





▶▶▶▶ inefficiently – big desks, high screens, 1:1 desk ratios – they thought they would need that sixth building by now. Since this building is a much more efficient use of space and because they are now considering to roll this concept back through the other buildings, those plans have been delayed.’

Building 5 is a 4-storey, 8,000 sq m (86,370 sq ft) administrative office building with a large central atrium, 250-seat restaurant, kitchen deli bar, coffee shop (wittily named Mega Bytes), underground car park and gymnasium/health club. Views of the campus, combined with Microsoft’s branding colours, provided the narrative for the office scheme – from earth to sky, with a colour palette moving from warm colours on the lower levels to cool colours on the upper level. The highly transparent interior of the building, with its central atrium, allows for this palette to be read as whole creating a colourful and dynamic scheme reflecting Microsoft’s culture and values.

‘One of the drivers for this job was that it had to be very, very cost-effective,’ David tells us. ‘The brief was changed part-way through. The background for this building was that it was going to be a replica of the other buildings here, with the same space planning. When they decided to do this building they also decided to be a little smarter about it, make better use of the space. Halfway through the process the whole thing was put on hold, the interior design was re-tendered, a new contractor was brought in, so we came on board with

the basic shell and Cat A design, together with a new brief and new interior design scheme.’

The ground floor design, incorporating Mega Bytes, the restaurant and the atrium was already in place when Pringle Brandon was brought on board. We ask about the new working relationship. ‘We were in a transitional period,’ Simon recalls. ‘This was around the same time the WPA brief came out – which was developed to improve our productivity through four main pillars; increasing the identity, utilising technology, increasing the flexibility of the space and increasing collaboration. Because we are Microsoft (and we have the technology which allows us to work whilst mobile) we don’t have to be tied to our desks. I can work just as well from home and I can work just as well away from my desk. We obviously do a lot of things electronically here.

‘If I don’t need to work from here, then I won’t – I’ll work from home. I have a healthy work/life balance. If I come to the office then I must be coming here for a reason, and that reason is predominantly to meet people. So we have more of these breakout areas, formal meeting areas, informal meeting areas – where we’ve taken away barriers and left them open and visible. We’ve introduced a lot more flexibility of meeting space and ability to work. We have 54MB wireless here and we can work anywhere. The only thing we haven’t got wireless is power!’

‘You’ll see a lot of guys here walking around with their laptops. My PC is also my phone. We have the ability to work wherever we feel like working.’

This is not, of course, the case with the rest of the campus, although David is quick to point out that study of these buildings and how they work has provided inspiration for building 5. ‘People used to queue up with laptops to use the atrium – to sit on the sofa – to do work, to have meetings. So you could tell people had a preference for using much more fluid and casual working spaces. They wanted that variety.’

To address this, during the redesign department heads, key staff and executives were canvassed in order to profile jobs and working styles under the new Microsoft Workplace Advantage strategy. The space allocation program Workplace Wizard was then used to establish the day-to-day space utilisation required. Concept layouts, illustrations and mock-ups were then presented to department representatives. A change management process, making use of the staff intranet, was put in place to manage expectations and help staff adapt to a new way of working.

‘Often we find clients are very forward thinking,’ David tells us, ‘but are actually held back by their own people and by how far their imagination will go. To some people, new ways of working means going open plan. What was great about this organisation was that they didn’t want to be tied to a desk and they wanted to incorporate all kinds of new technology and ideas. It was a great opportunity to push the boundaries and be creative, albeit within the budget and the Microsoft framework. This was not about creating wacky new furniture or design that we couldn’t procure next month or next year. This is really a ‘kit of parts’ that can be moved around and is completely adaptable.’

The remodelled Building 5 now brings together approximately 700 staff from three existing departments in Building 2. A managed desk-sharing policy enables more intensive use of the building’s 54,000 sq ft office space and improves communication. The building’s original design allowed for a density of 1 person/10 sq m, or 540 staff, but desk sharing ratios varying from 1:1 up to 1:2 now increase this potential utilisation to 840 staff. The promotion of flexible working here is extremely impressive.

The fit-out also provides a range of spaces with their own identity – all supported by the wireless technology of course. It goes without saying that ▶▶▶▶▶▶▶▶▶▶



▶▶▶▶ technology is critical to Microsoft’s working practices and access to information is paramount. The aforementioned (and quite incredible) wireless connectivity is even available throughout the landscaped external areas and the crèche.

Workspace areas feature moveable bench-style workstations with integrated technology for efficiency, ease of configuration and to enable short, ad-hoc meetings. The open plan environment supports individual working while promoting communication and collaborative working throughout each floor. ‘We’ve tried to keep things as open as possible throughout,’ David continues, ‘so everybody’s got plenty of daylight and can see through windows. Keeping it light, bright and airy was part of the overall concept.’

A range of meeting room styles has been used for both internal and external facing meetings. Neighbourhood Zones include collaborative spaces with mobile furniture for team meetings while telephone booths allow for confidential discussions and conference calls. Microsoft’s Live Meeting

and fantastic Roundtable software applications enable video conferencing between offices.

The Village zones provide a choice of transparent glass pods for boardroom-style meetings or product showcasing, and project rooms with writeable glass boards and partitioning to accommodate team discussions and presentations.

Focus rooms are furnished with small meeting tables or work benches for short ad-hoc meetings while domestic-style lounge meeting rooms provide an alternative setting. Flexible, standing meeting rooms support short team discussions and large informal staff gatherings.

Enclosed areas have glazed fronts to provide visual continuity between spaces and optimise use of natural and artificial light. Open vistas within the building have been used to reinforce the different space configurations and enhance collaboration.

Privacy across glass fronts is provided by means of applied graphics that incorporate the Microsoft brand. Enclosed spaces are lined with fabric to enhance acoustics and

ensure confidentiality while injecting colour and reinforcing the brand. Carpet colours delineate and differentiate working areas.

Despite the fact that the building was originally constructed before 2006, it nevertheless exceeds the new Part L regulations, with a carbon performance rating 32% better than the notional building requirement at the time. The project has also achieved a BREEAM ‘very good’ rating.

Another rating comes from Microsoft staff members themselves, Simon can reveal. ‘We get ‘visitors’ from the rest of the campus who come to work here because of the way we are able to work.’ – the building is open to all to use, it is a shared resource.

As a testimony to the impact and effectiveness of the facility, the project recently won a BCO award for best workplace fit-out for the SW England & Wales region, beating off some stiff competition.

Finally, to reinforce the point that we have been fortunate enough to meet with an extremely forward-thinking organisation here, we should mention that Microsoft actually presented to Pringle Brandon before the leading practice presented to Microsoft! Word! ●

essential ingredients

Client:	• Microsoft
Design:	• Pringle Brandon 020 7466 1000
Systems Furniture & Storage:	• Steelcase 020 7421 9000
Carpets:	• Milliken 01942 826073
Task Seating:	• Herman Miller 0845 226 7202
Breakout Seating:	• Orangebox 020 7837 9922 Vitra 020 7608 6200
Glazed Partitioning:	• Optima 01494 492600
Lighting:	• Zumtobel 020 8589 1800
Meeting Room Tables:	• Haworth 020 7324 1360
Meeting Seats / Stools:	• Boss 01384 455570
Mobile Tables:	• Kusch 020 7336 7561
Occasional Tables:	• Allermuir 01254 682421