Workplace Community
Why change? We did and it has changed our business
Tuesday 4th November 2014

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Tuesday 4 November 2014 - SEGRO plc, 258 Bath Road,Slough SL1 4DX

Another outing organised by CoreNet UK's Workplace Community, this time through a hideous rainstorm, to Slough, where we joined a good number of CoreNet and BIFM members from across Bucks, Berks, Hants and London, all come to visit SEGRO's new offices.

This well-established traditional business has taken a transformative step forward to create a vibrant new working environment. **Graham Brown,** head of operational services at SEGRO and **Farrol Goldblatt**, of tp bennett architects, provided a double act which explained the processes leading to this change.

Kicking off Graham described how he had joined the company five and a half years ago to be told not to unpack because they were on the verge of moving - three and a half years later they were all still there. Finally, in March 2012, the search for new offices actually got going. The immediate reason for the move being that the old building was to be demolished so the need for a new home became urgent, the longer-term reason that, under the old building arrangement, spread over several floors, teams worked in silos and there was little collaboration between them.

After much consultation it was decided to stay in Slough, a decision driven by the facts that the company had been in the area for 94 years that many of the staff lived locally, close proximity both to Heathrow and London and significantly, Slough is home to the Slough Trading Estate - one of the company's biggest assets. An existing building was chosen, 200m along Bath Road, and a project team was set up with a small steering committee to allow fast and clear decision making. Feedback from 119 Slough-based staff led to a vision of principles which included the desire for an office that would be open plan, on one floor only, and which would provide integrated working and encourage dialogue and sharing.

Appointed midway through 2012, Farrol explained how tp bennett led SEGRO through four months' research to discover staff preferences, including visits to other organisations' offices to see what could be done. A survey into meeting rooms showed that most meetings are small - for up to three people only - so there would be no need for large meeting rooms. A questionnaire asked what staff thought most important to the company - the reception area came out top as it is the first point of contact with customers and other visitors. Ultimately the research revealed big opportunities for sustainability, agile working and work/life balance. Constant staff engagement throughout the process, including public trials of furniture, and internal posters describing progress, led right up to the moving day.

Finally, said Graham, the move into the new office took place on 20th January 2014. It was he said 'a success - it was like a normal working day 119 staff had moved into half the space previously occupied, without a hitch". A post-occupancy survey highlights that 90% of staff believed that the original vision had been achieved. 20 people only have fixed desks, the rest all work flexibly, and there are no private offices. Key to the success of the operation he believed were: to get advice, to visit examples, quick decision-making, and introducing a change management programme into the marketing of the move.

And then we were taken on a tour of the offices. Most impressive were the break-out booths for small meetings - high-backed seating to provide a feeling of security, perch desks in the reception area, the variety of lighting, and the sparsity of printing facilities which has already led to savings. Additionally, the restaurant and welfare facilities are of a high standard, generating a calm and comfortable environment for staff to work collaboratively.

An interesting discussion and a fascinating visit.

AV Sutherland