

WRK/LDN:



Office

Revolution?

This research paper provides a snapshot of London's current response to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the capital's workspaces and their urban context, and evaluates how offices will need to adapt in the long-term.

WRK/LDN: Office Revolution? brings together thought leadership from industry experts and views from a comprehensive NLA Members Survey of 180 respondents about their experiences of a year of lockdown, working from home and the potential impact this will have in the longer term. The report also includes over 100 projects, ideas and products to illustrate the changing workplace, as well as recommendations to ensure London can support the way we want to work in the future.

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# Foreword

*By Peter Murray,  
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‘There are things we know we know. We also know there are known unknowns. (...) But there are also unknown unknowns’

Donald Rumsfeld's famous quote concerning the Iraq war might well sum up how things are with regard to the changing way we work and how we use the city right now.

This latest piece of NLA research brings together the thoughts of a wide range of practitioners and academics to assess our experiences of a year of lockdown, of increased home working, the effect this will have in the longer term and what we need to do to ensure positive outcomes. It provides a comprehensive guide to current thinking on issues facing workspace provision today.

What we know we know is that the way we work, at least in office-based jobs, will not be the same in the future as it was pre-pandemic. The experience and the successes of working from home will ensure that we will not go back to traditional work patterns; in the future, we will work more flexibly both in terms of location and time. The known unknown is the scale

of that change although we do know that it will be an acceleration of what has been happening for over 20 years. In his book *The New Office* published in 1997 DEGW's Frank Duffy wrote about an increase in home working and the changing nature of the office: "In the cities of the 21st-century offices will continue to exist, but will be designed in a richer and wider variety of ways — as streets, villages, colleges, and clubs — to encourage interaction." It is the lack of interaction that has been missing during lockdown and is now discussed as the prime role of the office, leaving tasks that can be carried out without the interaction with colleagues to home or remote working. The scale of the shift to “working from mobile” (WFM) is an unknown, as is the effect it will have on the amenities in city centres as well as on local neighbourhoods.

We know that our buildings will need to be adaptable and responsive to change. It has happened before — in the 1980s over a third of office space in the Square Mile was rebuilt or radically refurbished to accommodate changing use of technology. But this time around reuse and retrofit will play an even greater role and new buildings will be more conscious of their carbon footprint.

We know that the pandemic has brought wellbeing in the workplace to the fore. As with much else, this move was underway before COVID struck, but its importance is central to the delivery of new office space and adaptation of the old as well as the design of external spaces and streets.

What will happen will be influenced by attitudes of individuals, of companies and of political leaders. Some people have had positive experiences of WFM and some are desperate to return to the social interaction of the workplace; there are companies who are expecting staff to go back to the office and others who want home working to continue as a benefit to their bottom line. The City of London Corporation has come out with a very positive recovery plan which envisions a City that contrasts with that of its transformation after Big Bang; then, offices were seen as a part of the corporate image where staff were attracted by strong and successful brands. 'The Square Mile: Future City' report sets out a more humane and less brash city — a world-class business ecosystem, collaborative, flexible workspaces with attractive public realm and resilient, sustainable infrastructure. To support innovation and growth, the City will be providing affordable spaces for new and expanding businesses, something that is reflected in the conclusions to this report.

Yet at the same time as we are seeing positive action among local politicians, there are headlines suggesting that the Prime Minister intends to stop the 'brain drain to the city' to support red wall constituencies, a denial of the importance of agglomeration in the success of metropolitan areas and their role in the national economy.

However, less than half of Londoners work in offices and in the aftermath of COVID there is an increased need to protect London's industrial land and to make better use of what land there is by investigating new mixed-use typologies. In the conclusion to this report you will find this and other recommendations for recovery which align with NLA's broader checklist for development to 2035.

At NLA, while we are glad to see the boost to local neighbourhoods as a result of more home working, we believe that a strong and vibrant centre, with its rich mix of workplace, amenity and cultural offers, is an important driver of London's success and a key attractor to investors and visitor alike. We hope the content of this report will assist designers and decision-makers in reshaping the way we work and delivering a healthier future in the post-pandemic era.



# Executive summary – Looking back, looking forward

As we move out of restrictions and look to building future resilience as the critical phase of the pandemic hopefully recedes, London's offices will need to provide an exemplar of design, management and operation to continue to support the capital in its recovery as a leading global business centre. Flexibility and sustainability in every aspect — not just space and layout but also leasing, management and location — will be key attributes of the resilient office, as will a focus on accessibility, inclusivity, affordability and, not least, health and wellbeing. The office is not dead, but it will surely evolve. In the future, workspaces will have to be welcoming, sustainable, smart, and flexible.

Such conclusions echo and reinforce the eight recommendations made in NLA's WRK/LDN report of 2016 — some of these recommendations focused on industrial developments, and while such workspaces were not a focus of this report, NLA has launched a new Industrial & Logistics programme to explore the evolution of this sector.

## WRK/LDN 2016 recommendations

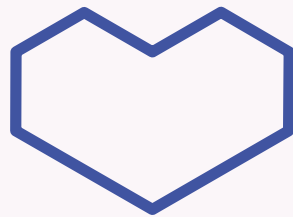
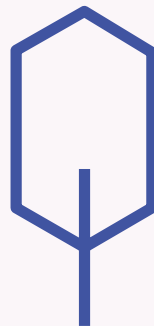
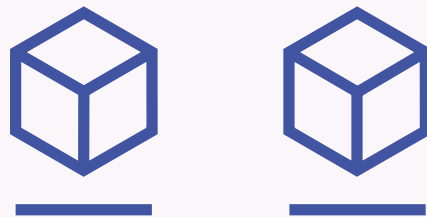
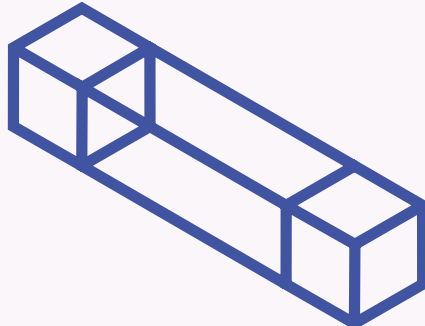
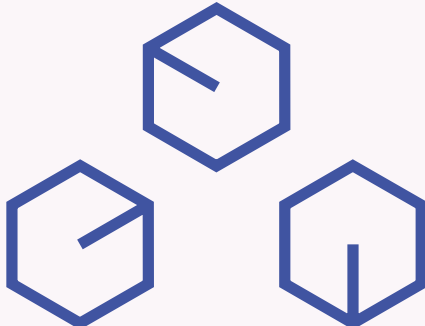
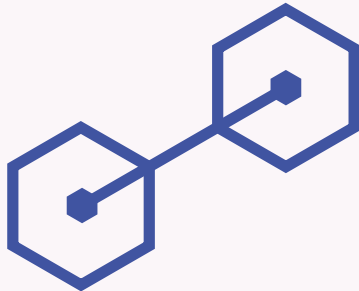
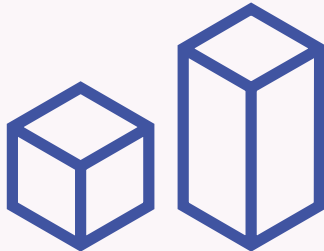
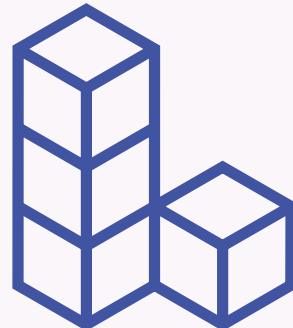
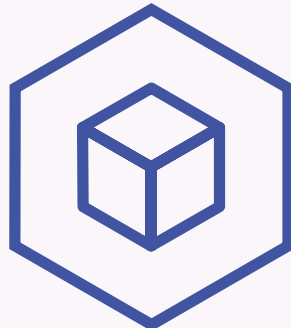
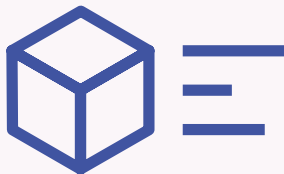

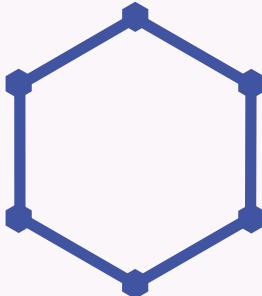
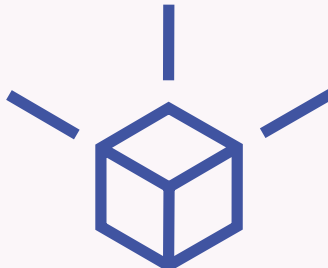

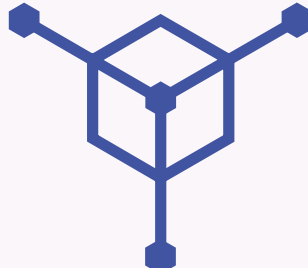
- 1 Create an adaptable, open and smart city
- 2 Integrate workspaces with transport infrastructure
- 3 Protect London's industrial land and uses
- 4 Provide affordable space for new and expanding businesses
- 5 Investigate new mixed-use typologies
- 6 Pilot new design-led industrial developments
- 7 Promote the wellbeing agenda as part of planning policy
- 8 Plan for a multi-generational workforce



NLA's publications presenting the evolution of London's offices in the last 15 years – The Office, 2006; London's Office Architecture, 2010; WRK/LDN, 2016

# London 2035 Checklist

Our findings also resonate with the London 2035 Checklist presented in our 15-year anniversary programme The Changing Face of London, in 2020. The Checklist sets out 15 themes that London will need to address in response to current challenges, and to position itself even more positively over the next decade and a half. NLA research and programming will continue to respond to these themes, using this list as a tool to measure London’s progress each year.

 <b>Healthy</b> A city that prioritises health and wellbeing	 <b>Zero Carbon</b> A greener city that responds urgently to the climate emergency	 <b>Equitable</b> A city of stronger, inclusive and more equal communities	 <b>Flexible</b> Buildings to meet changing needs and support the circular economy, with time-based use of streets	 <b>Polycentric</b> 15-minute mixed-use neighbourhoods with convenient public transport links to a strong centre
 <b>Responsive</b> A city where people can organise their time and space to suit their changing needs	 <b>Leading</b> A leading global city and business centre	 <b>Affordable</b> An affordable housing-led recovery	 <b>Hospitable</b> More diverse and thriving high streets and town centres	 <b>Active</b> A city that walks and cycles, with better air quality
 <b>Meanwhile</b> More meanwhile uses are encouraged	 <b>Viable</b> An open and growing city	 <b>Smart</b> A city that manages and regulates technology and big data effectively	 <b>Public</b> A greater role for the public sector in driving regeneration and housing delivery	 <b>Knowledge-based</b> Research, tech, bio-med and creative sectors drive the city's economy

# WRK/LDN: Office Revolution?

*‘Never forget that the office is neither  
a very old nor a very stable entity.’*

Frank Duffy, *The Office and the City:  
Twelve Propositions* (2012)