

Insights into: 2023 BCO Conference - Dublin

Resilience and Inspiration

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2023 BCO Conference Dublin

This year's BCO Conference in Dublin provided food for thought for Derwent London's Benjamin Lesser, Caroline Haines, Kane Lewis and Beth Wootton. We catch up with the team to hear their key takeaways on the future of the workplace – from changing occupier priorities to new thinking around the office and urban placemaking.



Windmill Quarter

At a glance

- As well as keynotes, panel discussions and seminars, the conference offered the chance to tour the latest Dublin workplaces, including HQs for tech giants Google, Microsoft and Meta.
- The Derwent team were impressed by the Energy Supply Board building by Grafton Architects, with BDP on MEP (mechanical, electrical and plumbing) and Sustainability.
- Completed in 2022, the new BREEAM Excellent HQ transforms a city block in Dublin's historic core, replacing a 1960s infill in a Georgian terrace. The office based, mixed-use development deliberately avoids a sealed glass-box approach and opens up an important new city route for pedestrians through permeable public colonnades and inner courts.

The people-powered office

“In Dublin it was great to witness occupiers, developers, designers, agents and contractors all embracing the concepts of employee wellbeing and social capital – and recognising how important they are for healthy organisations and cities,” says Benjamin Lesser, Derwent London’s Head of Design + Innovation.

At the conference, a keynote from BCO Senior Vice President Despina Katsikakis observed a ‘flight to quality’ in office markets, with a key requirement of today’s best workplaces being to inspire people to think, collaborate and innovate better. Lesser couldn’t agree more: “Despite the popularity of hybrid working, a good workplace remains a vital incubator for thriving organisations,” he says. “In fact, in a world facing the existential threat of AI, it could be said that the office as a place of original, human creativity has a more important role than ever.”

“It’s a piece of placemaking as well as a place of work,” says Lesser. “It proves that heritage, modern office buildings and citymaking can be interdependent.”

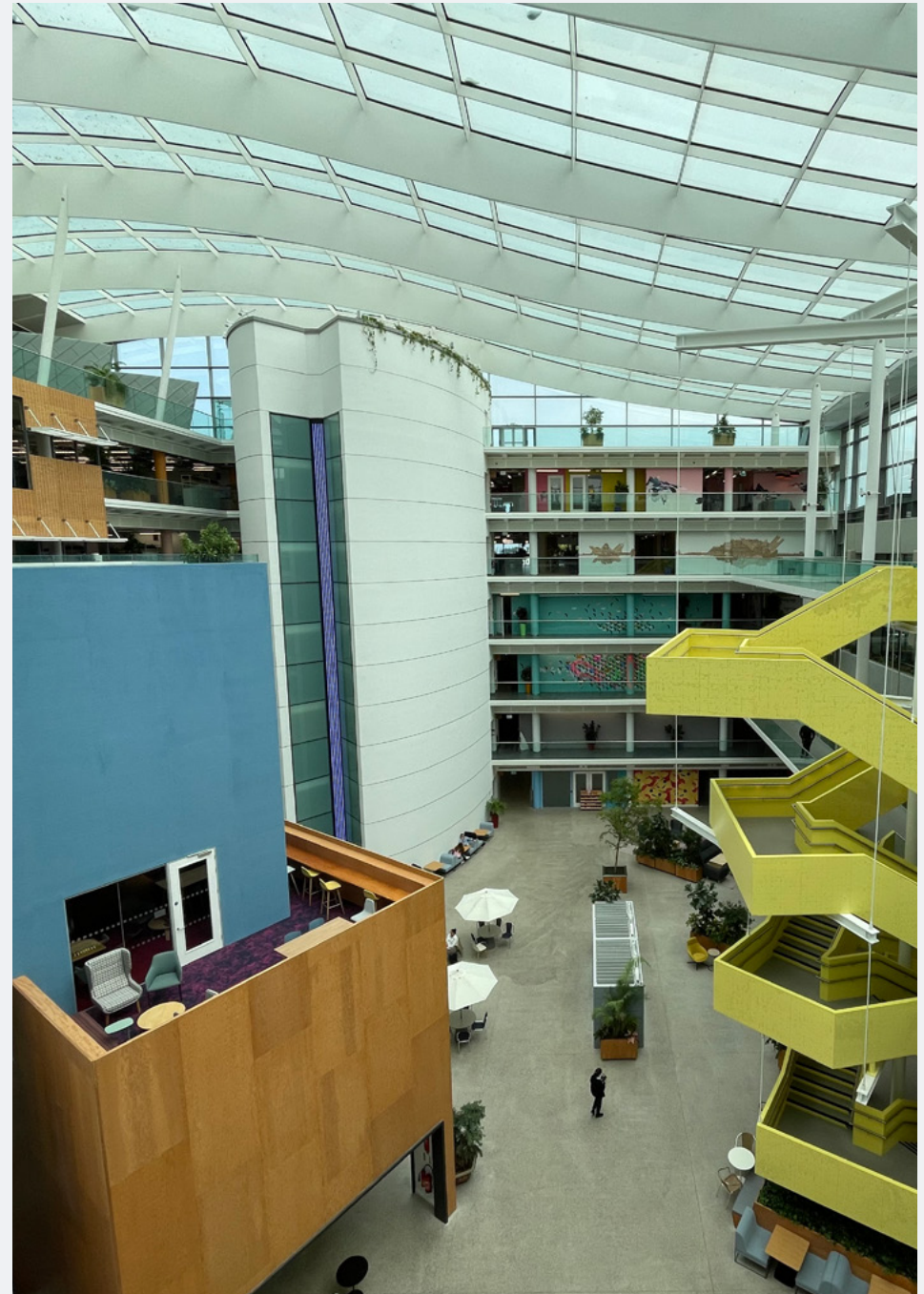


Dublin city view

“To me, the conference was proof that the real metric of the office is no longer about headcount per sq m,” adds Development Manager Caroline Haines.

“Now it’s more about quality, giving people room to breathe and using design to encourage creative approaches to work and problem solving.”

Senior Leasing Manager Kane Lewis was struck by some compelling research on social isolation and work performance, presented at the conference by Davina Saint of the Irish National Management Agency. “Recent studies from organisations including Harvard Business Review, PwC and Microsoft align with Derwent’s belief that while working from home may be popular, in the long term it can stifle growth and personal development,” he says. “It seems that after three years of hybrid working, creativity and innovation appears to have reduced. What’s become apparent is how much learning takes place through osmosis – just by being around other people, observing and interacting.”



Meta HQ

Connecting wellbeing and values

For Lesser, the conference chimed with his own experience of how dynamic businesses are thinking about their space and their people differently – with more emphasis on high-quality human interaction and sociability, wellbeing and Environmental and Social Governance values as well as better connections to communities. “It’s the responsibility of office investors and developers like Derwent to reshape workplaces in response to cultural shifts like these, and ESG drivers help to link buildings with communities.”

The team agree the conference demonstrated that enlightened employers everywhere are firmly focused on reasons people want to be back in the office, whether that’s for the quality of the environment or for learning. “At Derwent we’re using that information to inform the design and character of a new generation of office space – and enjoyment and wellbeing are definitely part of that,” observes Lesser.



The team noted a striking statistic from workplace strategist Nicola Gillen, who informed delegates that over 50% of determinants of our health and wellbeing come from the conditions of our immediate environments. What this means for the office, says Lesser, is an increasing spotlight on experiential aspects of space like enhanced indoor air quality, acoustics and thermal comfort.

“Aligning corporate values with personal values and individual wellbeing is the big challenge for the office now,” observes Lesser. “While the industry is responding pretty rapidly to sustainability targets, I’d say there’s some way to go before ESG values are fully embedded in the design and operation of office space.”

“Ethical values are certainly massive factors for new and next generation workers,” agrees Lewis. “The conference drove home the idea that office space needs to reflect the kind of value-based credentials that attract talent. It’s a very holistic picture.”



Part of Capital Dock

Leasing Manager Beth Wootton also noted a crossover between wellbeing and ESG agendas at the Dublin conference: “Whether that’s space that maximises cognitive performance or inspiring environments that promote shared values and learning through group discussion and behavioural observation.”

- At the BCO conference workplace strategist **Nicola Gillen** cited research from her new book, *Reworking the Workplace* (RIBA Publishing, June 2023), which includes case studies on Derwent's **80 Charlotte Street W1**, which completed in 2020 and **25 Baker St. W1**, due for completion in 2025.

- The book showcases 80 Charlotte Street as an all-electric development, forging **new public space in the heart of London's creative district**. Arup were the engineers on the project, as well as it being their headquarters. They created a sensor-driven app to **live stream and monitor data** such as indoor air quality, noise levels and workplace occupancy, allowing individuals at the engineering consultancy to **identity the desk space that best suits their needs that day**.



The Poet's Park, 80 Charlotte Street W1

Placemaking and workplace

“I’m not sure you can separate the future of the office from the future of the city,” says Haines. The team’s tour of the Guinness brewery site in Dublin 8 is a case in point. The story behind the recently approved proposal for a 5.5ha office, residential and commercial quarter provided a great opportunity to compare development contexts in the UK and Eire. “Like a lot of Derwent’s work in London, big themes at the Guinness Quarter include creative re-use and heritage, with a strong focus on retaining character and urban grain while investing a new lease of life,” says Wootton.

Lesser observes that successful placemaking, whether involving retrofit, new build or both, demands a city-scale focus far beyond the red line of the office site. Derwent’s goal of making better places for people, he adds, means ever-more collaborative working with a widening range of stakeholders and partners.

From Haines’ perspective, building a vision that can be shared by complex stakeholders is crucial to successful outcomes for both the workplace and the city: “Taking an active role in promoting ongoing engagement between office occupiers and communities is a big part of the placemaking picture for Derwent. It’s good to benchmark with other cities.”

“Derwent believes development is not just about making buildings but about making communities,” concludes Haines. “The drive for happy, healthy and productive workplaces ultimately contributes to more liveable and sustainable cities.”



The Derwent London team at Guinness Storehouse

- *“This is a pivotal moment in the story of work and the city. The impacts on the fabric and functioning of future cities will be significant. The scale could well be equivalent to the transformations of the late nineteenth century.”*
 - Nicola Gillen, Reworking the Workplace, RIBA Publishing 2023

- As an exemplar of office based, mixed-use development with placemaking at its core, Gillen’s book highlights Derwent’s 25 Baker St. Due to complete in 2025, the scheme by Hopkins Architects integrates 298,000 sq ft of flexible workspace with retail and residential around a new civic courtyard animated with shopping, dining and biodiversity.
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CGI view of public internal courtyard looking to rear of 25 Baker St. W1