

January 2023: Accelerating Circularity

Thursday 26th January 2023 – Ocee Design showroom

Core Team:

Harsha Kotak, WOD; Joanna Knight, WOD; Ella Fathi, Oktra;
Georgia Elliott-Smith, Element 4

Collective Members:

Angela Dapper, Grimshaw; Laura Wardrope, JLL; Asif Din, Perkins & Will;
Rhiannon Laurie, Gensler; May Fawzy, MF Studio / BIID;
Dicky Lewis, White Red Architects; Lucy Bagshaw, TP Bennett; Emily King, BDP; Gurvinder Khurana,
M Moser; Natasha Hewlett, Peldon Rose;
Ana Rita Martins, Woodalls Design; Nigel Tresise, Align; Deepak Parmar, MCM; Jennie
GreenWalker, MAA Architects; Dom Pegram, Salt & Pegram;
Jennifer Russell, Bureau Group; Matt Davies, The Furniture Practice;
Anja Schellenbauer, Conran and Partners; Fiona Edwards, JPA Workspaces; Sarah Audsley, Knight
Frank.

Supporters: Shaw Contract; Steelcase; Sedus UK; Solus Ceramics; Milliken;
Orluna LED; Workplace Insight

Purpose:

A 'think tank' group committed to acting as a collective within the workplace design community to identify developments and 'best practice' relating to sustainability.

This report highlights some of the points raised during the two-hour discussion. We have also included details of planned additional projects.

The British Council for Offices (BCO) released its new report at the end of 2022 that provides circular economy guidance to the office sector in relation to new-build, refurbishment and fit-out.

SDC was joined by authors of the Report:
Anna Surgenor and Kate Jones of Arup.

The introduction to the report highlights the considerable opportunities for the office sector:

“While the building and construction sector accounts for a sizeable portion of global carbon emissions, it is also well placed to lead the drive towards a circular economy.”



“Minimising waste, keeping products and materials in use for longer, re-using materials and regenerating and retrofitting existing buildings will clearly bring environmental benefits. The adoption of circular economy principles will be important in tackling the sector’s environmental footprint and creating better places for people to work.”

The new report will be available for download during the first week of February from the BCO’s web site.



Places:

“The recycling economy is not where we want to be. Reuse must be the ambition.”

“There are systemic challenges that need to be overcome: lack of policy drivers and regulations; business models in the private sector.”

“Pre-investment assessments for the building’s suitability for intended use are so important to determine viability of a project in terms of environmental impact.”

“Owners and occupiers need to set clear circular economy strategic objectives and project-level key performance indicators (KPIs) that embrace reducing embodied carbon, zero waste, recirculating materials and regenerating nature.”

“Design teams should be encouraged to use data from pre-demolition audits when designing spaces. There should be a prioritisation of principles such as designing for disassembly, designing out waste and reusing from demolition or from other projects.”

“Letting agents must clearly articulate and inform future occupiers of the reasons why a circular economy is incorporated in office new-build and fit-out.”

“Letting agents are very influential. They can navigate clients away from Cat A fit-out to Shell & Core.”

“Where Cat A is needed, virtual reality (VR) could be used as an alternative approach to showcase the potential of the space or, if needed, fitting out only one floor to Cat A standard as a showroom.”

“Property agents can work to avoid Cat A strip-outs by matching occupiers, developers and building owners early in the process to ensure that the first time the office is fitted-out the occupier’s requirements are being met.”

“Facilities management companies can play a valuable role in utilising buildings as material banks. They will have visibility of lease lengths and anticipated move dates.”

“There are significant issues relating to buildings as material banks. Construction delays impact on viability. Planned exit dates become extended so preventing the re-sale of assets or requiring removal of products to storage adding to the cost and practical logistics as well as environmental impact.”

Products:

“Material suppliers and manufacturers should be researching and implementing the infrastructure to enable take-back schemes to become a more common feature of the market.”

“Material passports can enable occupiers to understand materials that are contained within their ownership.”

“Tax incentives are needed on reused / ‘second hand’ materials.”

“The current super deduction tax for new furniture, for example, dis-incentivises buying second hand.”

“We recognise that manufacturers can’t be ‘cut-off’ but there needs to be stimulation for the new economy.”

“As we move towards net zero, any new products that are purchased now must be assessed in terms of planned future strategy. What is the future carbon impact?”

“We should be looking at models in Europe. The Netherlands has imposed minimum requirements for reuse. France has a ‘repairability’ index.”

“A major issue - product warranties including transfer of ownership.”



OUTCOMES:

Standardised Supplier Questionnaire:

This SDC meeting included the launch of the first ‘action committee’ to review supplier questionnaires and benchmark standards. The intention is to develop standardised documentation and guidance which can be adopted by the wider design community.

It is recognised that many suppliers spend a considerable amount of time and resources completing questionnaires. It is hoped that a consolidated version might be adopted by many practices. Smaller companies, in particular, will benefit from this approach.

This action committee will be led by Georgia Elliott-Smith of Element 4.

Net Zero Building Standard Framework:

Concerns were expressed by SDC that indications are that the proposed new standard does not include fit-out. The potential for change and opportunities for environmental impact reductions within fit-out are significant. New builds are likely to be in existence for at least 60 years whereas the ‘lifecycle’ for fit-out is getting shorter and shorter (in line with lease lengths).

Members of the group will be contacting the various organisations involved in the development of the new Standard to seek clarification and potential involvement.



SDC Magazine:

As part of its mission is to work collaboratively to share knowledge and 'best practice' to inspire and influence the workplace design sector, SDC will be launching a digital publication. The ambition is to provide a platform for views, opinions, and projects within the office workplace sector.

The first publication is scheduled for April 2023.

SDC Forum: 25th April 2023, Crypt on the Green, Clerkenwell

An interactive event for workplace designers, manufacturers, and suppliers to share knowledge and learn about efforts towards greater sustainability. It will provide the opportunity for networking and purposeful conversations as well as presentations and discussion panels.

FOOTNOTE:

The Sustainable Design Collective meets every two months. Each meeting addresses different initiatives designed to tackle the impact on our environment.

A summary document will be published after each meeting which is hosted on the Sustainable Design Collective's web site – an example of knowledge sharing.

We welcome comment and contributions from the office design sector.

www.woduk.com/sdc