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FIVE MINUTES WITH ...TIM GLEDSTONE, PARTNER, SQUIRE AND PARTNERS

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Editor, NLQ and New London
Weekly



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David Taylor

Hello Tim. How are you?

Tim Gledstone

Very good, David. Nice to hear from you!

David Taylor

I'd like to talk about active travel, principally in your views on what you have called the 'sustainable commute'. Could you unpack that a bit? What do you mean by a sustainable commute these days?

Tim Gledstone

I think a sustainable commute is obviously a wide topic, but I think sustainable in the bigger picture is going beyond perhaps just using electric transport, public transport, but something that's also good for wellbeing and your body, mind, soul. Maybe it also deals with your daily exercise - it puts in good habits into your team, your workforce and yourself. Can you make those good habits happen all the time? We benefited from an inclusive conversation when we moved ourselves down to Brixton and asked everybody every facet of working with us and where you work, what people's priorities were. And one of the major outcomes of that was to have really extensive cycling facilities. To have really good showers, perhaps even better than people might have at home; to have hanging space, drying space. That became a key driver and at the same time, we could see it happening partly through legislation and great encouragement of various bodies. But in particular, the mayor in London was pushing hard, as many other city leaders have in places like Paris, etc, internationally. But it was really changing the face of design of our projects, where, even though you might be a CEO, you are still a very keen cyclist and you very much enjoy cycling into Mayfair. Some of our Mayfair office buildings had similar parallels. So, I think, in its early stages - we're looking back now seven, eight years ago - rather than having to cram in the standards racks and force the showers into spaces, it is actually taking the opportunity to fully embrace that as an all-round, well-being, high design aspect, whether you're in Mayfair, or you're in Brixton. And what I like about that, perhaps in particular in - if we are allowed say post-pandemic now...

David Taylor

(laughs)

Tim Gledstone

(laughs) or mid-pandemic, with two years of pandemic experience is, it also encouraged an even bigger audience getting away from the 'them and us' auditors world into enjoying slow paced walking. We had several of our own staff walking in from Putney into Brixton. Just taking that

and us cyclists would enjoy slow paced walking, we had several of our own staff walking in from Fallowley into Duxton, just taking that 45 minutes, and just wondering how far you can travel in those 45 minutes. It's, I think, exploring all of those areas of wellbeing fitness, and energy free for free energy travel, and looking at that as the overall package. So, it's a really exciting topic that is being shared with outside of the industry, as well. It's an exciting area that can change the face of design.

David Taylor

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David Taylor

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Tim Gledstone

(laughs) I think there very much is a glow, particularly when you're in and there's enough showers, you're not queuing. Also, you're unfrustrated, you're fresh. Lots of them tend to come in a little bit earlier, because you can just beat the traffic or come the long way and not rush in. I think the slightly flexible working hours that were offered perhaps ease the roads and general traffic. So, it wasn't everybody doing everything at the same time, which is, again, another way of looking at that sustainable transport. If public transport's not all being used at the same hour, then if it's spread over a few hours, it can go much further, with less. So, I think that works right across the spectrum. But certainly, you could see the tangible benefits, whether walking in, scootering in or cycling in, and even the public transport being more empty and less stressful. You're not under the classic armpits; you're sitting down and catching up on a couple of emails or reading a book...

David Taylor

I forget where you come in from. I'm presuming you practice what you preach?

Tim Gledstone

I practice what I preach in a multitude of ways. I'm in Wimbledon, and I've got a lot of choices. I think what was very different, certainly in the peak of the pandemic, I cycled in and cycled home. Every day. We decided quite early it was essential for us to keep key teams and people. As you know we were fortunate enough to decide to be generous with the space we have with each other, and our office was very much COVID-ready despite being a 115 year old building. Space, light, volume, loads of outside space and lots of natural ventilation was really helpful. So, I absolutely 100% practice what I preach with cycling in and out of the office, but that was really when my workplace was one place, same place, every day. With those flexible beginnings and endings.

I thoroughly enjoyed it and restocked my cycling gear! I got talking to a friend who's actually the owner of these things might even be fourth or fifth generation of the oldest cycling shop in the world which is called Pearson's. They're based in Sheen, and they were also really quite interested in what's happening. It's seeing their bike sales growing and I was starting to try and buy not just Lycra-to-suits - not that I ever

wore a suit - but Lycra-to-civilian-wear. That turned into: 'Can I ride in slower and just wear a Merino wool top and a Merino wool tee shirt rather than my usual jackets and, shirt? Could you get this adaptive fashion? I mean, as it as it turned out, I think I'm just out of reach of that, and slightly over-competitive to accept getting into work in an hour and more pushing for the 35 minutes. But I do have a slightly different wardrobe now because of that, and they actually develop their own clothes. They've got some really lovely stuff - they're made by a family business in Portugal, sustainable materials as well. They're adapting what they're doing. In terms of the type of bikes, we got into a conversation about e-bikes as well, because that actually extends how far you can go. What I have found and others might find - it depends what kind of line of work you're in - as an agile architect in London and internationally, my days start and finish at different places, which does make it very difficult to then go back to your place of work to get home if I'm finishing the day in London Bridge or I'm finishing it in Kensington. It's much easier to jump on the Circle Line and get home that way. So, I think that's where Brompton bikes and those kinds of vehicles can help, or you just accept a multitude of ways of traveling. Which is how I do it. I work out my day, and then I plan accordingly.



David Taylor

And do you think this is it from now on for many people ie having a very fluid working day and actually fluid working week? I was watching a webinar this morning where a chap called Allen Simpson from London and Partners said he could foresee companies sharing offices, not in a WeWork way but across the week. So one company might have space in a building for Mondays and Fridays, for example, and a different company completely would have it from Tuesday to Thursday. Is that something that chimes with you? Or are you seeing different trends out there?

Tim Gledstone

I think obviously there are lots of conversations going on. And I think there will be all different solutions for all different kinds of businesses. And I think that's what's great. There are many different types of ways of working. Certainly, in our case, and again, what we enjoy is, although we do encourage weekend working, if people feel like it, we are a nine to five, roughly, Monday to Friday business. And people go home and sketch and come up with their ideas and thoughts over their weekends and evenings. But what we love is that our building is being used in the mornings and nights for other uses and spaces we'd be using in the day can be used by other people at nights. Not just our rooftop, but our event space. But I can totally see there being collaborations with other businesses who might want to use some desks and use office space in non-peak hours if you like. I can see there almost being a desk Airbnb kind of coming in some places. Obviously, there are management issues that go with that. But if there are more open door, WeWork type places then why not just go to a desk that's near you at the time you need it? And you can just click on your availability. And it may be that some of you are stay-at-home parents in the day and by the evening you just want to pop in, get out the house and do a few hours. If you are a journalist - someone like your good self - that could really suit. Just going somewhere to go and write an article, that isn't at home. It's not a library and it's not a club and it's not a bar. It's actually using a desk space that was used during the day. So, I can see that. And that could easily work if you can find businesses that work that way or even 24-hour businesses - whether it's call centres or that kind of thing.

David Taylor

So, last couple of questions. Firstly, how is Squire and Partners operating in terms of the occupation of your building at the moment? What sort of percentage are in? And I'm presuming that's on the upward curve given where we are with the pandemic?

Tim Gledstone

Yeah, well, we're really proud to say actually that we've got, with encouragement and we want to very much thank all our teams for all their hard work and making things happen whilst we were at home, it was absolutely clear to everybody that actually upon reflection or immediate return to work when they did the first time how much better it was. We are a physical face to face business. And I think we're a long way off being able to pick up on those little nuances and body language and the dynamic electricity in the room when you're mid-designing a building. And in architecture you're mid-designing buildings for quite a long period of time, with a lot of people. And the power of that connectivity, whether it be with your clients, whether it be with the people on sites, whether it is with your team; being together is absolutely essential. So a couple of weeks before Christmas, we encouraged everyone to go home, not ruin your Christmas, and New Year, to make sure you see your family because we can't quite control what's going on. Thankfully, it was a really mild version of COVID this time around. And that gave everyone confidence. We are I think about 98% in. There's about four people who are not in. And that's because of very obvious reasons like one is his wife is very close to giving birth and just wants to take a little bit of extra precaution. And one or two have just got a little bit more health issues that they just want to protect.. So that's gone really, really well. And it's a great, great atmosphere. Again, we've reinstated some of the older COVID constraints; everyone's very happy to wear a mask when they're not with their team and use a sanitizer and respect each other. But in their teams, they can work really closely in a very well-designed, safe environment.

David Taylor

So: very last question. How optimistic are you about the London market or just London this year? Does it feel like it's in recovery mode now?

Tim Gledstone

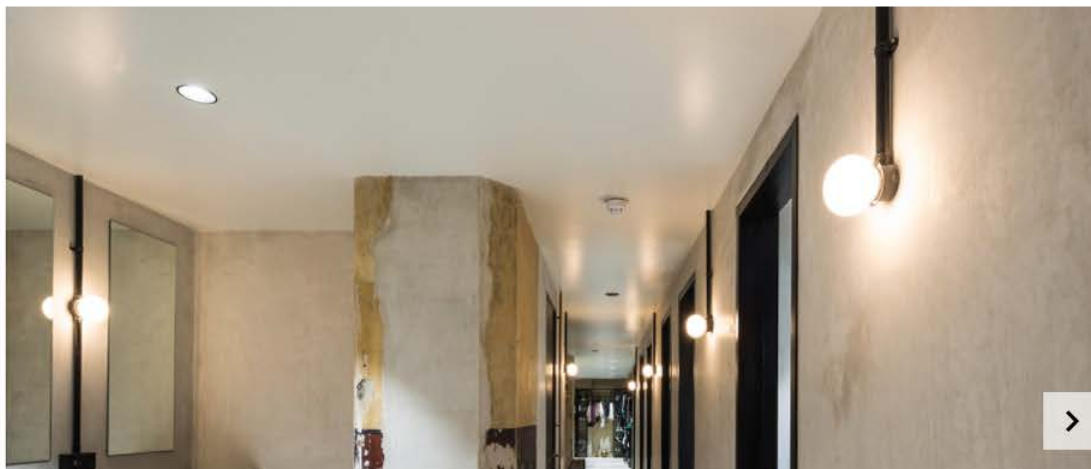
Yeah, I'm extremely optimistic. And I think there are many that are. I think there will be businesses that have learned to thrive by working differently in a less conventional way and thinking 'Why were we dragging everyone in just to make them work like battery chickens in a squashed floor plate?'. But there are others who will be like, actually, we get that extra 10% out of each other, that extra 10% out of our business. And we want to be the best to get the best. And we're doing a very good job. And let's reward each other in one of the best cities of the world where we can all share in it together. So, I think businesses will work their way through what suits them. But I think in terms of culture, food, life, entertainment, these are the things that people have hugely missed. And you can see London bouncing back with theatre, live music, food. That's a kind of heartbeat that draws everybody in, including tourism, but national tourism as well. Just people getting the confidence to get back out; and people haven't done it for a long, long time. So yeah, it seems pretty active in the marketplace. What we're seeing is a lot of reusing of existing buildings, which is fantastic, and for its sustainable credentials, but the character that comes with that and also the speed of doing the projects improves. Maybe even being stronger with the design - people can accept a bolder design if you've got to live within the framework you're in. So, in that case, we're doing Space House, the Seifert Tower and linear building with Seaforth Land. And that's we've got a huge cycle spa - where there were three carpark ramps and a filling station we're putting in a huge cycle spa with something like 600 bike spaces, generously set out with enormous numbers of showers as a major asset to that building. We're working with Derwent - Fora just taken a single let in Greencoat Place. And that was a refurbishment. We're working on Francis House, which is a refurbishment that Edelman has just taken the whole let of as well. So, the advertising world, media world excited. So those lettings are going really well, and our very own Department Store Studios we've created, where we've got everything from single desks to the whole top floor. Launching that in the last six months, you'd think 'God, that's a real test of what people want to do'. But actually, that offers a perfect middle ground in that 'hyperlocal, maybe I don't want to be in a big office anymore, perhaps I'll scale down'. You can have day memberships on the ground floor. So it's a less traditional, linear offer. And so, a little bit more easy-in, easy-out, easy expansion. And that enables people to make much quicker decisions, concentrate on their business and not worry about property. And that's quite good for a dynamic, growing city like London, where startups can start up, rather than have to start up and then get a facilities manager, and then get a lawyer and then do this. They don't need that. They get a cleaner and then you get a tea person and what you do for lunch? Thinking about a business growing from two people to 50 people and all the hurdles that used to be there. These new dynamic ways of working take that stress out of property for those businesses and allow them to flourish. I think international cities could do with the same kind of ability to pop in and out.

David Taylor

Great. Well, I've got to leave it there because we're well over five minutes! But thank you very much, Tim. I look forward to popping down and seeing you guys again fairly soon - and keep up with Merino wool. It's the way forward!

Tim Gledstone

(laughs) Cheers! Bye!





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