



axis all areas

We were flicking through the DSA's user guide when our eyes alighted on a little gem of information. Tucked away within a highly informative booklet which explains all about The Axis in Nottingham, cheek by jowl with the useful stuff about booking meeting rooms and the ergonomics of your workstation, is a nice little factoid.

billy J Kramer played in this very same building in 1963. Presumably with his Dakotas, it doesn't say. Also on the bill that night was Cilla Black. Oh yes, and The Beatles.

We're telling you this partially because we want to and mostly because it leads us into giving some idea of what a complex design and fit-out project this was. It's pretty difficult to tell from the nice images that illustrate this ▶▶▶▶▶



▶▶▶▶ piece, but The Axis in Nottingham was once the Co-op, in fact for about 80 years it was the biggest department store in town. And its popular Elizabethan Room was where the mop tops played. Peter Grant of grant thorp, the interior and workplace design consultants, explains: ‘The old Co-op

building was a shell and core when the design team was appointed. In fact, the developers had originally intended that there would be eight different occupiers, the Cat A fit-out had already begun to divide up the space for multi-tenancy. Ultimately the Driving Standards Agency

took 55,000 sq ft of office space on levels 3 and 4, and had a ground floor reception. The mixed-use building also contains apartments, shops, restaurants and a casino. Further complication was thrown into the equation by the numerous changes in floor levels and ceiling heights – a throw back to how the Co-op building evolved historically over a long period.’

‘We’re lucky enough to steal a little time with Roz Groves, the DSA’s Head of Estates and Facilities – who is responsible for over 400 buildings in the UK, including The Axis, the Nottingham Head Office. The plain speaking Ms Groves didn’t mince words as she spelled out the objectives of the move to The Axis: cost neutral real estate rationalisation and major cultural change.

‘We had two buildings in Nottingham, and the decision was made to bring the businesses together. The DSA had grown and evolved hugely, so the old premises were crammed full. There had been a lot of movement between sites – with its resulting cost and productivity issues, a certain silo mentality, and different management cultures. This growth had been promoted primarily by the Driving Safety Forward ▶▶▶▶▶▶



case study



►► policy, which caused a big increase in staff numbers. Another factor is that nobody knows who we are, with no strong identity, yet we manage the road safety agenda in this country. We're part of the Department of Transport, not the DVLA!

'We saw the need to move as an opportunity to be a catalyst for change in our business culture – new ways of working in the widest sense. The old buildings suffered from a lack of investment, which in turn impinged on productivity. We recognised cultural issues in the DSA – our sickness levels were worse than the national average of 15 days in the Civil Service, and we knew that the old buildings and old management cultures not only allowed them but perpetuated them. There was negativity before the move, a resistance to change. This building is changing that.'

So, six months later, has it worked? 'Yes, there's a complete change in business culture now, which can be seen in a number of different ways. The biggest thing is a huge improvement in communication; we're talking to each other. There's more of a community – people can now put faces to names of colleagues with whom they had regular dealings, but had never met. The central atrium area, for relaxation and informal meetings, gets people away from the desks from time to time and aids productivity. Everybody knows everybody.'

'The open plan layout, laid out in clusters, has also been a major benefit. The visibility of the nine directors is now high, part of the open plan. Hierarchy exists, but people are approachable now, they're part of the team, everybody gets the same workstation. In the past the Civil Service gave you a different chair, sometimes even a different carpet, according to your grade. The old culture was driven from the top – you've got to be firm to change embedded culture, and the change we've achieved here has been driven by our Chief Executive, Rosemary Thew.'

We were keen to explore the cost neutral aspect of The Axis. After all, this is an impressive space, fitted out to a high standard. Facilities Manager Rik Thirlwall offered a few examples of how an intelligent proactive FM strategy can reduce costs, and ultimately be demonstrably lower than planned budgets over the 15 year minimum lifecycle of the facility. 'We have an integrated system which can provide a great deal of useful information,' Rik tells us. 'For example, we operate a super-flexi time system with no core hours, yet we can accurately track occupancy levels – so when ►►►►



department requests 10 more workstations, then we know exactly what their actual needs are. Our systems include intelligent lighting, movement sensors and so on which save significant energy costs. In the last six months we've reduced the number of printers from 148 to nine, saving a million sheets of paper, and saved many

thousands of pounds on day delegate costs from when we had meetings in hotels.'

'Everything we specified for the fit-out is guaranteed for 15 years, so, spread over 15 years, the cost of high quality well designed furniture is very low,' adds Peter Grant.

'It's cost neutral because we calculate the lifecycle costs, the rationalisation of the

building estate, the IT (including video conferencing),' notes Roz Groves. 'It's about improvement, so naturally we made a business case.'

It is apparent in the specification that products which are durable, functional and well designed have been selected with care. There are no fripperies, but quality, discreet style is everywhere. It is noticeable that product longevity is backed by well established service pedigrees. Herman Miller's Abak workstations are teamed with CBS monitor arms and Humanscale's Liberty chairs. Maine filing, Optima partitioning and InterfaceFLOR carpeting feature throughout the light and airy space, banishing assumptions about the type of office a public sector body might occupy.

Clearly the design and delivery of the environment was the result of a well coordinated team. Working with Grant Thorp (who designed the impressive lighting solution as well as the interior and workplace) were base build architects Marchini Curran and project managers Lambert Smith Hampton. This is an appealing, well detailed space where time has been taken to provide a really well thought through solution to the issues that faced the DSA.

It is in the area of sustainability that the scheme is particularly impressive –





intelligently blending legal requirements with proactive, functional design to aid the cost neutral objective. The most is made of available daylight, with user friendly glare control in the form of Silent Gliss Triscreen blinds with 3% openness on the south side of the building and 5% openness to the north. This form of shading also reduces



solar gain. The custom designed lighting scheme, conforming to CIBSE Lighting Guidelines 7, maintains a level of over 45,000 luminaires per fitting. Zoned lighting, with separate controls, is used; while infrared motion detectors for automatic lighting control have been installed in washroom areas and meeting rooms. Indeed, each permanent workstation is positioned within seven metres of natural light, while high efficiency fittings with built in sensors are used throughout.

Apart from the lighting, the design is as green as they come: ranging from the use of Ecosil mineral paint, through to rubber flooring, recycled kitchen and washroom worktops and the use of floor grommets to avoid wasted cutting of floor tiles.

What this case study drums home is the value of intelligent design specification to support an organisation's cultural and business objectives.

This isn't design for design's sake, but a clear understanding of the bottom line and how to maximise potential.

During our visit to Nottingham we were struck by the real objectives of a real organisation faced with difficult issues. The real drivers for the DSA came down to cost and culture – and this scheme met those complex challenges head on.

And won with style ●

essential ingredients

Client:	• Driving Standards Agency
Interiors and Workplace Design Consultant:	• grant thorp 01926 485058
Project Manager:	• Lambert Smith Hampton 0121 237 2319
Base Build Architect:	• Marchini Curran 0115 947 4020
Main Contractor:	• Ibex Interiors 0121 212 3101
Systems Furniture:	• Herman Miller (through Workstation) 020 7250 0400
Storage & Filing:	• Maine 01932 260411
Task Seating:	• Humanscale 020 7566 7990
Joinery:	• Beacon Woodcraft 01922 613255
Loose Furniture:	• Orangebox, Vitra, Kusch, Allermuir
Flooring:	• InterfaceFLOR 01274 690690
Partitioning:	• Optima 01494 492600