Buro Happold
London, UK

DATA-LED SUSTAINABILITY

Engineering and built-environment consultancy Buro Happold relocated its London office in 2024 with the view of creating a sustainable, data-driven and experience-led workplace. The firm treated the project as a live test of its own ethos; it's now one of the UK's most highly certified workplaces, holding BREEAM Outstanding, WELL Platinum, LEED Platinum and NABERS ratings.

The 31,100 sqft fit-out sits across four floors of Derwent London's Featherstone Building on Old Street. The area is becoming synonymous with large tech firms located around Old Street station, earning itself the title of London's 'Silicon Roundabout'. Buro Happold relocated from its long-held tenancy in Fitzrovia to Old Street in 2024, seeking a space that allowed them to measure and monitor the workplace, in order to facilitate a healthier and more sustainable place to work.

Alongside its sustainability certifications, Buro Happold leverages a bespoke smart-building platform to measure the return on sustainable design. The firm used its own building-performance data to build an internal business case for the project – tracking energy use, staff turnover, wellbeing survey results and occupancy against its previous London office.





2

KEY FEATURES

- **Live occupancy:** energy, maintenance, thermal comfort and IAQ monitoring feed a smart-building platform that lets Buro Happold measure the workspace.
- **Material passports:** a pilot with Q Flow, BW and Derwent London tracked embodied carbon, warranty and disassembly data of high-value furniture aimed at making future reuse practical rather than aspirational.
- **Circular furniture strategy:** reusing furniture from the previous London office reduced cost and embodied carbon, but required the design team to plan the new floor plate around existing pieces rather than a blank specification.

WORKPLACE STRATEGY

Buro Happold's move was driven by the end of its previous lease and a wider ambition to improve sustainability, collaboration and inclusive design. This move aligned with the company's commitment to net zero carbon by 2030.

Gensler was appointed as workplace strategy partner and architect, and presented a shortlist of London buildings that included a transport and locality survey of staff travel patterns.

The firm ultimately decided upon The Featherstone building on Old Street. CBRE were a key strategic partner for project management.

Getting the brief agreed was, by the project team's own account, as much a stakeholder exercise as a design one. Buro Happold inhouse consultants were brought into the project for Workspace Fit Out, MEP, Energy and Sustainability, Structural, Inclusive Design, Specialist Lighting, Acoustics, and smart buildings.

Moreover, colleagues were also involved in the design process noted Emma Westbrandt, project design manager, ' we held a series of focus group workshops during the design stages, enabling staff to provide feedback as the design evolved; split into two dedicated workstreams, one focused on sustainability and wellbeing and the other on workplace and inclusivity.'

DESIGN

The fit-out includes a mass-timber staircase designed with fabrication studio Cake Industries and was built largely from cross-laminated timber. This staircase connects the four occupied floors and leads up to a private rooftop terrace with seating areas and a sculptural installation.

A dedicated collaborative workshop space, referred to internally as the 'Theatre of Ingenuity,' sits alongside a conventional mix of open-plan desking, individual focus rooms and larger meeting spaces.

Inclusive design was embedded through staff focus groups and Buro Happold's own Inclusive Design team, resulting in dedicated spaces including a parent room, a belief/prayer room and a sensory relief room. 'I believe we successfully created a diverse range of spaces that support different ways of working' remarked Westbrandt, 'providing colleagues with opportunities to meet and collaborate, as well as areas where they can step away for private calls or focus in a quieter environment.'

About half of the furniture from Buro Happold's previous London offices was retained and reused wherever possible. While this decision was made primarily for sustainability reasons, it did create a design challenge as the designers had to fit legacy pieces into a new floor plate, rather than specify freely.

Every desk is hardwired, with telecoms cabling run through the floor rather than relying solely on wireless connectivity. This decision was based on a demand for reliable infrastructure with the staff depending heavily on high-performance computing.

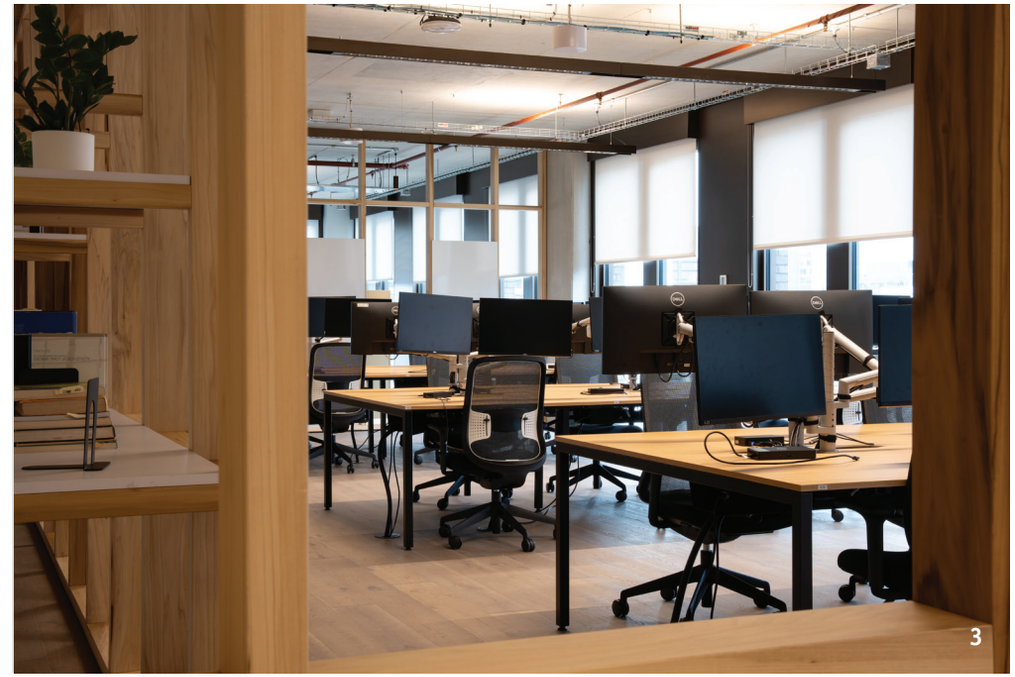
TECHNOLOGY AND DATA

The team used Buro Happold's own BIM modelling and high-performance computing capability through design and delivery, and the completed office is run through a bespoke, Buro Happold-branded app built on the Smart Spaces platform, letting them book desks, lockers and meeting rooms from their phone. Local wall mounted sensors allow employees to adjust temperature in their work zones.

A sensor network across the building tracks indoor air quality, humidity and anonymised occupancy data, feeding live dashboards that the facilities team uses for energy and maintenance monitoring. This data allows for a 'mixed-mode' operation which can switch between natural and active ventilation based on real-time thermal comfort data rather than a fixed schedule.

SUSTAINABILITY

The Featherstone Building fit-out holds a dense stack of sustainability certifications from BREEAM Outstanding which was confirmed at the project's one-year milestone in 2025; to WELL Platinum which was achieved May 2025, with all 80 of 80 attempted points verified, including 10 innovation points for carbon disclosure and reduction.


3


4



The building also holds LEED Platinum, WiredScore Platinum, SmartScore Platinum, AirScore Design & Operation Gold and a NABERS 4.5-star rating, alongside net zero carbon construction status for the fit-out itself.

Buro Happold's own reporting states the completed office uses 46% less energy than the average UK office, with 72% lower electricity consumption and 56% lower energy use per square metre.

A circular economy strategy was an important aspect of the project. A healthy materials assessment and embodied carbon target were set for the fit-out, UK/EU sourcing was prioritised to shorten supply chains, and legacy furniture as well as the material passport pilot were both used to keep materials in use for longer.

Buro Happold has also used Featherstone as a live testbed for material passports, piloting the approach with technology partner Q Flow , fit-out contractor BW and landlord Derwent London.

Rather than cataloguing every component, the pilot prioritised high-carbon, high-value elements such as the timber staircase, fan coil units and lighting. The material passports record warranty, embodied carbon and disassembly data in a database linked to the facilities management system, to support future reuse at end of life.

THE BUSINESS CASE

What sets this case study apart is that Buro Happold has since built a quantified internal business case for the project, using data from the building's own smart systems: including live occupancy and attendance, energy and cost monitoring, maintenance and thermal comfort data.

The firm spent around £1,300/sqm on a Cat B fit out, which is below the £1,200 - £1,800 UK benchmark range. The project generated roughly £870,000 in one-off capital savings against the total fit-out cost, plus upward of £400,000 a year in recurring productivity and energy savings.

Employee turnover has also reduced since the move from 12% to 10.8%. The firm has calculated these cost savings separately and treats these savings with more caution given the difficulty of isolating the office move from other factors, such as hybrid-working policy and the wider labour market.

The WELL occupant survey also reveals that the three highest-scoring statements in 2026 were all about the office itself.

Key Facts

Company	Buro Happold
Location	London, UK
Occupied	2024
Office size	31,100 sq ft
Industry	Engineering & Built Environment
People	~750 assigned to building
Workplace strategy	Gensler
Developer / landlord	Derwent London
Fit-out contractor	BW Interiors
Project management	CBRE
Timber staircase design	Cake Industries
Smart building platform	Smart Spaces
Material passport pilot	Q Flow, with BW and Derwent London
Key certifications	BREEAM Outstanding, WELL Platinum, LEED Platinum, WiredScore Platinum, SmartScore Platinum, NABERS 4.5 stars.

The survey found that 94% of employees agree the office is clean and tidy, 89% say they feel productive in their work, and 87% say that they can work productively in their current environment.

The proportion of staff who said they 'look forward to visiting the office' rose from 66% favourable in 2023 (pre-move) to 72% in 2026, with unfavourable responses falling from 10% to 7% over the same period.

Attendance data tells a related story, with average in-office attendance per employee rising year-on-year. The team also reports that attendance spiked on the hottest days of the year, which it linked directly to the building's active cooling factor drawing people back into the office, rather than working from home.

The success of the project goes beyond the qualitative data too. Lee Hargraves, associate director and project director at Buro Happold commented that the office has 'become the workplace we didn't know we needed until we moved in….it's a space that's brought teams back together.'

LESSONS LEARNED

There were a number of lessons learned throughout the project.

Cross-departmental buy-in was instrumental and key stakeholders shaped the brief from the outset. Getting the right people in the room was an exercise in ensuring voices were heard from different perspectives, without over-complicating the brief.

The firm also discovered that while reusing furniture saved cost and carbon, it still came at a cost. The approach constrained the floor plate and required close coordination between the design team and what was to be kept from the old office.

The project also carried internal pressure to visibly demonstrate the firm's net zero principles and best practices, so it needed to be a successful use case to clients. As the building was designed to be measured from day one, Buro Happold can now point to a quantified business case. This has proven to be critical in demonstrating return of investment throughout the project.



6


7

CONCLUSION

Buro Happold's Featherstone office demonstrates how sustainability and inclusivity can be integrated into a high performing environment, supporting both employee and organisation. The project highlights the value of treating a workplace as a long-term investment, one with measurable outcomes that can be utilised to inform future decisions and so vividly illustrate the business case for sustainability.


8


9

Photographs

1. Indoor biophilia and staircase
2. Wooden staircase and soft seating
3. Open plan work stations with monitor screens and ergonomic chairs
4. Communal working area, overlooking the desk work stations
5. Communal working spaces with a mix of seating
6. Communal smart locker space
7. Area for gethering, with digital signage screens on walls
8. Small private meeting room, with a white board and ergonomic chairs
9. Open plan workstations with screens and whiteboards on walls

Photography courtesy of Buro Happold.

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