

## EXPERT OPINION

## Is Hyperlocal a Blueprint for the Future?

Squire & Partners is Developing a Site Next to its Brixton Offices for the Local Creative Community in What it Terms a Hyperlocal 'Win/Win'



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A question mark hangs over what the workplace will look like once COVID-19 is behind us. Months of alternative working practices

forced on us by numerous lockdowns have divided opinion on the future of offices and the effectiveness of working from home.

While the long-term changes are yet to be felt, there is no doubt that a variety of responses will unfold. The pandemic has been an accelerator to the growing trend of flexible working, allowing people to better manage the different facets of their lives including family, pets and wellbeing. And although it has become clear that full time remote working is not the answer, many employers are grappling with how they will move forward. From endorsing a full return to the office to reducing business overheads by letting their employee network roam freely – or a hybrid approach of the two?

So how do we find a way to encourage teams back to the office while embracing the more positive changes the pandemic has introduced to our working lives?

A ‘hyperlocal’ model may provide the blueprint for the future: High-quality, purpose-built workplaces located in neighbourhoods which provide an invigorating and collaborative creative environment. Hyperlocal workspaces tie into the idea of the 15-minute city from Professor Carlos Moreno in Paris, who suggested that everything a person needs – a job, schooling, healthcare, leisure facilities – should ideally be within a quarter of an hour from their home, accessible by foot or bike.

We moved our 200-person architects’ practice to Brixton in 2017, so know first-hand the multitude of benefits which hyperlocal working creates. The value of working in a neighbourhood near to home for many of our staff, and being immersed in the local community has been valuable and joyful.

As we emerge from the current lockdown, we believe many more people will want to ditch expensive and dispiriting daily commutes into city centres but will still want some distance from their kitchen table. Sustainable commutes – walking, cycling, jogging or scooting – are booming, with benefits for health, wellbeing and the planet. In the past 12 months, the UK Bicycle Association has noted a 60% increase in bike sales alone.

The hyperlocal model allows people to enjoy the benefits of communal working within their existing community, while supporting their local economies, and enjoying a more sustainable commute.

Providing access to hyperlocal working is a positive step towards addressing the physical and mental wellbeing of employees. Encouragingly, a growing number of developers are starting to look at suburban locations to meet the needs of occupiers who increasingly want to be based near home.

While there is an obvious opportunity for large city-centre based companies to reduce costs, many are also looking to establish downsized central 'hub' locations as branded clubhouses, supported by suburban 'spoke' workplaces where employees can come together closer to home.

At Squire & Partners, we have taken our investment one step further by developing The Department Store Studios, a new 25,284 sq-ft workspace on a redundant site behind our own offices. The Studios will provide a platform for businesses in Brixton by offering private studios for between 6 and 72 people, with access to fully serviced social and meeting areas, complete with a neighbourhood bar, restaurant and screening room.

The space aims to provide a base for both fledgling and established businesses in the Brixton area, affording them the space to be part of a supportive community of talent.

But it's not just the staff who stand to gain when occupiers locate themselves in a city's 'villages' and suburban areas. Occupiers of The Department Store Studios will have the opportunity to embed themselves in an area in a way that will be hugely beneficial to the community, surrounding businesses and the local culture. It's a win/win.

***Tim Gledstone, Partner at Squire & Partners***