

June 2020

# FUTURE OF THE WORKPLACE



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John Robertson Architects

**JRA**



33 King William Street

## Introduction

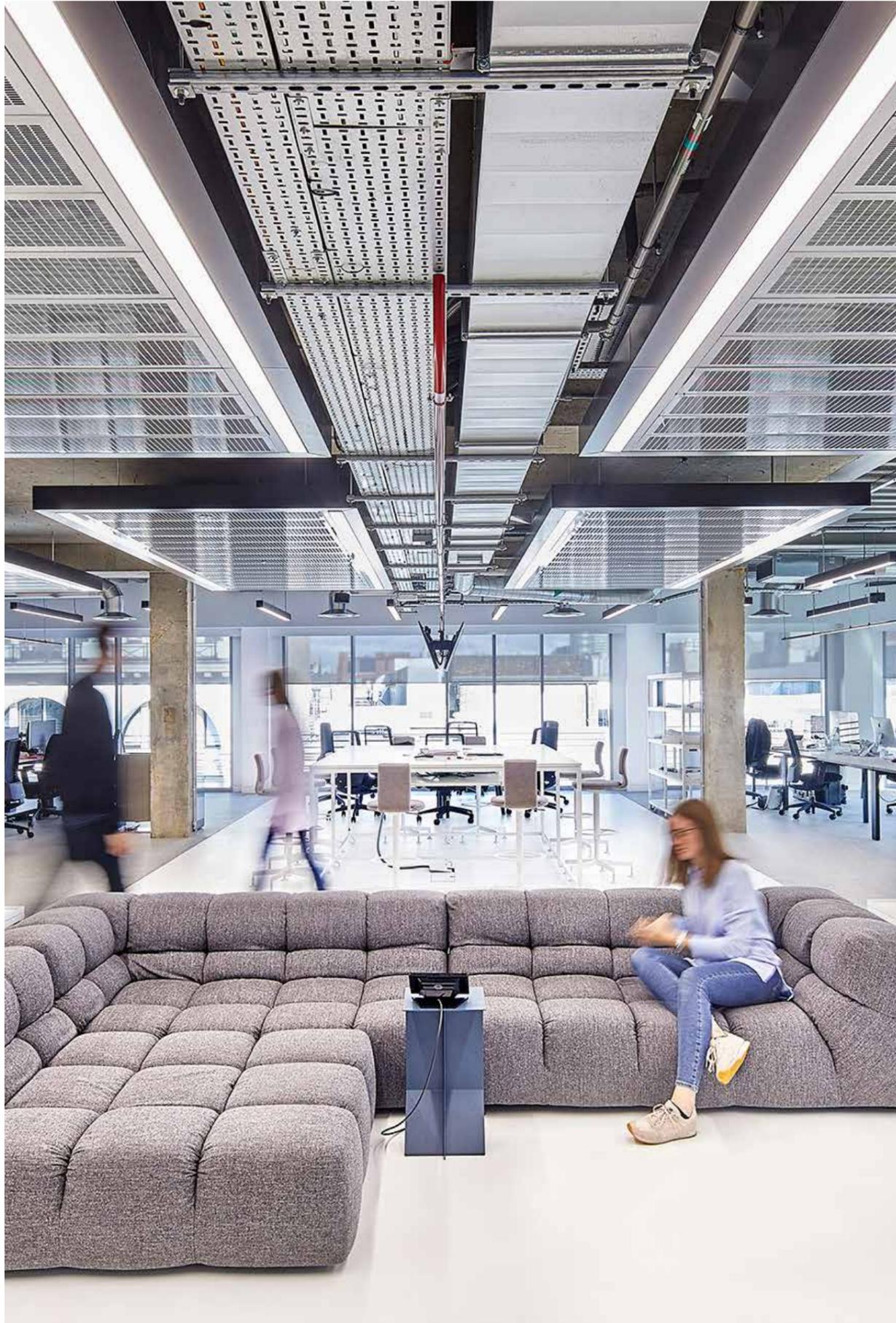
Reports of the demise of the office are greatly exaggerated and premature: the office is not dead.

In a post-Covid-19 world, people will still come to an office to work and to connect, face-to-face, with colleagues and collaborators, albeit on a less frequent basis. There has been widespread coverage of interim measures adopted by companies preparing to return to work as the Covid-19 threat diminishes. However, JRA is already starting to focus on more radical innovations which will transform the office environment.

Our vision of the workplace of the future offers a seamless mix of the virtual and the actual, most importantly supporting the wellbeing of employees as well as providing a clear 'base' from which an organisation can establish and communicate its values.

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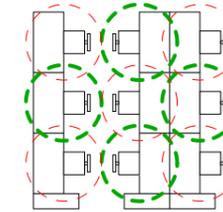
## The office in a post-Covid-19 world

Workforces across the world are preparing to transition back to the office, implementing arrangements which will minimise the future transmission of the Covid-19 virus. Interim measures include surveys, physical-distancing analysis, two-metre 'bubble' diagrams and Perspex screens.

JRA has been analysing the lessons learned during this pandemic. During the lockdown period, those of us able to work from home did so – and many of us are continuing to do so despite the gradual easing of restrictions. Lockdown has created a new culture of virtual meetings using channels such as Zoom, Teams and WebEx. For many, offices in the 'new normal' have morphed into familiar kitchen tables and reliable broadband connectivity.

Corporate HR teams are currently assessing how best to adapt existing facilities in terms of capacity and operational strategies, as well as managing the rapidly changing expectations of employees. They are considering a wide range of issues including the following: What will the office look like once the virus is no longer a threat? What will returning to the workplace mean for those occupying it? Will dividing screens blocking or limiting workplace interaction still be considered necessary? What sort of occupancy figures should we be designing for? How will companies futureproof their real estate and how can designers help shape the new landscape that will be required?

Architects and interior designers will need to address these issues going forward and ensure that the lessons of lockdown are not forgotten. They will also need to be mindful of the threat of new pandemics in the future and how organisations and individuals can be better prepared to respond to these when they occur.



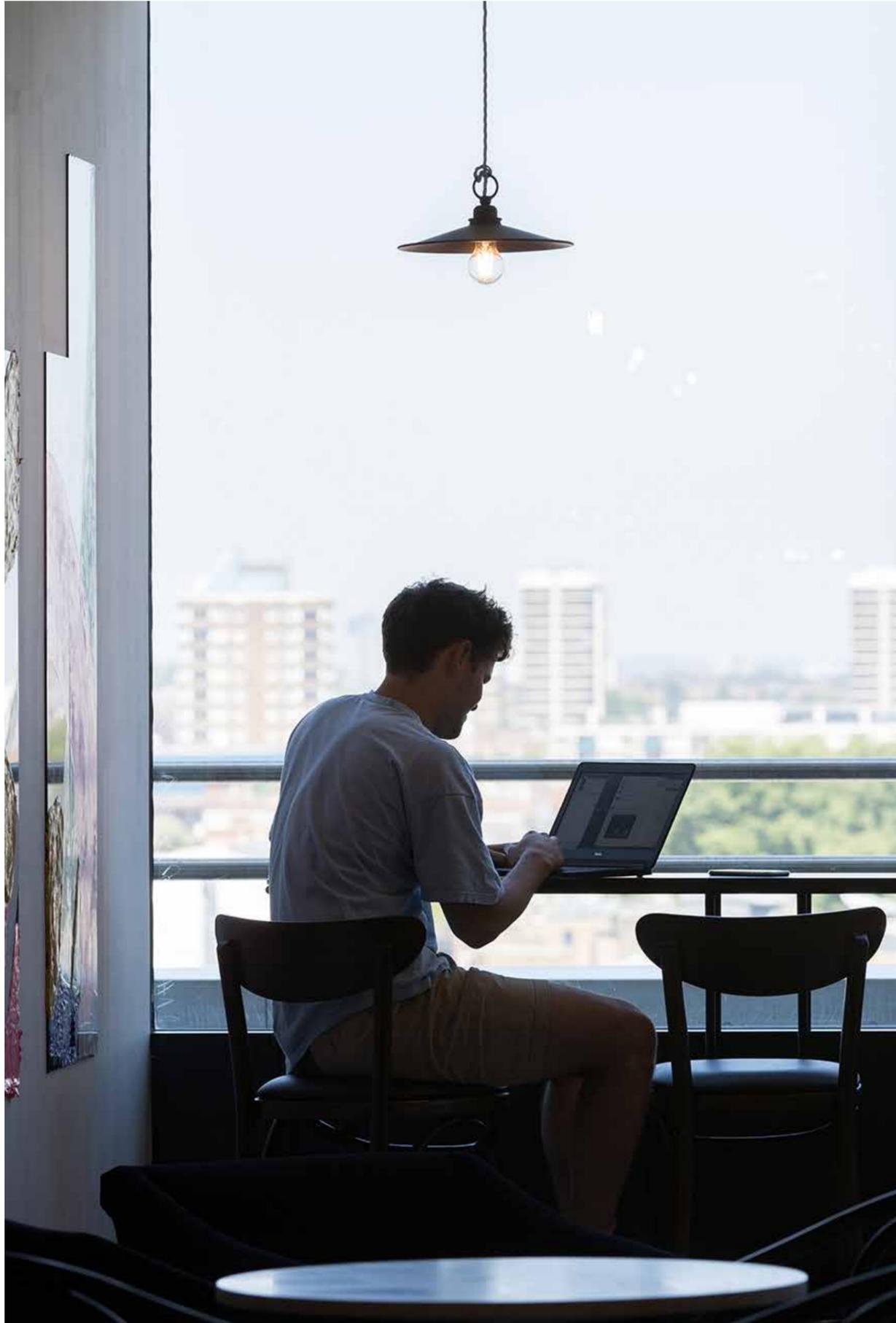
Lockdown Period

- Remote working where possible
- Increased IT support

Transition Period

- Phased return of staff
- Social distancing measures
- Establish office capacity and office protocols with regard to food prep, visitors, deliveries and maintenance

Future of the Office



## What we have learned from remote working

For many of us, the working-from-home experience has been a success.

Flexible working is now seen as an entirely viable option for a significant proportion of employees across many types of organisation, with major players such as Twitter even giving staff the option of working from home on a permanent basis.

However, there are disadvantages to remote working. While this arrangement offers tangible financial benefits for employers in terms of real estate savings, many employees want to remain visible within their organisations; indeed studies indicate that those who regularly work remotely are less likely to be promoted. Mentoring of less experienced staff is also far more difficult to undertake via virtual interfaces, as is nurturing and developing new staff in the day-to-day culture of a business. Similarly, the juggling of domestic duties such as childcare and home schooling with the need to continue working has proved deeply stressful for many.

The two conflicting questions that both employers and workers will increasingly be asking and need to resolve are: 'Why do we need the office?' versus 'What is missing from the office setting which has been of importance while we have been working remotely?'

We should continually remind ourselves of the benefits of working in a collaborative space – the serendipitous encounters with colleagues and those spur-of-the-moment conversations which can spark innovative ideas and take businesses in new directions. The office offers us an important physical connection with our colleagues and associates – socially as well as professionally – giving meaning to what we do and engendering a collective purpose that helps to define an organisation.





Bracken House



Bureau Building

## Rethinking the office

Three key factors will characterise our post-Covid-19 world: more debt, less globalisation and greater digitalisation. It cannot be 'business as usual', but London is a resilient city with huge potential and is likely to recover quickly. The more fundamental issue highlighted by the Covid-19 pandemic is that of global climate change. Properly coordinated international action is now vital if we are to mitigate or even reverse the devastating effects of climate change.

Most major cities in the UK are now considering plans for the radical reconfiguration of their transport infrastructures, reducing congestion on public transport routes and expanding networks of cycle lanes to create more environmentally friendly and healthier ways of travelling to and from work. In the immediate future, we will see far more people walking or cycling to work, wherever possible. Office staff are rightly concerned about the dangers of working in close proximity to their colleagues, so occupational densities must be significantly reduced, with 'app' analytics recording daily interactions and measuring social distancing.

Companies are starting to respond to this new flexibility, balancing the need for proximity to key transport hubs with innovative spatial solutions which will accommodate the changing requirements of workers and visitors in a post-Covid-19 world.

Large organisations such as Barclays have confidently stated that 'a big city office may be a thing of the past'. Some firms have even considered leasing spaces in suburban hubs as opposed to dense city centres in order to allow staff to work 'near' home. Utilising existing suburban flexible office spaces, combined with city centre head office facilities can offer a new 'hybrid' structure. This approach offers staff greater choice of where they can work, resulting in a richer and more layered creative environment.



## Rethinking the office

An organisation's greatest asset is its staff. The health and well-being of employees is set to become of even greater importance in a post-Covid-19 environment, with landlords facilitating WELL standards and increased levels of natural, fresh air. 'Touchless' environments will be commonplace with 'smart' security barriers, doors, lifts, taps and toilets. A key example is JRA's recently completed 'Bureau' office project in Fetter Lane, which has pioneered the use of facial recognition to provide frictionless entry to the building.

While the City of London will remain a hotbed of activity where businesses can continue to thrive, many people will choose to work remotely for at least part of the week, while continuing to attend face-to-face meetings with colleagues and collaborators in local or central meeting spaces. With fewer workers travelling in every day, companies can maximise their real estate, maintaining occupational density by accommodating a greater number of staff at key facilities. The office environment in the 'new normal' will provide imaginative work settings, with collaborative zones stimulating and sustaining an adaptive 'office culture'.

Contactless systems will be used increasingly within entrance halls and lifts and lift lobbies, with sensors on sliding entry doors and reception building apps provided to meet and greet visitors, to direct them through buildings and to call lifts. Building apps will be used to explain how particular

buildings function, highlighting special features originally introduced to deal with Covid-19. Door handles will be redundant, with automatic doors powered by the building app allowing staff and those visitors with pre-arranged contactless access to enter designated areas.

Internal volumes in office spaces will be increased to make them lighter and airier and designed to use natural ventilation more effectively. Office furniture will feature screens to provide privacy space, like business club cabins on airlines. Green-planted dividing screens will help to humanise offices and meeting rooms could become a thing of the past. Meetings will take place in specially designed presentation rooms, using video technology. Staff and client webinars will reduce the need for workplace interaction. Outside spaces – including rooftops – previously found only in the most luxurious of offices, will become a precious resource, where workers can find solitude and relaxation in green, outdoor amenity areas.

Hygiene will be a key issue. Washrooms will have integrated hand sanitisers and sensor-driven taps and flushes. In addition, sensor-driven sliding doors will allow contactless access to toilet cubicles. WCs will be redesigned to avoid splashes and equipped with 'washlets' which automatically clean the WC after use. All toilet area surfaces will be smooth and hygienic.

Offices will be reconfigured to offer activity-based work settings and spaces for collaboration, ranging from one-on-one mentoring through to IT-facilitated project spaces where 'real' teams can gather, as well as involving 'virtual' colleagues from home or in other offices via video dial-ins.

The language of the office-scape will evolve at an increased pace, with the proportions of traditional desking to social and collaborative areas being reversed.

With reduced desk-based activities, we can free up space to allow the sort of face-to-face connection between staff that cannot be replicated via remote working. Mentoring the next generation of staff will be crucial in preserving a company's ethos in a 'digitally-segregated' workforce. A physical space will need to be provided for this to happen and the rationale for having an actual office environment to work in will continue long after the threat from Covid-19 has passed.





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51 Moorgate

# CASE STUDY



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51 Moorgate

## Skanska fit-out 51 Moorgate London EC1

JRA's newly completed London office for Skanska at 51 Moorgate offers a persuasive case study for how the workplace could look in the future. Well before the Covid-19 crisis struck, Skanska had transitioned to an agile working environment with a range of work settings, meeting room booking systems and the principles of WELL engrained into the building's design and management.

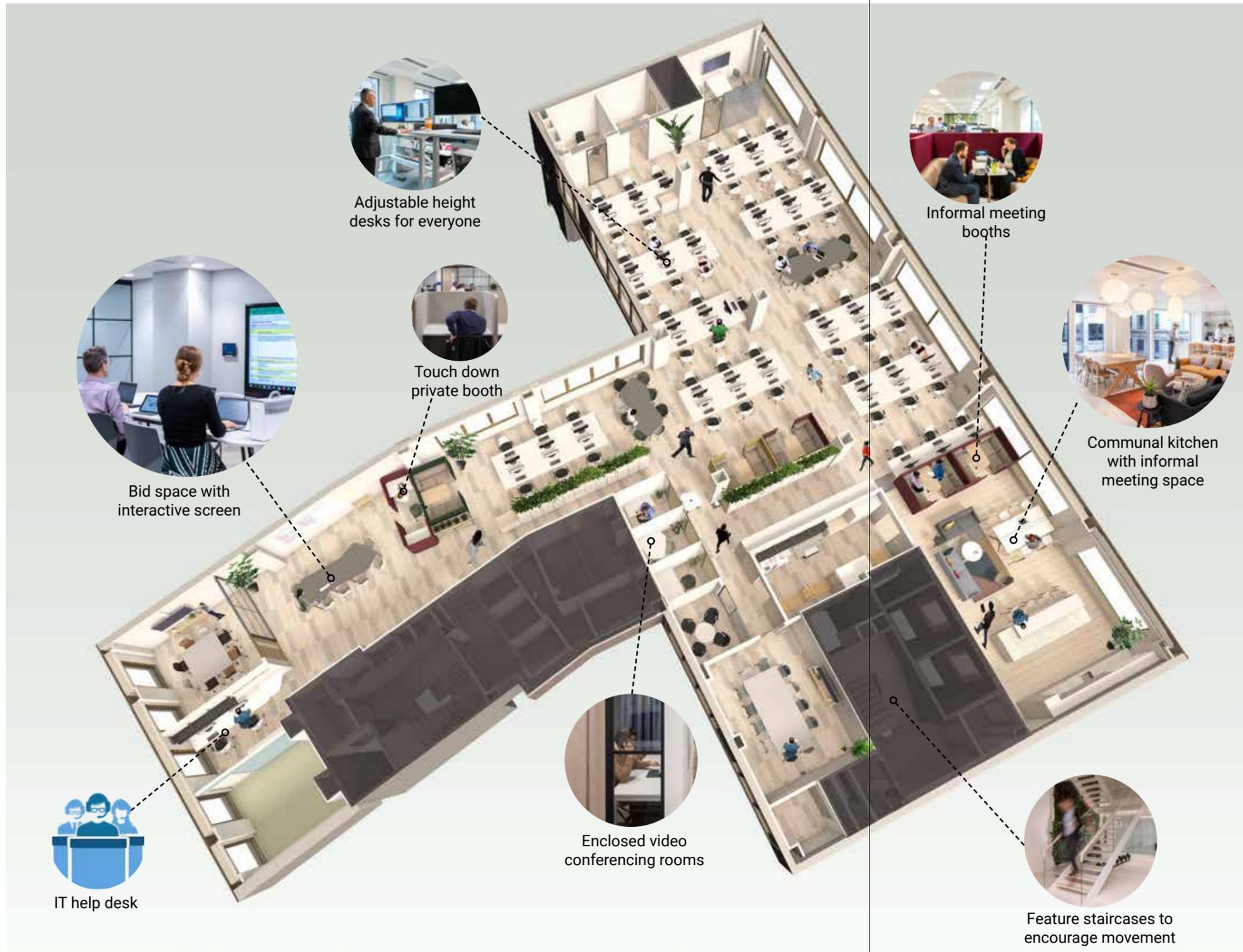
51 Moorgate is an office building that dates back to the 1980s, with a long leasehold interest acquired by Skanska in 2015. JRA's refurbishment project reused the existing foundations, structural frame and façade to the internal courtyards of the building. The decision to retain the existing structure at an early stage has resulted in an estimated saving of approximately 43 per cent of the total carbon emissions across the life of the building as compared to a newbuild of a similar scale.

Skanska and JRA have, together, planned the new office space in forensic detail – the building consolidates three offices into a single London hub. The design team carried out space utilisation and occupational studies to determine the final layouts, allowing the introduction of agile working across the office floors. The designs incorporate a number of features specific to Skanska and its business functions, such as PPE rooms and collaboration areas, with wayfinding graphics inspired by the company's branding. The brief placed the concept of 'wellbeing' at the heart of the refurbishment, and JRA's approach has incorporated measures that improve user experience and health. The building aspires to be one of the first in the UK to achieve certification to Version 2 of the WELL Building Standard, alongside BREEAM 'Excellent'.



51 Moorgate

JRA 15



# CURRENT WORKPLACE

Skanska's shift towards activity-based working is not new by any means, but it is a good example of how the workplace of the future will look. The existing offices at 51 Moorgate already featured a contactless entry experience, offering users access to the main reception and conference suites via automated sliding doors with a swipe entry system. A dramatic new staircase with a 'green wall' has been introduced to link the ground and lower ground floors and provide direct access to the Skanska-dedicated reception area for external visitors and access to the client meeting room suites.

As part of JRA's upgrade of the facilities, dedicated cycle store and shower facilities have been provided to encourage cyclists, scooter-users and runners. We have also provided a range of work settings in the core spaces around the kitchen as well as amenity spaces to embrace activity-based working. This strategy focuses on providing the most appropriate setting for the task at hand rather than a one-size-fits-all desk solution. JRA's redesign of Skanska's new office has created a flexible, welcoming work environment.

## BUILDING IN NUMBERS

**81.1%**

BREEAM Excellent targeted

**89**

Points targeted towards WELL Platinum

**43%**

Savings of total carbon emissions by refurbishment as opposed to a newbuild

**17,493**

Square feet of space across three floors

**44**

Cycle spaces

**38+156**

38 lockers in the cycle facilities and 156 for activity-based working

**6**

Showers

**14**

Meeting rooms

**112**

Desks

**112**

Activity-based work settings



Semi-private spaces for mentorship meetings



Huddle spaces for brainstorming sessions



Spaces to ask questions or advice



More enclosed meeting room spaces



Bid space with interactive screen



Large kitchen areas with working spaces that encourage connectivity and spur-of-the-moment conversations

# 'FUTURE' WORKPLACE

The 'future' workplace will feature touchless experiences from the point of entry onward, as we have already implemented in projects such as 51 Moorgate, Farringdon West and Bureau, together with apps which manage spaces within the buildings. Technology will increasingly provide opportunities to streamline functionality as part of ordinary office routine.

Some commentators predict that businesses will still have a larger portion of the staff working remotely even after the pandemic is no longer a threat. This will have a financial benefit in savings on real estate for companies. But what about the existing stock of office space? The language of the office-scape will not change dramatically but the proportions of the split of traditional desking to social areas could be flipped. With more desk-based activities that can be done from home, we can free up the floorplan for more social spaces to interact and provide the face-to-face connection that cannot be replicated at home. Mentoring the next generation of staff will be crucial in preserving the company ethos in a digitally segregated workforce and we need to provide a physical space for this. Cities will remain meeting places, providing a physical focus for the interaction we seek as social beings.

## TYPICAL FLOOR IN NUMBERS

**21**

Meeting rooms. 40% increase

**80**

Fixed desks. This represents a decrease of more than 50% as a result of more remote working and the provision of social spaces

**166**

Activity-based seats +135% increase in informal meeting spaces for mentorships and brainstorming sessions



Opportunities to interact with colleagues



Conferencing rooms with robust IT and signal



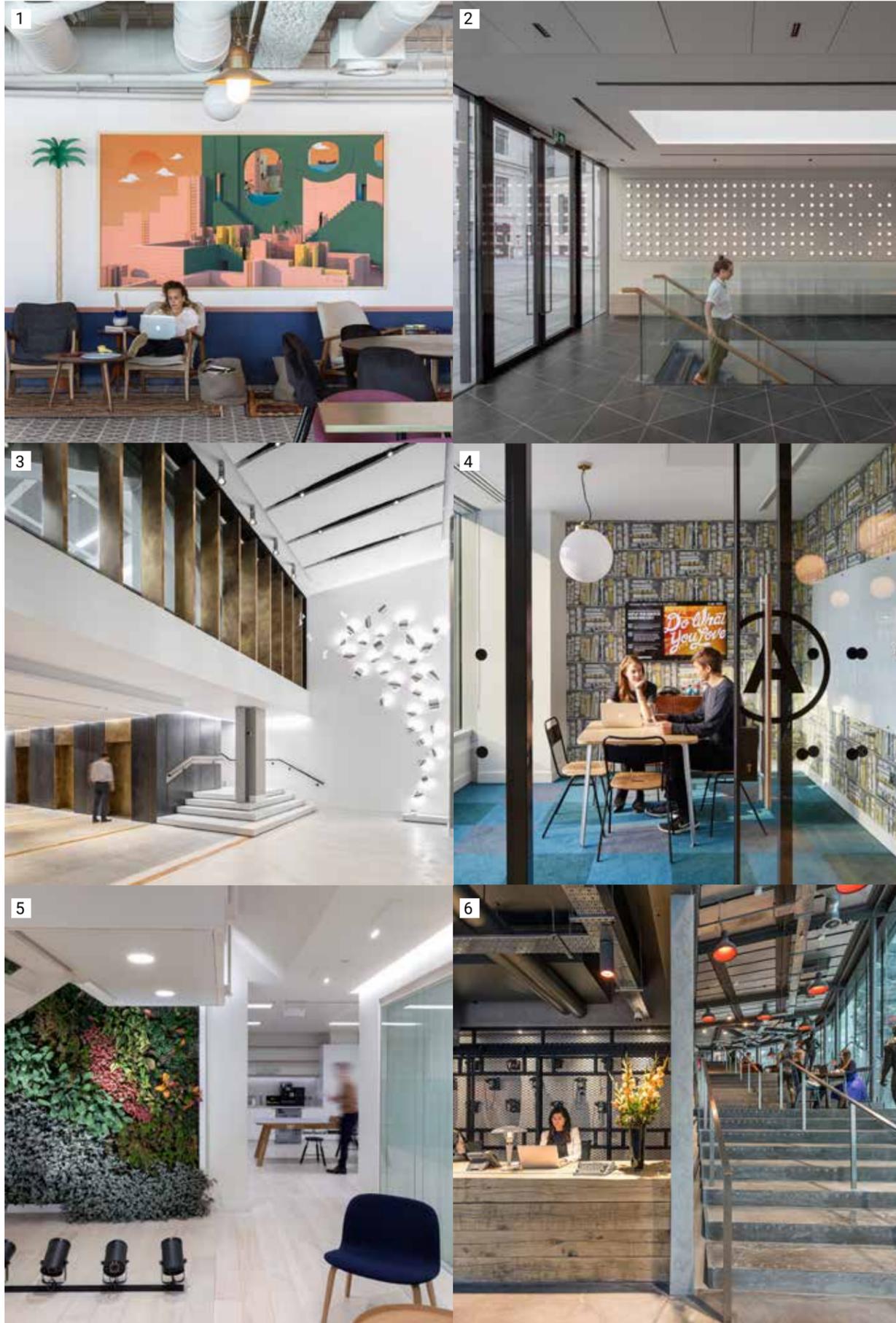
A place to exchange ideas



Private rooms to dial in for video conferencing or webinars



Informal spaces for mentorship



## How can we help you?

Feel free to contact us should you need any assistance or guidance on future proofing your office space.

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John Robertson Architects (JRA) is an award-winning architectural practice based in central London. Since its formation in 1993, JRA has designed and delivered a wide range of high-quality office buildings in sensitive Central London locations. The firm specialises in the complex refurbishment and reconfiguration of projects across Central London, many located within the City of London.

- 1 Mindspace, Appold Street
- 2 King's College
- 3 Bureau, Fetter Lane
- 4 WeWork, Spitafields
- 5 51 Moorgate
- 6 Cannon Green

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