
The Design District's new post-pandemic leasing model

Could the 'On/Off office' be the future of flexible working?



Helen Arvanitakis is a leading voice on the challenges that creative businesses are facing. Photograph by Taran Wilkhu.

Responding to the disruptions of coronavirus and lockdown's effect on work culture, Design District director Helen Arvanitakis argues that many businesses may not be

able to return to the status quo of full-time office leasing when restrictions are lifted – and others might not need to.

To cater to the needs of such organisations, the soon-to-launch creative quarter on London's Greenwich Peninsula is pioneering a new approach to leasing space in line with the now-proven viability of flexible working, and the growing demand for a new relationship with office spaces and landlords. Alongside its full-time studio and whole-building rental options, the Design District is proposing to introduce an innovative new leasing model, built on flexibility.

Our mode of work has changed forever

In the last few months, the world has learned that nothing can be taken for granted anymore, least of all the way we work.

“There have been changes to our daily routines: yoga at midday, perfecting the home-brewed coffee, wearing slippers to client meetings... These tiny adjustments on an individual level are just a small part of a larger paradigm shift for UK businesses as a whole. As they look to what the future holds for them, a growing number are realising traditional leasing models aren't fit for purpose, and discovering that a new way is possible.”

– Helen Arvanitakis, Design District director

Even before COVID-19, flexible and remote working were gaining traction, and a movement towards more adaptable workspace leasing was taking shape. The pandemic has dramatically fast-tracked these trends, and businesses in numerous sectors are now seriously asking themselves: 'What kind of space do we need – and want – to be working from? And *how often* do we need it?'

Through adapting to lockdown, many small businesses are now realising that they do not need a full-time office space. However, full remote working is not a long-term solution either. Some people cannot find quiet space in their homes, and others rely on in-person interactions to develop professional relationships.

We still need spaces in which to meet, discuss, experiment and build together, but we can now be more conscious about how and when we use them. In the new world of work, these shared spaces will have to be increasingly flexible and agile.

Welcome to the 'On/Off office'



The Design District has changed its plans in response to Covid-19 to better serve the creative industry.

From the beginning of the project, the Design District team knew that if they were going to develop a purpose-built workplace for the creative industries, it would need to be responsive to the particular needs of the sector. This inherent flexibility has enabled the project to adapt quickly to the demands of our new post-Covid reality.

Aiming to make everything as convenient and flexible as possible, the Design District has developed an innovative new leasing concept: 'the On/Off office'. This gives tenants options to rent office space for one to three days a week, with the benefit of an 'active' landlord on call to respond quickly with assistance and advice. 'On' when you need it; 'off' when you don't.

A range of rental options will be available to ensure maximum flexibility, enabling creative companies of all sizes to lease workspaces for one to three days per week. The Design District team will ensure the workspace is fully set up for the tenant business before they arrive, including bespoke IT provision, so it truly feels like their own permanent workspace – only without the hassle or commitment of maintaining one, and at a fraction of the cost.

Businesses and individuals will still have access to full-time workspace rental if they choose, but this approach offers potential 'On/Off' tenants physical access to the Design District's buzzing creative community as well as the freedom to embrace the possibilities of the new working paradigm. They'll be able to enjoy a healthier work/life balance, lose less time to commuting, and have greater opportunity to

attend to family needs and 'life admin' such as arranging time at the gym or dealing with domestic appliances breaking down, without having to take time off.

The Design District's new model offers all of the benefits of a permanent space, removing as many of the restrictions as that come with being tied to one.



Following social-distancing guidelines, Design District construction has restarted on the Greenwich Peninsula site.

Notes to editors

For more information about the Design District and its pioneering workspace provision, or for interviews with director Helen Arvanitakis, please contact Rupert Evans-Harding at designdistrict@zetteler.co.uk.

Helen Arvanitakis

Helen Arvanitakis has a 15+ year career as a manager, strategist and business-development specialist in the design sector. Having both worked as independent consultant and spent a decade at the forefront of Tom Dixon's Design Research Studio, Helen has cultivated particular expertise in the areas of people, process and productivity, and now helps businesses improve efficiency and profitability while

getting the best from their creative teams. As Director of the Design District, she is masterminding the creation of a visionary new working community for London's creative industries.

Design District

At the heart of Greenwich Peninsula, the Design District is London's first permanent, purpose-built hub for the creative industries. A collection of 16 unique buildings designed by a team of eight leading architects, the District is designed to support an ecosystem of 1,800 creatives, encompassing individual makers, ambitious start-ups, ground-breaking enterprises and industry leaders.

Opening 2021

In response to the varied disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Design District team has rescheduled the official opening of the district to 2021. This is to ensure that the construction is completed to the highest of standards as well as allowing sufficient provision for social distancing and safety that can be implemented in each workspace. A phased programme of opening will begin next year, with tenant businesses moving into their workspaces in controlled stages. Further updates will be made in due course.

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