



severn up





had been bolted on to an amalgamation of old municipal water boards) and focused on water. At the time we had more than 7,000 sites and some 55,000 acres – but no property services department. I was brought in 18 months ago to take the company from a position of no capability on real estate projects through a programme culminating in this project. We’ve moved from an ad hoc approach to something that’s a well-considered and important element of the business.

‘Severn Trent has the desire to be the best. We have 20 key performance indicators which are openly shared and transparent to everyone both inside and outside the business. In summary: we’re business-oriented and we need good people. Waters Court is important because it’s both a demonstration of real research about issues that are vital to us. Waters Court is about people – diversity, productivity, retention and our environment.

‘We’re in a customer relations business. We have exacting and high standards relating to customer contact, and our staff must work with complex systems. We invest heavily in training to an advanced level by contact centre standards. Combine those issues with what has been in the past an indifferent occupants customer satisfaction score, it’s not surprising that historically we had relatively high levels of churn.

‘Waters Court is addressing all these issues – we’re looking at everything. We’re looking at how we use space; how to make space work harder. We’re looking at ways of working, we’re looking at where people live and how they will get to work. We’re ultimately driven by the need to recruit and retain good people to ensure that we’re the best at what we do.

‘We conducted a wide search for the right location for our new operations centre. We looked as far afield as Nottingham and Derby before settling on Coventry. That process concluded 18 months ago when we bought a brownfield site in the centre of Coventry – a place that had once, long ago, been home to a Victorian ribbon factory. It will be an exemplar of urban place-making. It connects us closely to the region. We’re working with Advantage West Midlands, and we’ve forged a strong relationship with Coventry City Council and the University as we go about recruiting good people locally.

‘There’s a strong environmental element to what we’re doing. An important aspect of an integrated environmental approach is a ▶▶▶▶▶

▶▶▶▶ wider environmental issues, urban regeneration, real estate rationalisation, human resource recruitment and retention as well as social responsibility

It’s a complex undertaking with entwined objectives, so as a precursor to the big move, Waters Court is an important prototype. This is where Severn Trent will test and measure against its objectives and gather information and feedback – all to ensure the success of the main project. It’s not some pseudo marketing suite, it’s a

working office – designed by The Harmsen Group, project managed by Sabian and fitted out by ISG – currently staffed by around 90 customer service representatives.

‘As a result of previous business models, the company found itself with a sprawling real estate portfolio in the M42/M5/M6 box – and one equipped with increasingly obsolescent technology,’ explains Ted. ‘A few years ago the board, led by Sir John Egan and Tony Wray, restructured the company. We demerged non core businesses (which



▶▶▶▶ multi-modal transport policy, so Waters Court is a key test of that. We want to be a major part of policy which reduces single occupancy car journeys and makes full use of rail and bus services. The new building is designed to be BREEAM 'excellent', with a full array of photovoltaic, biomass boilers, ground water use and brise soleil (the internal space is conditioned via underfloor displacement ventilation) being just some examples of a very green building. This is not a one-off; our environmental strategy is

a major part of our business plan and overall vision for the company.

'We want to be an employer of choice, but it's not simply a matter of getting good press or giving out good messages. Waters Court is a 30 month project to give staff a flavour of what the new building will be like and to underscore who we are as a company. It's a marketplace prototype that says a lot about what the company is about. At the same time, it's a fully functional entity. Working with Harmsen, we're

looking at how people will work, looking at team structures, examining different workstation types and groupings. This is part of our drive for high standards, low ongoing costs, higher productivity, enhanced space utilisation and churn reduction. So, at Waters Court we have an array of various working workstation types from Herman Miller, Kinnarps and Roc. We're looking at everything, getting feedback – testing breakout areas, meeting rooms, finishes. This is all about looking at how people work productively and making better use of space.'

As prototypes go, Waters Court is exhaustive. Covering everything from use of public transport to soft seating in breakout areas, the project is testament to Severn Trent's commitment to its community and customers. We're already looking forward to reporting on the 'big move'! ●

## essential ingredients

- Client: • Severn Trent Water
- Interior Designer: • The Harmsen Group  
01275 465200
- Project Manager: • Sabian  
0121 629 7772
- M&E Consultant: • Building Services Partnership  
0121 504 9020
- Fit-out Contractor: • ISG Retail and Leisure  
01480 423500
- Systems Furniture: • Herman Miller  
0845 226 7202  
(through Workstation)  
020 7250 0400  
Kinnarps  
01753 681860  
ROC Office Furniture  
0121 358 0411
- Task Seating: • Orangebox  
020 7837 9922  
Herman Miller  
0845 226 7202  
Kinnarps  
01753 681860
- Soft Seating: • Allermuir  
01254 682421
- Meeting/Breakout Furniture: • Orangebox  
020 7837 9922  
Allermuir  
01254 682421  
Herman Miller  
0845 226 7202
- Flooring: • Paragon Carpets  
01709 763839  
Tarkett Limited  
01622 854000