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'It's a very interesting area. As a practice we produce solutions for our clients. On the sustainability front, yet again it's about finding solutions, so it's more than having a list saying 'Have we got a recycling programme? Have we done what we can do in terms of assisting with the procurement process? Have we helped with your work processes to reduce the use of waste materials?' It's not about ticking boxes – it's about helping the client to understand how they can help themselves.

'We did some research with the British Market Research Bureau where the big question we asked was 'How is it that the individual home is so good at understanding sustainable issues and recycling, yet when people go to work they won't – or they can't?' Either the mechanics or the infrastructure aren't there, or they feel it's someone else's responsibility.'

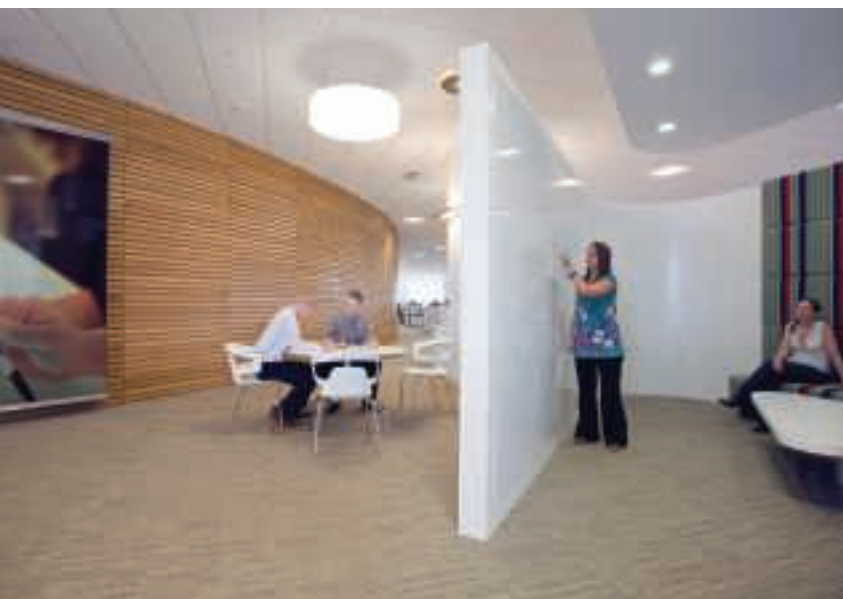
Incredibly, the answer that came back was that a massive 70% of people felt that this wasn't their responsibility, and instead felt it should be a corporate responsibility. Food for thought! 'We have ISO 14001,' Phil continues, 'which is important to our clients because it demonstrates that we have a certain level of understanding and a certain approach. With the CSR approach, we give our clients better value by carrying out research like this, identifying the issues and helping them understand that these are issues and then helping them to solve them.

'A number of clients we have worked with are very knowledgeable. A lot aren't however – or see the solution as a simple tick in the box. They think they can write a cheque to get that tick. That's a little bit sad, and these are the clients we want to help if we can. We do have to bear in mind however that sustainability is just a little bit of what we do – we obviously do much more. We don't work on projects just to do sustainability.'

Before we head back out onto the wet Clerkenwell streets, we ask about Phil Hutchinson the man and the career. 'I don't have a personal side, I love my work so much!' he jokes. 'I think I just arrived one day! I'm not the sort of person who looks backwards. I don't do CVs. I like to talk about the experiences I have had working with clients, I like to talk about projects and areas where we have broken new ground.

'My background since college has all been focused in commercial work or workplace design. I'd love to say that this was through passion. 3D design is so wide that, when you go through college, you understand areas that particularly interest you and I think I found an area that I felt I could be of best value and I felt comfortable in. Retail design is a little more transitional. There were certain values in design that I felt were important – and I still do. One is understanding strategy clearly – and of course this is relevant to every piece of design, recognising the value of some very simple core principles and developing those on which you build sustainable design – and what I mean by sustainable is not just the 'green' thing, but the wider meaning of the word sustainable – and then understanding how you add the various layers on top of that – core services, flexibility, brand.





▶▶▶▶▶ I'm quite a pragmatic person. I think this is key to producing successful solutions over and above anything else. In our field we design for business and what we do affects the bottom line.

'I spent some time with Steelcase in the very early days, a little bit of time with a niche design agency, a little bit of time in Design and Build, and quite a lot of time with BDG! I've gained more experience at BDG than anywhere else, because the benefit I've had is that the practice has changed so much over the past 10 years. I've had the advantage of being able to understand the value of everything under one roof – which was where BDG was almost heading when I first arrived – but I now understand the very real value of a simple, focused consultancy. That's what Gill Parker and I have developed over the past four or five years and probably one of the biggest challenges we've had has been helping the practice to go through that kind of change – moving from a multi-disciplinary approach to a very focused one. In a way it would almost have been easier to close the practice and start again, re-brand. But we realised that BDG is a name that goes back a long way, and the pedigree of the name and the value is important. It's important to our clients, it's important to the consultants we work, it's important to our suppliers and it's importance to us.'

And it's important that we don't take up more of Phil's valuable time. We head out onto St John Street and think about popping across the road, just to say hello to Stuart. Maybe not – there's only so much 'experience' you can take of a morning ●