





winds of change

Question: If you were a workplace interior specialist with particular expertise in technology, flexible working options and brand enhancement, who would you trust with the design creation of your new mixed-use, multi-tenant, fully serviced premises? Hint: Mixology North Company of the Year winner Claremont Group Interiors didn't have to look very far, as Martin Mitchell discovers.

When parking up outside 'The Breeze', the base of Claremont Group Interiors' operations – a stone's throw from the M62 near Warrington – the first impression is one of how unassuming the building is. Aside from the manifestation of a dandelion clock with seeds blowing away (a recurrent theme elsewhere within the premises) there is little in the way of flashy design statements. No 'feature' canopy or atrium or commissioned artwork made from locally sourced scrap metal, just a clean, uncluttered entrance into the building's main reception area.





►►► building's location (midway between Liverpool and Manchester) and the high quality facilities including ample parking, superbly designed office space and cutting edge ICT technological support, courtesy of Air Angel, a specialist wireless technology company set up by CGI to provide clients with unrivalled remote server access and connection speed. The upper floor also offers potential for further occupancy, equipped and furnished to a high standard, but with room for adaptation to suit the specific requirements and numbers of any potential tenants.

As with the design scheme, the plans for subletting part of the office were meticulously planned from the start, from initial research of its viability as a workable area of the business right down to specification of exactly the right furniture appropriate for a contemporary workspace, from formal meeting rooms to breakout areas. Once the decision to relocate to such a facility had been made, the decision on how to approach the development of the building was addressed with the same professionalism as would've been afforded to an external client, as Ken Bundy explains: 'We could've sub-contracted out the design and build of the new premises, but we felt that as long as we approached the project like we would any other – i.e. combining a creative design brief with regular consultation and attention to budgets and time constraints – we would be more than capable of delivering the satisfactory result. In effect, we set ourselves up as our own client, and then proceeded as we would with any other project.'

This does make sense – after all, if the workplace specialist with over 30 years in the business has to get someone else in to deliver its own HQ, then what message does this send to future clientele? Happily, this isn't an issue, as The Breeze is a superb facility – both as an example of striking yet subtle design and as a benchmark in innovative use of serviced space.

The recurring theme of innovation is one that pops up often at The Breeze. Particularly apparent in the fashion that the serviced section of the building is run. The reception team that manages appointment and visitors to CGI headquarters also manages the operation of the serviced area, independently of CGI. As all conference facility or meeting room bookings and payments are handled by the team, even when such spaces are required for use by CGI staff themselves, this in effect renders the serviced facility as a separate business, ►►►►►





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Innovation is also prevalent in the way the building operates in terms of 'fit-for-purpose'. In CGI's own offices, each department – from marketing to design to sales – is situated in one large open plan office, arranged about a central 'hub' area which contains informal conference spaces, breakout zones and the like. None of it seems rigid or inflexible, with the capacity to change the composition seemingly never far from the designer's mind.

Interesting approaches to zoning are present in the serviced area of the building as well, with different colours or designs of carpet being used in conjunction with carefully selected styles of furniture and appropriate lighting to achieve differing levels of formality between separate spaces. And yet some of these aren't even as 'separate' as they first appear, with sliding walls dividing meeting rooms and moving to create even larger, more flexible spaces.

The repeated ideal seems to be – in keeping with the whole Breeze philosophy – that nothing should be needlessly static or immovable, and the capacity for change or

at least evolution is as important in how a workplace functions as its appearance.

So what is the next stage of evolution for The Breeze? Ken Bundy explains: 'Now we've seen how successfully we can function both as tenant and landlord, and with the excellent feedback we've received from the other businesses that share the building with us, the next aim has to be to offer these services to more companies.'

'With access to services like Air Angel and the range of different spaces available at The Breeze, there's really no reason to expect that these premises shouldn't be home to several more companies by the end of this year.'

Ultimately, The Breeze establishes itself as the complete antithesis of eye-catching but impractical workplace design. The stylish design touches are only present where they enhance the CGI brand or add to the building's functionality as a place of day-to-day operation. What's more, it's also the most demonstrable example of what CGI can achieve with a project when adhering to a specified budget, or footprint, or occupancy requirement or any other type of condition of contract or design brief.

It is, in essence, a working case study – almost an advertisement – both of the group and the continuing development of its brand and range of services ●

