traditional hurdles and driving efficiency* "
>
> *Andrew Jackson, Shaw Contract*

■ A Vision for the Future

Leadership in sustainability means committing to transparency, setting science-based targets, and demonstrating measurable progress—whether through carbon footprint reduction, embodied carbon tracking, or sustainable material sourcing.

Companies that invest in low-carbon technologies and net-zero strategies not only futureproof their assets but also meet growing investor and tenant demands for ESG-compliant, high-performance buildings.

Looking ahead, workplace design and construction must embrace a culture of innovation, transparency, and collaboration to meet the growing demand for sustainable practices. Scalable circular economy models, sustainable low-carbon materials, and supply chain innovations will be key drivers in advancing sustainability within the construction industry.

> " *The future lies in designing systems with reuse and adaptability in mind, from aluminum partitioning to modular glazing, ensuring sustainability at every stage* "
>
> *Dave Webb, Optima Systems*

The path forward is clear: sustainability must become a standard practice rather than a premium option.

Leading companies are those that go beyond compliance, setting measurable targets for carbon reduction, circular economy practices, and energy efficiency to drive real impact.

By integrating eco-conscious principles into every aspect of their operations, businesses can not only address pressing environmental challenges but also enhance long-term profitability and industry credibility.

> **Utilise AI to optimise resource allocation**

As AI technology continues to advance, its role in the workplace will deepen, offering even greater potential for innovation and efficiency.

The Evolving Office

The modern workplace is undergoing a profound transformation, evolving beyond a traditional office into a dynamic environment that fosters collaboration, creativity, and individual focus. As businesses navigate hybrid work models and shifting employee expectations, the challenge lies in designing spaces that not only enhance productivity but also support well-being and engagement.

Organisations are rethinking office design to balance operational efficiency with the needs of their workforce. From flexible layouts to wellness-driven amenities, companies are prioritising environments that inspire innovation, attract top talent, and create a sense of purpose and belonging.

■ Designing for Well-Being

Offices are being designed to evoke positive emotions, enhance mental health, and nurture creativity. By integrating principles that focus on emotional and physical well-being organisations create environments that not only boost productivity but also align with the values of inclusivity and purpose held by today's workforce. An effective contemporary workplace prioritises the human experience.

This shift is especially significant for younger generations, such as Millennials and Gen Z, who prioritise workplaces that align with their values,

"We are moving beyond Neurodiversity to Neurophysiology or how space makes people behave, understanding the human reaction to the spaces we create is vital to delivering exceptional experiences for everyone"

Justin Treacy, Perkins and Will

offering flexibility, well-being, and a sense of purpose. Employees are no longer satisfied with

generic office spaces; they value environments that inspire, support, and promote a sense of belonging.

"The office is no longer a necessity—it's a choice. To attract people back, it must be a space where people want to be"

Roland O'Connell, Savills

The Evolving Office

■ The Adaptable Workplace

Flexibility has emerged as a critical feature of modern office design. Adaptable spaces allow organisations to respond to shifting demands while avoiding the cost and disruption of frequent redesigns. Modular furniture systems can enable employees to reconfigure work environments according to their needs, fostering creativity and engagement.

Office layouts reflect this adaptability, with standardised and scalable solutions that cater to diverse team sizes and activities.

" I think what we need to figure out is the elastic office, the office that can expand for Tuesday and contract by Friday "

Robert Moher, Guidewire

" Furniture should be viewed as an investment, not a consumable— designed for durability, adaptability, and long-term value "

Emily Knott, Bene

This approach ensures that workplaces remain agile and functional in the face of changing requirements, supporting both collaboration and focused work.

AI-driven technologies are playing an increasing role in workplace adaptability. Smart systems can dynamically manage space utilisation by analysing real-time occupancy data, ensuring workspaces are efficiently allocated and optimised for varying team sizes. This level of automation supports flexibility in hybrid work environments, ensuring offices remain cost-effective and responsive to employee needs.

■ The Role of Hybrid Work

The modern office continues to evolve as a hub for connection and collaboration, accommodating the dynamic schedules of today's workforce.

As attendance patterns vary throughout the week, office spaces must be designed for flexibility and efficiency. This requires innovative layouts and advanced technologies that optimise resource use and space allocation.

AI-powered systems enhance workplace functionality by managing occupancy levels, and enabling seamless transitions between remote and in-office work.

Invest in modular layouts and adaptable furniture

" Change is the only constant in the office market. The way we work today won't be the same in two years—or even six months "

Roland O'Connell, Savills

Smart scheduling tools, for example, allow employees to reserve workstations and meeting spaces efficiently, ensuring that hybrid work models are well-supported and reducing unnecessary space underutilisation.

Create spaces that encourage informal interactions, collaboration, and innovation

Organisations play a key role in fostering a culture of respect, collaboration, and connection, ensuring employees feel supported in navigating these changes.

The Evolving Office

■ Informal Connections and Collaboration

Organisations play a crucial role in fostering a culture of respect, connection, and teamwork, ensuring employees feel supported as they navigate these changes.

> **Design breakout areas, communal lounges, and flexible work zones to build relationships and spark creativity**

Spontaneous, informal interactions—like casual conversations in shared spaces—are essential for creativity and collaboration. These moments build trust, spark innovation, and strengthen team dynamics.

To encourage these valuable connections, office designs are increasingly incorporating breakout areas, communal kitchens, and flexible seating arrangements that naturally facilitate social engagement.

> **Incorporate amenities and adaptable workstations to meet the demands of hybrid workforces and diverse employee preferences**

AI powered workplace analytics can also provide insights to help Organisations optimise the 'shape' and location of social and collaborative spaces.

"Remote work doesn't drive innovation. It doesn't allow that space for thoughts to be explored. There is no spontaneity."

Robert Moher, Guidewire

■ Attracting and Retaining Talent

City centre offices near transport links, cultural activities, and social opportunities are highly desirable. However, organisations that prioritise

> **Enable employees to reconfigure spaces based on tasks and collaboration**

workplace design to support employee well-being see even greater benefits. By incorporating spaces for collaboration, social connection, and quiet focus, they enhance both productivity and, importantly, creativity and innovation. Moreover, these environments foster a shared sense of purpose, strengthening trust among employees. As a result, such workplaces not only attract but also retain top talent.

Conclusion

Sustainability has evolved from a peripheral concern to a central strategic imperative. The adoption of circular economy principles, embodied carbon tracking, and retrofitting underscores the industry's commitment to addressing environmental challenges. These efforts are not only ethical but also practical, delivering measurable benefits to businesses, investors, and tenants alike. Transparency and collaboration will remain key drivers in advancing these sustainable practices and maintaining trust in an increasingly eco-conscious market.

As businesses and industries navigate shifting expectations, the office is being reimagined not merely as a place to work but by prioritising emotional well-being, adaptability, and sustainability, organisations can craft spaces that meet the evolving needs of their workforce while driving long-term success that fosters and enhances creativity, collaboration, and individual connection.

Technology, particularly AI, is set to play a transformative role in optimising workspaces. From real-time resource management to enhancing space utilisation, AI offers unparalleled opportunities to boost efficiency and sustainability.

Ultimately, the road ahead calls for a collaborative, collective commitment to innovation, flexibility and accountability. By embracing these principles, we can create environments that empower employees and support sustainable growth,

The modern office and construction landscape are no longer confined by tradition but are instead evolving into platforms for sustainable, resilient development. In this new era, creative collaboration and sustainable objectives will define the spaces where we work, connect, and thrive.

> **The modern office and construction landscape are breaking away from traditional models, embracing innovation, sustainability, and flexible design to meet evolving needs**

Sustainable Office Design and the Evolving Workplace

Walls to Workstations first roundtable fostered a dynamic exchange of ideas, with industry leaders sharing actionable insights on navigating workplace transformation. The discussion reinforced the importance of collaboration, innovation, and adaptability in shaping the future of workspaces and the construction industry.

As W2W continues to support the evolution of workplace design, these insights will help inform future strategies, ensuring that work environments remain not only sustainable but also adaptable, engaging, and built for long-term success.