



# **Commercial Refurbishment Solutions Ltd.**



**Office and commercial  
refurbishment specialists**

# CHOOSING THE RIGHT OFFICE SPACE: A CHECKLIST

A guide to evaluating, negotiating and renting office space that's right for your business.

## CHECKLIST

Finding the perfect office, in the perfect location, can have a huge impact on your business. With the average length of a commercial property lease at 5-10 years, finding the perfect space is crucial; nobody wants to be stuck in the Wrong office for any amount of time, let alone 10 years!

If you've been tasked with finding your new office space, it may seem like a daunting task at first. With many different people to please and dozens of options to consider, you may not know Where to begin. By asking the right questions from the Very beginning you'll be able to find the office space that is inspiring, cost effective and right for your business.

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## Location, location, location

You've identified office space in your dream area, but location is about more than just the neighborhood, there's more to consider. Have you thought about the other things that can make your new Workplace a success or a living nightmare?

### Public transport

- If you're in London you will need to consider the closest underground stations. Which lines are nearby? Are there alternative stations in case of closures? In addition to the Tube, check the nearest mainline station and how frequent the trains are.

### Planned closures

- Road, rail and tubes may all be subject to closures which could affect both your staff and Visitors during their journeys to your new office. Are there any long term closures planned? Tube and rail stations can close for years if there are major upgrades planned. Check before you sign on the dotted line.

### What is the commute like?

- A long or stressful journey can put employees in a bad mood before they've even reached the office. Consider the journey into Work for your staff. If you are relocating to a different area you may want to consider the impact on employees' commutes.

### Traffic patterns

- If your staff or Visitors Will be driving into the office, consider local traffic patterns. When are the busy times? How will this affect the journey to your new office? Is the proposed location in a notoriously congested area? Take a test drive to and from the office during rush hour.

### Image/reputation of the area

- The reputation of the local area can have a big impact on the Way potential clients see your business. Your staff and Visitors Will feel safer visiting your office if the area has a good reputation.

### Neighbors

- Consider your potential neighbours, in and out of the building. Are they competitors? Could they cause problems? A 24/7 call center should be cautious of a nightclub next door, for example.
- Is the proposed office space close to residential areas? You may need to consider this when carrying out the Works and your local authority may insist on a noise test report.

### Local labor market

- If you are relocating to a new area you may want to consider the local labor market, especially if you are not near a large city.

### Taxis

- If your business requires staff or Visitors to travel regularly to and from the office, you may need to consider the quality and availability of local taxi companies.

### Competition

- Consider the location of your competitors; are they nearby? Will this pose problems? Are they located in an area that has a better or worse reputation?

### Clients

- Your staff may need to regularly Visit clients' offices (and Vice Versa) so you may need to consider this When finding your new office space. If your new office is far from your target market, your sales team may spend more time on the road than with clients.

### Couriers

- As With local taxi companies, nearby courier companies may also be a consideration, especially if you are looking for space outside of a city.

### Security of neighborhood

- Employees spend in excess of 8 hours a day in the office, so having a secure neighborhood where your employees feel safe should be a priority. Consider the route staff will need to travel to and from local transport, especially if travelling by foot.

### Proximity to emergency services

- Nobody wants to think about serious accidents at Work, but it is possible you may need to call out the emergency services. Think about how close the nearest hospital, fire Station and police stations are.

### Client entertainment

- What's nearby? Will you need to design in client hosting areas in your new space?

### Transport to airports

- Do you (or your clients) have a global presence? Are your staff likely to need to travel abroad for business? Locating far from an airport can Waste precious time and cause hassle for your staff.

### Food

- Take a look at the local area; are there enough places to eat? How far will staff need to travel during their lunch break? Are there suitable places for both dining in and take away?

### Local amenities

- Life carries on when we are in the office; your employees will have errands to run after work or during lunch. Find an office close to a bank, pharmacy and shopping area and your staff will thank you forever.

### Construction

- Are there any current or planned construction projects nearby? These can not only be unsightly, but also cause noise and air pollution. Major Works can change a nice view into an eyesore.

### Hotels

- Will Visitors need to stay overnight? Consider how close the nearest hotel is to your office, and the possible travel time.

### Other offices

- If your employees need to travel between offices, you may want to consider the proximity of your proposed new space to your other sites and how easy the journey will be.

## The office space itself

Before signing on the dotted line, it's important to know exactly what you're getting yourself into with your new office space. Careful consideration can help iron out any potential problems before they occur.

### Access at night and Weekend

- If your staff are likely to need access to the building outside of normal office hours, you'll need to consider how easy it is for them to do so. Is there 24 hour access and security? Will you need to implement any extra security measures?

### Age of building

- Older buildings can not only bring with them issues relating to maintenance, but also possible restrictions to building Work. The landlord should be able to tell you how old the building is.

### Asbestos survey

- An asbestos survey can help you to identify and dispose of ACMs (asbestos containing materials) safely and securely. Find out if an asbestos survey has previously been carried out or if the building has a high chance of containing ACMs.

### Building manager

- Find out who is managing the day-to-day operations, security and services of the building. Is it a credible firm? Ask other tenants about the quality of service.

### Building regulations

- Does the space meet current building regulations, or will certain things need updating, for example lighting, heating and Ventilation systems? This can add a substantial amount to your final cost, so make sure you check before agreeing to anything.

### Building security

- Nobody likes to Work in an insecure environment and your staff is no different. How secure is the building? Do you need extra security for different areas? Have there been any recent break ins? Are windows, skylights and doors secure, or will they need to be altered upon occupation?

#### Canteen in building

- For those all-important tea breaks and power lunches, a canteen in the building can not only provide a place for staff to relax and buy lunch, but also a different environment to hold informal meetings. Is there a shared canteen or will you need to build a café in the space?

#### Contamination survey

- Has a contamination survey been done on any land associated with the property? Check beforehand to avoid any expensive surprises later on.

#### Cycle Park and showers

- One of the contributing factors towards a BREEAM<sup>1</sup> rating, cycle park and shower facilities provide your staff with an alternative means of transport that's not just good for them, but the environment too.

#### Disabled access

- Does the space/building meet current DDA (Disability Discrimination Act) regulations? In October 2010 the Equality Act<sup>2</sup> replaced most of the DDA; check your proposed space is up-to-date with the latest changes.

#### Disaster recovery

- Does the building have a reliable backup generator in case the main supply goes out? How will the building fare in the event of a national disaster? Consider emergency exits and the time it would take your employees to evacuate the building.

#### Drainage

- If you are planning to add kitchens or tea points, you'll need proper drainage and exhaust access. Get a survey done before you plan any Work to make sure what you want is feasible (and affordable).

#### Fire plan

- Are the fire plans up-to-date? Are there the right amount of fire exits for the amount of people? Check beforehand in case structural changes are needed.

#### Growth

Make sure you consider possible future growth. Nobody wants to undertake a large office move, only to realize another move is necessary a year later because you've been expanding rapidly. Does the new space allow for increasing staff numbers?

BREEAM is the UK's leading method of reviewing and improving the environmental performance of office buildings. For more information Visit: <http://WWW.breem.org/page.jsp?id=17>

#### Landlord plans for refurbishments

- Does the landlord have any plans to update the common areas (reception, toilets, hallways)? Get the

landlord to commit before you do.

#### Listed building

- If your building is listed, you may be severely restricted in what construction can take place. Your local authority will be able to tell you if your building is listed. Do some preliminary space planning taking the restrictions into consideration to make sure the office space still works for you.

#### Mechanical & electrical

- The last thing anyone wants is to go through a relocation project only to discover the mechanical and electrical equipment in the new space isn't up to scratch. Consider a full survey to check the current state of all equipment.

#### External noise

- Is the building on a main road, next to a railway or in an airport flight path? Does the building have sufficient double glazing? Does the space echo? Get an acoustic survey done.

#### Internal acoustics

- A noisy office is one of the most common complaints from staff. Check the acoustics of the internal space. An echoing space can be very uncomfortable to work in.

#### Floor plate

- Is the space on one floor or multiple storeys? Larger floor plates are more cost effective because it lessens the need for multiple tea points, copy points etc.

#### Fit factor

- Is the floor plate a perfect rectangle or oddly shaped? Irregular shaped buildings fit fewer desks and will increase your cost per employee per square foot.

#### Outside of building

- Looks matter. Consider the external image of your potential building, and what it says about your company. Are there any planned upgrades? If so, will it lead to an increase to your management charge?

#### Outward Views

- Evaluate the quality of the views outside. Good views and access to natural light reduce stress for employees. Check for any potential changes to the views to avoid disappointment later.

#### Parking

- Are there enough spaces? If your building doesn't have its own car park, is there sufficient parking nearby for employees and regular Visitors? You may wish to consider renting out several individual parking spaces for those all-important client Visits.

#### Permissions

- Consider who you'll need to gain permission from to alter any aspect of the space. From the local authority to the building manager, make sure you speak to the relevant parties beforehand.



#### Pollution

- Is the building close to a major motorway, factory or airport? Consider carrying out an air quality survey.

#### Post room

- Does the building have a post room that you can share, or will you have to install your own facilities?

#### Raised floor for cabling

- Certain types of cables will require raised flooring. If there is no raised flooring you'll have to get creative with your space planning to get data and power to your staff.

#### Reception/porter

- Will you have access to a joint reception or porter service? If not, you may need to design a reception area into the space.

#### Risk of flooding

- Nobody wants to come into the office in the morning to find the place underwater. Consider any possible flooding risks; is the plumbing up to scratch? Is the office in a flood risk area? Will you need extra insurance?

#### Services

- Air conditioning, plumbing, heating and Waste disposal Will all need careful consideration, but are often overlooked. Are any of these joint services with other tenants? Will you need to provide any of these yourselves?

#### Lifts

- Older lifts can be easily re-skinned to look like new, but underneath can be knackered. Find out the real age.

#### Size

- How many people can the space hold? Will it be a tight squeeze, or need careful space planning to fit your staff?

#### Storage

- Have you calculated your storage needs for the new space? Calculating the cost per square foot

for your storage may encourage you to consider offsite storage or electric archiving.

Which floor/s will you be on?

- In a multi-storey building, the floor you're on can have all sorts of implications. Lower floors can cause privacy issues and can be noisy next to busy streets. If your staff are split over several floors will this affect communication, costs or security?

Who is the landlord?

- Are they located in another country, or nearby? Will they be able to react to your needs quickly and effectively? It's worth finding out as you may need quick answers when it comes to getting approvals for any alterations to your space.

Windows

- Double glazing may seem like a given now, but many older buildings may need upgrading. This could add a substantial amount to your fit out cost. If you are considering street level windows, you may want to consider Vulnerability to Vandalism. Do they provide enough privacy to your business?

## Environment and sustainability <sup>3</sup>

Not only can a sustainable office interior save you money on your energy bill, it can also boost motivation, raise productivity and lower absenteeism amongst staff. Consider the points below and start saving money from day 1.

Energy efficiency

- When selling or renting a building, the landlord is required by law to provide an EPC (Environmental Performance Certificate). This will give you clues as to how energy efficient the building is.
- Check the energy efficiency of the heating, Ventilation and air conditioning systems. Get an idea of energy costs from the landlord or if possible, previous tenants.

BREEAM

- Is the building BREEAM rated? If so, under Which Version of BREEAM? Older Versions were less stringent and won't guarantee a similar rating of the interior space.

Air conditioning

- Finding office space with a new air conditioning unit can shave a substantial amount off your final fit

out cost. Is the current air conditioning unit of a good enough standard? What would it cost to upgrade or replace? Get a mechanical and electrical survey done.

#### Double glazing

- Easily overlooked, double glazing can shave large amounts off your energy bills as well as reducing external noise.

#### Natural light

- A factor towards achieving a BREEAM rating, natural light can not only increase productivity amongst your staff, but also reduce your energy costs. Visit the space during different times of the day to assess how light penetrates the office space.

#### Sub metering

- If you can't measure it, you can't manage it. A crucial place to start when monitoring energy consumption, sub metering helps you to measure your energy use, identify areas of waste, and manage your future consumption. If not already installed, consider sub metering during the fit out stage. It will be cheaper to install during a refit than later on.

#### Thermal testing

- Have you considered thermal testing? This can show you how much heat is escaping from the building, which can have an impact on your energy bills.

#### Footprint tracker

- Is there an energy display for all to see? Footprint trackers allow you to monitor energy floor by floor, meter by meter, enabling you to identify and reduce wastage.

## IT and telecoms

Older buildings weren't designed with today's technology in mind. Thinking about the suitability of your shortlisted spaces for your IT needs can save time and money later.

#### Power

- Is the power supply sufficient to power your data center and IT equipment? A good office design and fit out company can help you to Work out how much power you'll need and carry out a load check to identify if your new space will meet your requirements.

#### Location of exchange

- How close or far away you are from the internet exchange can have an effect on your internet speed. Have your IT department investigate to avoid an ongoing problem later.

#### Data center

- Will you be locating a data center in the space? Have you considered the extra requirements needed, for example; air conditioning, security and power? Think about the size of the space you'll need for a comms room, and if there's a good place to locate it.

### Cabling

- Does the space have raised flooring? Without it laying relevant cables can be a problem. Are there enough electricity points to service desks, copiers and equipment?

## Costs

A proper budget can save a lot of stress down the road. Nobody wants to go over budget when moving offices, so have a clear idea of all costs involved beforehand to avoid surprises later on.

### Deposit

- You'll need to budget for the deposit of your new space which should be refundable at the end of the lease (minus any reasonable costs for damages).

### Energy

- The energy efficiency of the building can either increase or decrease your energy bills, so make sure you budget accordingly for this.

### Fit out costs

- Depending on the scope of works, fit out costs can vary greatly. According to the Chartered Institute of Building, going with design and build (one stop shop) for your fit out can save you 15% (as well as being 40% quicker than hiring multiple contractors).

### Furniture

- Will you be moving old furniture or buying new? Undertake a furniture audit to identify your needs before moving. Make sure your furniture fits in the space before moving in; you don't want to get to moving day and realize your large boardroom table won't fit in the room!

### Insurance

- Insurance. Nobody likes paying it, but it's a must if you want to protect your company from all kinds of possible problems. Your solicitor should be able to tell you what insurance is mandatory and what is optional.

### IT

- Moving existing IT systems, equipment and cabling can add a significant amount to your final budget, so make sure you have an idea of how much this will cost to avoid going over budget.

### Legal

- You'll need legal representation to help you get through the mountain of paperwork that comes with finding a new office space, not to mention ensuring you're complying with all related laws.
- Many landlords will make it a term of the lease that the tenant should pay the landlord's legal costs. To avoid this, make it clear from the beginning that any offer on the property or space is subject to your company not paying legal costs incurred by the landlord.

### Personnel

- Many businesses overlook personnel costs when moving offices, but they can often add a large amount to your final cost. Will you need to offer staff travel allowances?

### Removal costs

- Moving offices is an ideal time to dispose of old furniture, computers, paperwork and rubbish. It doesn't just cost to buy new office items, but to dispose of them as well so you'll need to budget for removals.

### Temporary storage

- Will you need to temporarily store any furniture or large amounts of filing? Make sure you get a quote and plan for this in your budget.

### Stationery

- Moving to a new office can be an ideal time to consider rebranding. If this isn't an option, consider your stationery that will need to be updated. Letter headed paper, business cards, email signatures, documents, Website, internal communications, outgoing invoices and any other branded merchandise will all need to be updated with your new address details.

### Business rates

- Before committing to a new property find out what your business rates are likely to be. Consider getting professional advice to check if these can be negotiated.

### Agent fees

- Make sure you budget for agent fees, these are likely to be approximately 10% of your first year's rent (excluding rent free periods), and will cover the costs of searching for properties and negotiating with the landlord.

## Negotiations

Many aspects of your move can be negotiated to save you money now and later. Knowing who to negotiate with and when is key to reducing those costs.

### Rent free periods

- Your solicitor should be able to help you negotiate rent free periods. The general rule is the longer the lease (Without an option to break), the longer the rent free period will be.

#### Service charges

- As With rent free periods, a service charge holiday can be negotiated between the tenant and landlord.
- Consider negotiating a fixed service charge before committing to the new space; you don't want to be stuck paying for the landlord's renovations!

#### Dilapidation costs

- Your landlord will require you to return your space back to its original condition when you move out, so locking the cost of this in when taking out the lease can save you money later.

#### Lease terms; length and breaks

- The terms, length and possible breaks of your lease can all be negotiated through your agent and solicitor before signing on the dotted line. Your solicitor should be able to tell you what is normal and what can be negotiated.

## Selecting a design & fit out company

At this stage, there are several things that a design & fit out company can do to help you identify the office space that will most suit your company's needs:

- Workplace appraisal - this will help you to identify how much space you need and how it should Work for your business.
- Space plans for short listed buildings - otherwise known as a 'test fit' this will give you peace of mind that the space will actually Work for your business.
- Indicative fit out cost - so you can begin to form an accurate fit out budget. Knowing how much it will cost to fit out a space can be a negotiation point for your lease.
- Concept drawings and 3D Visualizations - so you can get a feel of how the space will really look.
- Surveys - there are a number of surveys an office design and fit out company can help you with so you know exactly what you're getting into with your new space. These include mechanical and electrical, environmental, asbestos and contamination surveys.