BCO NextGen Scotland: Future Thinking – Building User at the Fore.

Glasgow, 5th May 2016

The BCO NextGen 2016 launch event saw a panel of industry experts lead an active discussion on the topic of "Building User at the Fore" as part of the Future Thinking series of events. These events will seek to challenge current ideas and conventions, whilst examining what the future holds for the office environment. A summary of the discussions can be found below.

Our panellists included:

- Andy McBain, Lead Office Design & Strategy, RBS.
- Glenn Masterton, Director at Mayforth.
- Liam Nisbet, Building Manager at Tanfield House in Edinburgh.

1. To what extent should the building user be at the heart of workplace design?

Building users should absolutely be at the heart of workplace design, and their needs should be considered at the earliest stage possible.

- This can have a positive effect on multiple areas including staff engagement, staff retention and the effective operation and management of the office.
- The building users' requirements beyond the interior of the office should be considered, i.e. transport, local amenities etc.

However, it was acknowledged that speculative developments can face problems in this area as the end user may be unknown. This can lead to tenants

having to invest in adapting speculative builds to their needs, or compromising their vision for their offices. This led to the second point of the morning:

2. How do you design a building when you don't know who the end user is?

Speculative builds can face multiple issues when it comes to an unknown end user, with the industry running the risk of working to the lowest common denominator and designing bland buildings.

- Building services were identified as being particularly problematic and an area of potential waste. Anecdotal evidence was provided of developments which were being "un-designed" to fit in with tenant requirements.
- It was suggested that it could be more effective to build developments to a shell and core status and leave the service installation till the end user requirements were known. However, this can cause potential issues with letting as a finished building is easier to attract tenants to, as well as issues with building control and achieving practical completion.

"Building users should absolutely be at the heart of workplace design...."

3. How is innovation impacting upon workplace design?

Innovation in the area of work places has led to evolving working practises which need to be accommodated:

- A culture of working anywhere at any time is emerging.
- Practises such as co-working and remote working are leading to a more dynamic office landscape.
- However, while a new generation is embracing these changes the design of offices is generally driven by management who may not fully understand their workers requirements.

4. As an industry are we keeping up with technology?

It was felt that as an industry we are taking a more reactive than proactive approach:

- We need to look beyond the short term and consider longer term requirements and costs.
- The disruptive effect of technology is important – what developments are in the pipeline that are going to impact upon our working practises?
- Schools now incorporate tablets, smart boards and other technologies in their teaching. What will happen when we have a generation of school leavers who are used to more advanced technology than is commonly provided in today's workplace?

5. What does the office of the future look like?

We finished by asking each of the panel their views on what the office of the future will look like:

- Offices will need to adapt to changing roles. Some individuals need to be in an office full time, and some can work from home. It's important to remember that we are social creatures, so the office of the future will become a destination to share ideas and meet up.
- People don't necessarily know what they want when it comes to emerging technology. Early adopters may already be looking at new tech which will have a huge impact upon working practises – we need to identify what the next big thing is. Once this had been identified we need to understand what the impact upon the office environment will be.
- We'll see improvements in usability and accessibility. Also, it would be nice if we stopped hiding building services away, it makes building management difficult!

BCO NextGen in Scotland will be running a series of events throughout 2016 on the Future Thinking theme. To find out details of these and other BCO events please visit www.bco.org.uk