





▶▶▶▶▶ ‘This is a law firm that avoids the mistakes of bureaucratic corporate cultures and encourages its people to contribute.

‘DWF is a leading national law firm. We provide a full range of legal services to businesses and individuals, and our client base ranges from privately owned entrepreneurial companies to large multi-national organisations.’

Karl went on to explain DWF’s recent growth, which has been exponential to say the least. ‘The foundations of the firm go back to the 1970’s, when based in

Liverpool, we established ourselves as market leaders in the insurance sector. The firm evolved and grew. With a headcount of over 950, including 127 partners, DWF is ranked as one of the largest in the North West. Growth has been particularly rapid over the last three years – in fact we’ve added over 100 people in the last six months alone – exciting times ahead.’

Growth like this is part of DWF’s plan – to be one of the country’s top 30 law firms by 2010, and the drive is to be recognised as one that is a broad based commercial services provider.

But here’s the difference. DWF’s strategy is to achieve these aims by being a very different kind of law firm. ‘New people really want to join us, because they connect with our values of community, of sustainability, of looking after clients and our people. They’re not buzzwords either, they’re real beliefs and principles,’ adds Karl. ‘You see it in everything we do, from regional marketing campaigns with strong, consistent branding, to the way this office is designed and the way we work.’

DWF’s impressive space was designed and fitted out by TSK Group. Design Director Martin Barber-Redmore commented on the thinking behind the interior. ‘What we’ve done is helped DWF with their vision of different ways of working. It’s about collaboration, breaking down the barriers. There’s a real team community, egalitarian yet with a clear understanding of priorities. We’ve expressed hierarchies in a different way.’

‘There’s a sense of space, it’s not crammed. It’s not about ‘sweating the asset’, it’s deliberate, effective and productive,’ TSK’s joint Managing Director Andrew Burns adds. ‘DWF see the Liverpool office as core to their strategy of growth. It’s designed to attract and retain key fee earners. It’s also a high performance entity designed to help win clients.’



case study



▶▶▶▶‘Integration of the DWF brand and its values are so important,’ notes Martin. ‘The brand has been refined, so the external marketing is focused on getting people to buy into what DWF stands for.’

It’s clear that there were significant change management issues to be addressed by the new Liverpool offices. Quite apart from growth that had been achieved organically and by merger, the new space offered estate rationalisation as DWF moved from outdated premises in Victorian buildings. ‘The move was a big leap culturally,’ says Andrew. ‘The feel, the quality, the space – all these things were massive changes – but Andrew Leatherland wanted the new offices to be more than just about physical change. He wanted the space to deliver a vision of collaboration. People are asked how they want to behave in this space.’

Guided by Karl Warmbold and Martin Barber-Redmore, we tour DWF’s impressive new offices. 45,000 sq ft is spread over three floors of the building, with examples and details of DWF’s vision and values everywhere. Take for example the seventh floor reception area and client suites. Strong branding on arrival is complemented by an array of subtle finishes and detailing. Dashes of walnut and limestone are appropriately businesslike yet set off by the slightly retro light fittings, furniture and organic shapes of the initial waiting area.

A bevy of meeting rooms is slightly angled to offer an element of protection and minimise traffic noise. As Martin points out: ‘You can’t see the doors, but you can see the identity and that business is being done.’ The unusual, sometimes off-kilter sometimes organic, layout creates ‘little cubby holes’, areas for brief impromptu meetings – but more to the point, makes DWF feel like a different kind of law firm from the moment of entry. Client work spaces are managed concierge style, effortlessly blending a boutique hotel-like feel with a business like atmosphere. There’s a chic restaurant, complete with its ‘surfboard’ high counter, with a totally non-segregated, informal but high quality air, impressive dividable training rooms with high spec AV, breakout lounges with full IT connectivity and the more formal completion room. This is a space where clients are welcomed and encouraged to drop in, work, use all the services on offer – feel like they’re very much part of the team. There are too many nice touches to mention but, apart from the Squiggle chairs ▶▶▶▶



▶▶▶▶ (rarely seen outside of showrooms and design museums) a particularly nice note is set with the rotating digital portraits of DWF partners. We like the way the Managing Partner insisted that the Liverpool portraits had to be of Liverpool people, and not from other regional offices; a point of detail, but also an illustration of values.

Floors six and five accommodate about 350 people. ‘All people are provided with the best opportunity of access to natural daylight and vistas,’ explains Martin. ‘The main flexible open plan work spaces were allocated adjacent to the external envelope, and all enclosed space had full-height glazed partitioning to maximise light penetration to the deepest core spaces. We developed a blend of work settings to cater for a range of needs from team working to enclosed private space for concentrated work. As a result, many of the enclosed spaces have been defined with a ‘chameleon’ approach. This means allowing spaces to be multifunctional and flexible, thereby future-proofing expensive internal real estate and providing real choice for the people and the business as a whole. This philosophy allows everyone in the practice to choose the most appropriate space for the work required.’

It’s egalitarian, flexible and productive, with fluid, organic space planning a noticeable counterpoint to the rectilinear architecture. ‘Islands of Information’ create small havens between areas and offer a sense of discovery. Informal meeting areas, social spaces, small libraries – all reinforce the central vision of community. People are brought together in a completely naturalistic style, setting an informal yet businesslike approach.

So, we ask Karl Warmbold if it works. ‘TSK weren’t just close when they won this project – they won it by a mile. Their understanding and development of the brief was remarkable; their quirky (I don’t meant wacky) approach meant they translated our vision and values into an exceptional space. This was a fast track project, delivered on time and on budget, but they’ve done more than that. Productivity and efficiency has improved, the interest of good people joining us has increased, but for me the big thing has been the excitement of everyone from day one – suppliers, our people, our clients and even the building owners. Seeing the space, using the space as it was intended – and the buzz is still there. We wanted this office to support our vision – and the experience is exceptional.’ ●

essential ingredients

Client:	• DWF LLP
Design & Build:	• TSK Group 0161 872 0298
Furniture Supply:	• TSK Group 0161 872 0298
Systems Furniture & Task Seating:	• Herman Miller 0845 226 7202
Mobile Storage:	• Bisley 020 7436 7111
Meeting Rooms:	• Vitra 020 7608 6200 Herman Miller 0845 226 7202 Howe UK 020 8673 9777
Loose Furniture:	• Vitra 020 7608 6200 Hitch Mylius 020 8443 2616
Partitioning:	• Planet Partitioning 0800 328 9561
Flooring:	• Milliken 01942 612777 Amtico 0247 686 1400