

# UK PROPERTY PREDICTIONS FOR 2022: Insights from GPA's experts

2022 will be a pivotal year for the workplace. For the [Government Property Agency](#) (GPA), our work continues in supporting the delivery of Government priorities including supporting levelling up, sustainability and Civil Service Reform through property technology and hybrid working – issues which have important parallels for the industry at large.

## **IN THE WORKPLACE**

Despite a lot of the change in working habits starting pre-pandemic, Dominic Brankin, our Workplace Services Director, and Kate Guthrie, our Deputy Director Workplace Experience believe that this evolution will continue for some time. They see 2022 as the year in which businesses show real commitment to learning and curiosity about their people's workplace experience. It's expected that companies will make good progress in getting the right workplace design to support the combination of people's different working practices. People have had experience of working at home for a long period of time now, and there will be some who want to continue this practice, but also a lot of people who will relish a choice of working environments to suit different tasks. The organisations that will be most successful will be the ones where great workplaces meet great leadership – where honest conversations about the workplace are proactively facilitated and feed into choices made by teams to enable them to work as effectively as possible.

A lot has been said about 'collaboration zones' and 'social spaces' when reconfiguring the office. But we believe that businesses enhancing or introducing these types of space in 2022 and beyond shouldn't forget the quiet, individual spaces that support focussed work. Our research with Leesman surveying 26,000 civil servants told us that 'individual work' was still the priority for many and this should be factored into office design too.

We also believe that 2022 will see organisations focus on understanding and supporting team effectiveness, measuring the aspects of the work experience that indicate employees are getting what they need to be able to do their best at their job. This will inevitably include the workplace experience. Do people have the workplaces they want and the experiences they need? Are they supported effectively to do their job, and work collaboratively with their team?

## **POST-COVID 'ATTENDEE-ISM'**

In respect of demand for space, Alan Whitelaw, our Property Director, believes that across businesses there will be a general shift in focus from the pre-Covid 'presenteeism' way of thinking about the workplace to a post-Covid 'attendeism' – where people are not judged on the amount of time they spend in the office, rather how they use that time – for example, for team

working, in-person presentations and training, creative work and projects. He is seeing a shift in the perception of organisations towards empowerment and trust that people will use the office for a purpose, rather than requiring mandated attendance. Alan points out that different businesses and functions need to use the office differently – during lockdown we still had some departments that needed to be in the office and were there throughout. Similarly, there are some functions that were thought to need to be in the office that have proved that they can work efficiently on a more flexible basis.

## **CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE IS KEY**

On the technology side, our Chief Digital and Technology Officer, Neil Williams, believes there will be a focus on interoperability in 2022 – customer experience is key. This means making the use of the office and digital tools as easy as possible for our customers – the civil servants who use our space – and creating a streamlined experience. In particular, audio visual technology will become much more widespread in collaborative and creative spaces as well as in meeting rooms. Again, simplicity is key with plug-and-play equipment enabling hybrid meetings between staff in several different locations.

On the data front, Neil believes that it will take some time to gather and gain insight from data on how people are working together and interacting with space. But bringing available data together in one place to create a complete overview will add the most value: which spaces are used and when – collaborative vs individual for example; whether people are booking spaces before they travel; what issues are reported and how quickly they are dealt with; water and electricity usage and at what times of the day.

## **GETTING TO GRIPS WITH ESG**

And last but definitely not least, sustainability will be on everybody's minds in 2022 as they really get to grips with Environmental Social Governance (ESG) – some might say finally! Dr Miguel Godfrey, our Head of Sustainability, and Louisa Le Roux, our Net Carbon Zero Programme Manager, predict that property companies will start to prioritise not only reaching targets but searching for ways to exceed them. For example, BREEAM Excellent is the ambition for many developers. However, the reality is that there is much more that can be accomplished. Achieving the required 78% carbon reduction by 2035 will not be easy, and to achieve this we will need both concerted effort and work to deliver the quick wins early.

We will see businesses shift their focus to a wider array of green initiatives with sub-metering set to be a real trend. This will allow businesses to understand their energy usage so that they can pick the right measures to reduce it. These measures will most likely include switching to green tariffs, landlords installing more EV charging units, revisiting their heating and cooling units, and undertaking a 'greening' of their procurement and supply chain process. These are all areas the GPA is taking forward at pace.

For the bigger developments and refurbishment, we expect to see wider use of Modern Methods of Construction and the use of digital twins to help with the drive towards sustainability – something we are developing across our own projects. On the retrofitting side, we think 2022 will be the year where heritage buildings are tackled more widely. It's been proven that retrofitting can be done to improve sustainability and so more will follow suit. As technology develops at pace, we will start to see more usage of solar panel solutions which will blend in better with the façade and fabric of older buildings.

We are currently working on potential PV panel installation on some of our Central London buildings with a test site going through listed building consent. We are also putting a plan in place for decarbonising our Whitehall District Heat System which will go a long way to reducing carbon emissions on our Central London heritage estate.

Finally, we hope (and want) 2022 to be the year where the industry gets to grips with the measurement of embodied carbon and a reduction in construction waste which will help supercharge our collaborative race to Net Zero.