

July 2026 Meeting Report:

Ocee & Four Design Showroom

Core Team:

Harsha Kotak, WOD; Joanna Knight, WOD

Collective Members:

Rebecca Poll / Harriet Jacobs, Grimshaw; Asif Din, Perkins and Will; Alison Grant, Taskspace; May Fawzy, MF Studio / BIID; Lucy Bagshaw, TP Bennett; Katharine Blankley / Jaffer Muljiani, BDP; Gurvinder Khurana / Samantha Allen, M Moser; Astrid Hugo, Gensler; Ana Rita Martins / Deepak Parmar, MCM; Nigel Tresise, Align; Jennie GreenWalker, MAA Architects; Nicole Allegri, HLW; Dom Pegram, FACT; Phil Towle / Alex Webb, The Furniture Practice; Anja Schellenbauer, John Robertson Architects; Fiona Edwards, JPA Workspaces; Claire Owens / Ruth Marsh, Sheppard Robson; Lydia Randall, BDG A+D; Deborah Allen, DouglasJane Studio; Penelope McCallum, Unispace; Mathew Freeman, Freeman Studio; Joe Croft / Zoe Glander, Overbury; Valerio D'Angelantonio, Make Architects; Roseanna Hart, Cast Interiors; Caroline Pontifex, Savills; Jane Goodman, Think iDEA; Matt Davies, The Furnologists; Matthew Robinson, Ambit Moat; Stuart McHendry, Scotch Partners; Duncan Morris, Four Front Group; Mads Olsen, Day 2; Poppy Cunningham, Virtus Contracts; Katie Bowes, Axis @ Work; Georgina Smith, Broadbase; Ian Smeaton, JLL;

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.

SDC associate members meet every two months. This report is part of our commitment to knowledge sharing and highlights some of the points raised during the discussion.

Topic: "AI – have we already opened Pandora's box? how are we using AI and can we manage its progress and implementation?"

"We need to ensure that AI enhances what we do – not replacing our involvement. It is important there is human interaction. We must be mindful and avoid the potential to eliminate the creative input in our industry."

"AI does have an important role to play in enhancing efficiency in certain tasks."



"When utilised in relation to reuse and asset management, for example, it has enabled us to analyse findings quicker."

“Research and input at the implementation phase are essential. As long it is set up correctly it can improve efficiency. There must be a thorough understanding of what you are wanting to achieve and the processes it will be replacing / replicating.”

“There is a danger that the human intellectual capital will be lost – we can’t leave AI to ‘get on with it’. It must be checked and validated.”

“There is a difference between data and information. AI is a significant contributor in terms of access to data, but analysis must include human intervention.”

“We must sense check – there is a danger that AI will ‘spit out’ information which is clearly wrong! But this will be overlooked if not checked.”



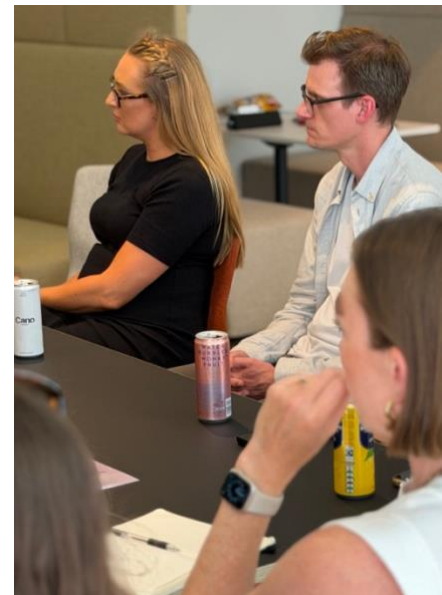
“As an example, AI may create a bus timetable but it’s you who decides and chooses which bus to take.”

“Our procurement team is involved in automating routine processes but still managed and overseen by ‘humans’.”

“The elimination of entry level jobs will be a major error.”

“We do all need to have a better understanding of AI – it is here to stay. Potentially, those with the best understanding will get the better jobs.”

“It must be recognised that data usage currently has a massive environmental impact. Amazon and Microsoft, for example, have reported increases in their carbon footprint through the growth and expansion of data centres.”



“Nordic countries are adopting a more considered approach in terms of the location of data centres to capture and utilise the heat generated, for example. In the UK we lack transparency in terms of where data centres are located and I don’t believe statistics are available.”

“Technology is moving so fast. We don’t know what data centre usage and AI will look like in, say, five years’ time.”



The advancement and use of AI is a hot topic. The subject will be part of future meeting debates including “building strategies and frameworks for the design and implementation of technology, including AI, to promote dignity and recognise the value of people.

Footnote: Ikea has recently retrained its call centre staff (8,500 people) to handle more complex queries (rather than making redundancies). See <https://www.linkedin.com/news/story/ikea-retrains-call-centre-staff-8383945/>

The July meeting was shorter than usual – it was combined with our summer social. Thanks to Ocee & Four Design for the hospitality and the World Cup competition.

Duncan Morris from Four Front Group won the prize for the Work Cup competition.



SDC Forum:

The fourth forum was held on 23rd April 2026: an interactive event for workplace designers, manufacturers, and suppliers to share knowledge and learn about efforts towards greater sustainability.

The next ‘mini’ forum will be held on Thursday 8th October 2026 at Crypt on the Green. Two hours of interactive round table discussions – come and ‘have your say’! Watch for social media announcements to secure your ticket.