

Creating a buzz

Manchester's Landmark building is a hive of activity thanks to its focus on biodiversity and wellbeing. Two years on from its opening, Evelina Grecenko looks at how its key features are attracting workers back to the office

How does an office building stand out in a city where glass towers and skyscrapers are as common as rain and hipsters? Manchester's Landmark, on St Peter's Square, has the answer. It ticks all the boxes from health and wellbeing to customer experience, digital connectivity and the environment.

The building, which opened in 2020 and is home to occupiers including JLL, Grant Thornton and Allianz, has arguably come into its own during the warmer months. A focus on biodiversity gives what could easily be just another office an element of surprise. The building is home to bird boxes and rooftop beehives which produce the building's own brand of honey. And when it comes to luring people back to the office, what could be more of a draw in warmer weather – and very possibly a future of increasingly fierce

heatwaves – than VRF air-conditioning? It also boasts a BREEAM Excellent rating and is powered by renewable energy.

So in a world where office buildings jostle for position in the great race to get staff back into city centres, can Landmark and its bee colonies deliver what it takes to become a veritable hive of activity?

Stand out from the crowd

Located in the heart of the CBD, Landmark's 27m-long street frontage opens up into 180,000 sq ft of workspace designed by Squire & Partners and developed by Barings.

"There are lots of office buildings in Manchester," says S&P partner Murray Levinson. "But Barings wanted to differentiate itself from other buildings that were coming on stream at the same time."

Plans for the building were

originally submitted in June 2013, with planning consent granted in August of that year. However, it laid dormant until December 2015 when new owner Barings (with Castlebrooke as development manager) contacted Squire & Partners to reactivate the project. Squire & Partners then went on to make a planning application to adjust the design to Barings' requirements in June 2016.

Levinson says: "There seems to be a little bit of a lag between London and office development in cities outside of London; although Manchester is very close behind. We wanted to catch up, particularly on the cycle storage and cycle arrival experience."

Ian Mayhew, Barings managing director of UK asset management and real estate, says: "When we looked at the designs we got, I said 'Right, take me through the arrival experience of

"To keep people together and maintain that collaboration and culture, you have got to get people in the office. And the only way you can do that is to take space that is of a high quality"

Ian Mayhew, Barings

a cyclist and show me what the journey is.' We went through it and we all agreed that the original layout of the showers, changing rooms, cycle stores and lockers was not particularly efficient.

"We came up with a layout that was more logical and easier for the cyclists. We also designed a cycle repair room with an iPad on the wall. If your chain comes off or if you need to do a bit of a repair on your bike and you're not quite sure what to do, you can go on to the iPad and access cycle repair websites."

There is also an app that allows occupiers to hire bikes.

He is quick too, to mention those bees. Apart from the hugely positive environmental impact of having the hives on the roof, he also highlights the benefit from an occupier perspective. "When I was at Landmark last time, it just happened to be the day when the beekeeper was there on the 10th floor. He got the honeycomb from the beehive and was demonstrating how to slice the honey off it. Then occupiers, including myself, were invited to have a go. This sort of thing really helps to promote a community neighbourhood feeling within the building."

Tech solutions

In terms of technology, Landmark is managed by an internal intelligent system with all mechanical and electrical elements controlled remotely. Data is collated based on how the building is being occupied and optimum settings are automatically worked out.

The technology is also touch-free. "We decided to go down that route to ease navigation through the building and provide health benefits to the occupiers," says Mayhew. "You can have your digital security card stored on your phone and when you arrive, just hover your phone by the gates or wave it in front of the reader on the wall and the doors will open automatically."

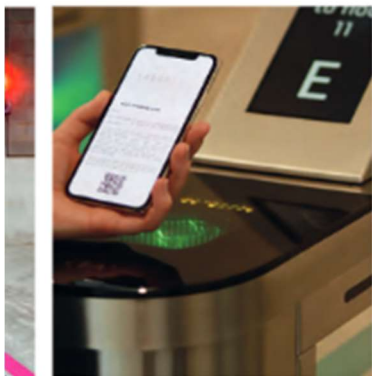


JLL secured a WELL Platinum rating for its office at Landmark



The property holds a dominant position on St Peter's Square





The building also features sensors for lighting and taps, electric vehicle charging points, high-performance glazing and PV solar panels.

Natural resources

Turning to the fit-out of the communal areas, Mayhew says all the timber used in the building was sourced from Forestry Stewards Commission-compliant suppliers.

The developer has also focused on providing as much natural light in the reception area as possible. This was achieved by doubling the width of the window frames to 3m.

In addition, Barings moved away from the carpeted floors of lifts in the original

design, opting for the same tiles used in the reception area to ensure is seamless and not "cheapened" by a carpet tile.

"When you're designing the best building, you don't put carpet tiles down in a lift or lift lobby, you carry on whatever floor finish you decide to put in reception," explains Mayhew.

Barings has also looked beyond the communal areas, placing a lot of attention on the "bones" of private offices so that its future tenants can make the most of their workspace.

Mayhew says: "We engaged with the WELL Institute during our design and construction to make sure that what we were doing would deliver a building that would enable the occupier to pursue the WELL accreditation for their fit-out, if they wanted to."

The plan has worked. Landmark's first occupier, JLL, was the first firm outside London to secure a WELL Platinum certification for its office fit-out. Only five such certificates have been awarded across the UK so far.

Chris Mulcahy, director of office agency at JLL Manchester, says: "One of the reasons we came to this building is because we could see the floor layout, how we could configure it and how we could design it to produce a healthy environment for staff so that people want to come to work here. Staff wellness and wellbeing is really high on the agenda for JLL."

Perfect timing

This is also supported through the modern lighting system, which adjusts to the tone of the daylight. The layout of the space allows for desks to be located next to the windows, with shared areas and private booths put in darker areas.

JLL aimed to use recycled materials for its fit-out, mostly wood or glass, but there are some more interesting solutions, too, including a carpet made partly from used fishing nets and a kitchen table made from yoghurt pots.

A standard set to be rolled out throughout the whole building as more occupiers take space? Perhaps. After all, says Mayhew, the building came to the market at just the right time, as businesses have started to realise the importance of good, healthy office space and a flight to quality.

"In order to keep people together and maintain that collaboration and culture, you have got to get people in the office," he says. "And the only way you can do that is to take space of a high quality with a lot of amenities because you're competing with people's homes."

@Gre_Eve evelina.grecenko@eg.co.uk