

A modern office interior featuring a white countertop with a wooden base. A potted plant sits on the counter. In the background, there is a glass door with a decorative pattern and a wooden door. A gold-colored pendant light hangs from the ceiling.

From Spaces to *Sanctuaries*:

A wellbeing guide



Contents

1. Introduction
2. Purposeful Lighting Design
3. Aural Architecture
4. Biophilic Design
5. Human Centered Design and Design Thinking
6. Inclusive Office Design

Introduction

Office wellbeing has stepped into the spotlight, affirming its indispensable role in the modern workspace.

The pandemic sharply highlighted the need for a workspace that nurtures and supports the wellbeing of those who inhabit it. Now, in a time where the work/life balance conversation dominates, employees are demanding more from their workplaces and are not willing to compromise. A 2022 C-Suite study conducted by Deloitte discovered that 57% of employees are considering quitting their jobs in favour of one that better supports their wellbeing.

It is time for office space to undergo a radical transformation and become compassionate environments that put the needs of its team first. From reasonably simple design components to structural and architectural elements, this guide will lay out how you can harness to create an office that is happy, productive and well.

So, whether you're looking for a complete overhaul, are moving to a new office, or want to add a few finishing touches, this is the office wellbeing toolkit you've been looking for.



Purposeful lighting design is not merely a trend; it's a fundamental pillar in the creation of workspaces that nourish the *mind* and body.

Whilst the days of energy-draining fluorescent-lit cubicles may be over, there still needs to be a greater understanding of the methodology behind purposeful lighting design. Studies show that good lighting can create a space that illuminates workspaces, uplifts mood, enhances cognitive ability and regulates a team's sleeping patterns.

There has never been more of a focus on the importance of employee wellbeing. In order to improve the employee experience, the approach to wellbeing must be holistic.

What Impact Does Ineffective Lighting Have on Employee *Wellbeing*?



A recent study found that 78% of employees surveyed noted that access to natural light and views improves their overall happiness and wellbeing. And 47% of employees admitted they felt tired or very tired thanks to the absence of natural light or a window at their office.

Exposure to natural light gives us the essential nutrient, Vitamin D, and helps keep our circadian rhythms in check, our innate internal process regulating our sleep-wake cycles. A confused circadian rhythm can negatively impact our sleeping patterns, decrease our alertness and cause problems with memory and decision-making abilities. Just 15 minutes of exposure to natural light can help to trigger the release of endorphins, also known as 'happy hormones'.



How to Create ‘Good’ Office Lighting:

If you're designing a new office, considering how to maximise the natural light the space offers should be an integral part of the design. However, if you're in an existing office space, there are still plenty of ways to let natural light pour in.



Mirrors	Place mirrors opposite natural light sources like windows, as they reflect the light and spread it across the office.
Furniture	Avoid dark furniture that blocks light from parts of the room.
Skylights	If your office is windowless, consider installing skylights in the ceiling.
Biodynamic lighting	Set up biodynamic lighting, which replicates the variations of daylight and sunlight through an artificial light system.
Desks	Desks should be placed in either a north or south-facing position to minimise direct sunlight impacting
Decorating	Opt for a lighter colour palette that reflects light rather than absorbs it.
Walls	Replace partition walls with windows to help spread natural light throughout the office.





Aural Architecture:
creating a space that
minimises noise
annoyance, increases
your team's *productivity*,
and boosts wellness by
harnessing the power
of good acoustics.

What is Aural Architecture?

Acoustics concern the science behind sound and its impact on objects, aural architecture extends this science to its impact on human behaviour and emotion. Research shows that anything above 50 decibels can cause an increase in stress levels, and anything over 55 decibels makes it impossible for humans to concentrate.

How to Improve the Aural Architecture of Your Office:

Our Design Director, Lisa McLeod, works closely with all AW Spaces clients on their requirements, including when it comes to the sound design of a space. These are her recommendations on what to look out for when it comes to aural architecture.

Understand the Needs of the Office

“You really have to dig down with the client. Your boss’s view of a good acoustic room will be completely different from yours. What’s acceptable to you? At AW Spaces, we make it clear to the client what can be achieved balanced with what’s acceptable to them.”

Avoid ‘Acoustic-Washing’ Products

“People claim that they’ve got an acoustic product, which actually doesn’t do anything. Like felt panels, they’re a lovely product visually made of recycled bottles and plastics. It does a tiny bit to help, but not a huge amount.”

Utilise Soft Furnishings

“Any kind of absorbent banquet seating is great. You get decent acoustic thickness with those types of furnishings.”



Identify Sound Leaks

“You can have the best room in the world, and then you pierce it with an air conditioning unit; it’s broken. Or if you have doors with no seals, sound just travels completely over it.”

Start with Sound Masking

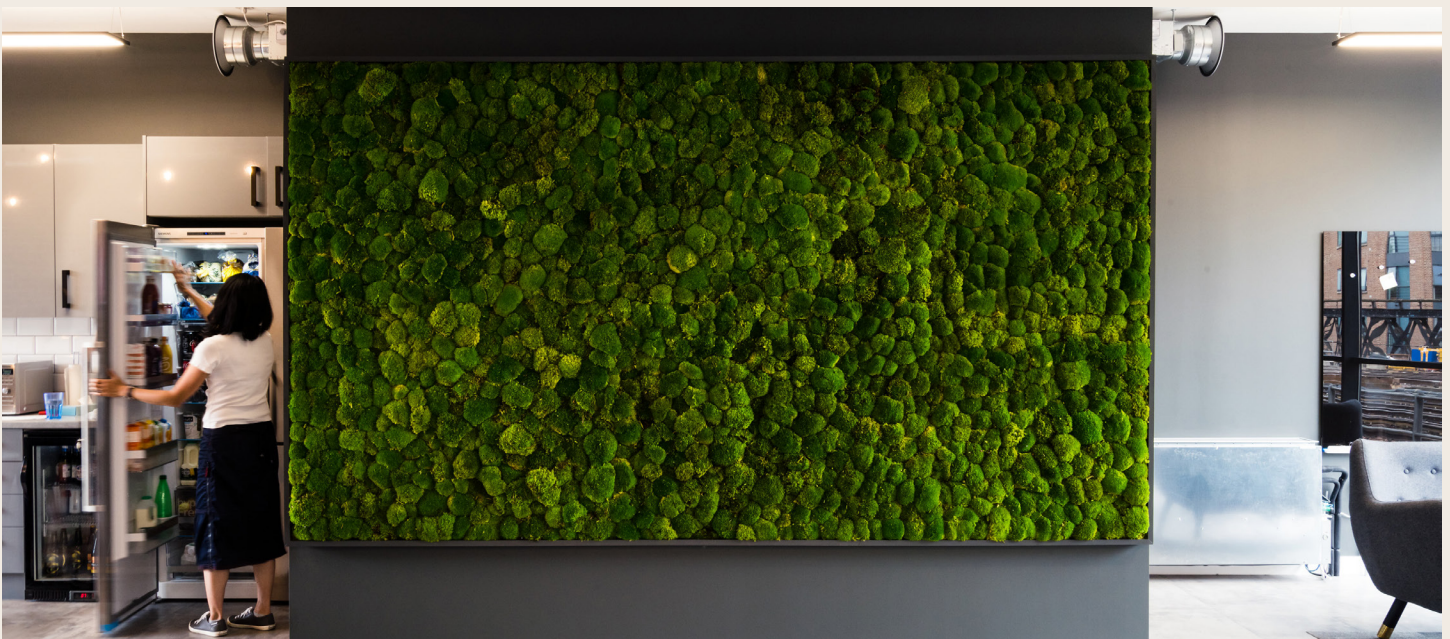
“Sound Masking is where you create a background mimicking noise using certain frequencies. It’s a speaker system you can install in a room that goes on with the problem noise and tunes it out of the room.”

When asked to imagine a place where you feel calm and at peace, it's likely that your brain will conjure up images of nature. In fact, 90% of us will picture a natural setting when asked, according to research from Mocha. In a world that is becoming increasingly urbanised, our connection with nature is becoming more and more detached.

Spending time in nature is an innate part of our humanness; research shows that it can improve mental health issues, reduce loneliness and encourages us to be more active.

The word Biophilia describes the human tendency to commune with nature. It has recently become an industry buzzword, but the importance of incorporating biophilic design principles into a workspace is genuine. Biophilic design brings the natural world inside and enables human connection with nature, even in an office.

Harnessing the power of biophilic design can transform your team's wellbeing, productivity and innovation. The Human Spaces report, *The Global Impact of Biophilic Design in the Workplace*, found that those who worked in offices with natural greenery saw a 15% rise in productivity over three months, and levels of creativity were 15% higher than the levels reported by those who work in environments devoid of nature.



Biophilia can be a relatively simple design principle to bring into your office, and the benefits of these modest actions can be huge. Don't think that you are creating a biophilic office by placing a single potted plant on a desk. To authentically gain the power of biophilia, actions should be considered and intentional.

Natural Views	While you may not be able to control what is on the other side, even just placing desks with access to windows will help. And if the view is of greenery or water, that's even better.
Bring in Life	One of the most cost-efficient biophilic essentials is incorporating life in the office design. Think plants, living walls, flowers, water features, or even a fishtank, all of these will have an immediate effect on your team.
Natural Analogues	This is a term given to manmade items that mimic nature. This could include artwork, natural patterns and architectural structures. Opt for furniture and textures that are based on organic shapes and building materials that emulate nature.
Accent Colours	Whilst there's nothing wrong with a bold splash of colour, research has shown that using colours associated with nature (brown, green, blue etc.) helps to significantly reduce levels of stress.
Natural Light	As previously mentioned, light has a serious impact on our office environment. Wherever it's possible, natural light should flood in. Install larger windows, or skylights if your office is blocked in.

Human Centred
Design is a creative
problem-solving
approach built on
empathy that can be
adopted within any
design process.

There is no question that the introduction of technology into the workplace has radically transformed and improved the way we work, but with the increase of digitisation comes with it a loss in human interaction. The lack of face-to-face moments that comes with technological advancements can cause employees to feel isolated, impacting productivity and the risk of blurring the boundaries between personal and professional lives, which can cause burnout.

Design thinking methods are used when creating something new, combining the human need with the feasibility of the product. Human Centred Design focuses on the human experience of the problem and uses that experience to iterate and fine-tune the solution.

The combination of design thinking and the Human Centred Design process can look something like this:

Inspiration	The discovery of the problem motivates a search for a solution. Designers may immerse themselves into the environment they are innovating to help pinpoint solutions before issues arise.
-------------	---

Ideation	This is where creative problem-solving begins. Designers may synthesise situations to then develop and test ideas.
----------	--

Implementation	This is an integral component of the HCD philosophy. Prototypes are initially introduced, and then learnings are taken and applied from the test. Embracing failure and reiterating prototypes is crucial to fostering empathy in the solution.
----------------	---



By designing an office incorporating Human Centred Design, you can seamlessly combine the technological innovations that improve our workflow with a human-centric design that accommodates the needs of its people and makes them feel valued. Modern and progressive human-centric office design will craft workplaces around the people rather than the people around the work.

Flexibility and
Choice

Provide your teams with options, from collaborative spaces and dedicated 'quiet zones' for deep work.

Layout

Consider the flow between different 'zones' and how this may impact the employee experience.

Aural
Architecture

Consider the impact of different noises of the office and how these can be minimised.

Wayfinding

Clear wayfinding can significantly help improve the experience of employees, especially neurodivergent members of the team.

Alleviate Stress

Creating breakaway spaces that are nothing to do with working will allow team members to access calm environments.

Biophilia and
Natural Light

Both lower stress and anxiety, boost cognition, and
lower work-related sickness.

Furniture

Ergonomic furniture, such as adjustable chairs
and desks, will not only provide comfort but also
mitigates the risk of musculoskeletal injuries.



Inclusive design
champions the
understanding that
everyone works
differently, and *celebrates*
these differences in the
design process.

An estimated one in seven people in the UK are considered to be neurodivergent, equating to 15-20% of the population, and the real number is likely much higher. Some examples of neurodivergent conditions are autism, ADHD, dyslexia and dyspraxia, but there is a long list of lesser-known conditions.

With the understanding that not everyone works in the same way, these differences should be championed and elevated in design. Workspace design must incorporate inclusive design principles to ensure that the space itself advocates for its neurodiverse employees, empowering them to reach their full potential when they're in the office.

AW Spaces, Senior Designer Marti Lee has worked on numerous spaces incorporating neurodiversity in design and understands its importance. As she tells us, "Neurodiversity is a strength, not a weakness. By designing for neurodiversity, we can create spaces that celebrate and support all individuals' unique abilities and perspectives."

How to Create a More Inclusive Space

Sensory Design Elements

Place kitchens away from work areas, minimise noise with acoustic baffling and use LED bulbs instead of fluorescents.

Natural Light and Neutral Colours

These can help promote a sense of calm and allow those with sensory processing challenges to focus better.

Clear Wayfinding

Modern design should create clear lines of sight and incorporate simple, smooth shapes and clear zoning structures to enhance effective wayfinding.

Define Work Zones

When designing your workspace, consider defining different zones and areas that facilitate other working methods, including hyper-focus areas, stimulation spaces and respite zones.



The journey towards a holistic office wellbeing involves understanding and implementing key design principles.

It's about placing the physical, emotional, and cognitive needs of employees at the core of office design. It's about nurturing the varied strengths of a diverse team, acknowledging different working styles, and ensuring the environment supports this.

By championing these approaches, companies can create office spaces that foster not just productivity and innovation but also wellbeing, happiness, and a strong sense of community. Remember, an office is not just a place of work - it's an ecosystem that can inspire, motivate, and uplift.

Get in touch with us

hello@awspaces.co.uk • 020 3988 0057