

Sustainable Design Collective

Thursday 28th January 2022 – Sedus UK 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; Bysse Wallace, Element 4; Deepak Parmar, MCM.

Supporters: Sedus UK; Shaw Contract; Steelcase; Orluna LED; Mix Interiors

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.

Meeting One: Setting the Scene

The first meeting aimed to provide an overview of how the office design sector is currently approaching sustainability. What are the current issues, actions needed and key barriers to change?



Current Approach:

- All members' organisations include an inhouse team on sustainability. "Most RFPs demand an inhouse sustainability team."
- Use of sustainability workshops with clients – setting ambitions and expectations
- Many practices have created 'responsible sourcing' questionnaires for supply chains for compilation of inhouse databases
- Some members already establishing embodied carbon measurements for fit-out and targeted ambitious reductions
- Increasing focus on waste reduction and reuse "Clients are increasingly prepared to consider reuse."
- Health & Wellbeing; Diversity & Inclusion; Social Value – all key metrics as well as environmental responsibility

Current Key Issues:

Cost vs Sustainability:

"There's a need to educate the client from start – there is a cost associated with greater focus on sustainability."

"We need to educate clients – it will take longer and cost more."

"Even if clients are driven by cost we can still introduce sustainability measures – for example, dry fixings."

Compromise:

"It is invariably 'death by 1,000 cuts' – there is always a compromise."

"We want to minimise waste so we focus on reuse but there may be more energy efficient alternatives. There's a measurement and also compromise."

Knowledge Sharing:

There was unanimous agreement that knowledge sharing is an important goal:

"Knowledge sharing is vitally important". All recognised that this approach requires a behavioural change – "You can't copy my homework!"

All agreed that sharing databases through 'open source' would be hugely beneficial. This approach would help promote greater knowledge and understanding but also support greater transparency. "Sharing will actually help ensure the truth. Misinformation can be 'called out' in a public way."

Expectations:

All agreed that there needs to be a 'mind shift' in terms of the 'look and feel' of interior design. The traditional expectation is that everything will be 'shiny and new' – this needs to change. "The media, in particular, need to be representing interiors differently."

The Three 'P's

Each Collective meeting will address the focus topic through three separate lenses – Places, Products, People

Places:

Building / Fit-out certifications – such as BREEAM, LEED, SKARating, WELL, FitWel – divided opinion within the Collective.

“Certifications should be used to help support a client’s drive – not simply a tick box exercise.”

“Certifications are often simply a tick box exercise and don’t really help in terms of greater sustainability in design.”

“Certificates can give clients an ambition – but sometimes just to have ‘outstanding’ on the wall in reception.”

“Should we ‘demand’ all or nothing from clients in terms of certification requirements? Some clients only want one aspect of the criteria.”

Building Regulations

CAT A can be hugely wasteful – CAT A and B need to be re-examined. Educate clients to exclude CAT A.

Greater Co-operation and Liaison

A Collective member highlighted the opportunities for reuse through collaboration – including clients, contractors, agents, designers. Liaison between parties may identify opportunities to limit strip-out and reuse of existing F,F&E.



Products:

Certification Products certificates also divided the Collective members. All agreed that current cost of achievement of certificates and lack of standardisation mean that customised questionnaires and databases are imperative. There was a recognition that a demand for certificates would exclude innovative, smaller manufacturers. Manufacturers must, however, respond by providing factual, honest information.

“We can evaluate products by composition and volume.”

“Talking to manufacturers can be difficult. We need to demand transparency.”

“Three years ago we had a 10 point questionnaire – this has now been expanded to 45.”

People:

Staff Training and Development All agreed that training and development is essential but compromised by time commitments. It is reassuring that all agreed that there is increasing 'buy in' throughout all levels within each business.

"We need to educate internal teams to ask questions. We need to empower everyone from the bottom up. Managers must lead by example."

"We have inhouse training but it is currently voluntary. This means that we are often preaching to the converted."

"We need to make it as easy as possible for designers. Most people don't believe that they have time for sustainability training."

"Information needs to be relevant. Many staff have made lifestyle changes themselves. We need to show them that they can make a significantly greater overall impact through their design work."

"Different team members have varying knowledge and passion. How do we facilitate knowledge sharing?"

"We need to show that focus on sustainability can actually allow greater creativity. 'Urban mining' can be immensely inspiring."

"We do undertake 'lessons learned' exercises from previous projects. We deliberately use very short questionnaires which means that 80% of people do action and respond."

Accountability

There was a recognition that there is limited process for future accountability. Who is responsible? Client? Landlord? Designer? Supplier?

"Who is responsible for actually ensuring that 'take back' commitments, for example, actually happen? What is the process at 'end of life'?"

INNOVATIVE PROJECT EXAMPLE

The "Carbon Cube" installation in Leeds

Installed during the COP26 Summit by tp bennett, "Carbon Cube" explored the enormity of the climate crisis by creating a physical representation of carbon emissions. The sculpture is conceived as 8m^3 cube, equivalent in volume to one metric tonne of carbon dioxide at sea level.



The average carbon footprint per person in the UK is approximately six tonnes per year.



A Women in Office Design Initiative

tp bennett's installation visualises approximately two months of emissions from the activities of an average person in the UK. It also serves as a reminder that carbon usage adds up: if the UK's 68 million people each reduced their carbon footprint by one tonne per year (totalling 68 million tonnes), this would save the equivalent carbon needed to power 12.4m homes for a year.

The built environment is responsible for 39% of all global carbon emissions, almost a third of which are attributable to materials and construction. The embodied carbon of products – the carbon dioxide emissions released during raw material extraction, manufacture, maintenance, destruction and all transport stages – is not often considered.

FOOTNOTE:

The Sustainable Design Collective will meet every two months between January and September 2022. Each meeting will address different initiatives designed to tackle the impact on our environment.

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

www.woduk.com/sdc