

# Why resi developers should be studying workplace design

*Covid-19 has accelerated the existing trend towards more agile working, says Grant Lipton, and developers should follow suit...*

• By Grant Lipton • 20th May 2020

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Long before the Covid-19 outbreak, we had already seen a blurring of the boundaries between office, home and third-party spaces such as cafes.

In the past decade, technology and lifestyle changes encouraged employers to embrace agile and flexible working. The Global Coworking Growth Study 2019 predicted that the number of coworking spaces worldwide was projected to reach 25,968 by 2022, an increase of 42% from 2019.

Despite these behavioural shifts, according to figures released by the Office for National Statistics last year, only 5% of active workers considered their home as their main place of work.

Now, to ensure the safety and security of others, many of us have been compelled to work from home.

While the government has revealed plans to get Britain back to work, the social distancing restrictions will remain in place for a little while longer meaning offices will not be at full capacity staff-wise for some time.

The view from the World Health Organisation, meanwhile, is that Covid-19 may be with us for some time. All the evidence suggests that, after SARs and avian flu, with our highly interconnected global economy, Covid-19 will not be the last major pandemic.

If this is the case, in the future we can expect to see more of us working from home for extended periods.

This raises two issues. Firstly, that this will inevitably make some companies re-evaluate their workspace requirements. Secondly, as employees become more attuned to working

from home, housebuilders and developers will have to respond by creating spaces which make it easier to do so. This must go beyond simply installing super-fast broadband and instead considering how residential design can support remote working.

For years workplace design has focused on practices which instill productivity, positivity and the promotion of the physical and mental wellbeing of employees. These now need to be transferred to within the four walls of the home.

This means designing homes that we can live and work in, rather than adding a small second or third bedroom which doubles as a study. We are already seeing a growth in the number of highly innovative designs which physically separate workspaces from the parts of the home associated with down-time.

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Where this physical separation can be done through acoustic controls, posture promoting furniture and even colour schemes – with yellows associated with being uplifting, blues bringing clarity and purples installing mindfulness, according to Karen Haller's *The Little Book of Colour*.

While sunlight can have a multitude of benefits on our health, natural light is reported as improving mood, energy, alertness and productivity, as well as decreasing depression. Cooler halogen light temperatures are also proven to make workers more productive.

Biophilia, another interior design trend linked to the wellness movement which espouses health and fulfilment, has seen the return of the humble houseplant to many contemporary living spaces.

Many companies have already experienced the benefits of agile working, through cutting costs and reducing their environmental impact.

The shift to agile working has been heavily reliant on communication platforms such as Zoom and Microsoft Teams to keep day-to-day business going. To ensure connectivity between colleagues and clients runs smoothly, having the best internet connection at home is becoming increasingly vital.

At our Langham Street development in Fitzrovia, we pre-installed Hyperoptic Fibre broadband, ensuring the 17 apartments within the Grade II Listed building enjoy fast plug and play connectivity.

But to cope with this virtual lifestyle, we need more than just strong broadband and a strong connection. A highly personalised, comfortable home working environment is essential for the health and wellbeing of employees.

While the future is uncertain, it is clear that Covid-19 has accelerated the existing trend towards more agile working. Housebuilders and residential developers should follow suit.