

“OUT OF TOWN” VERSUS “CITY CENTRE” OFFICES

The “in town” “out of town” office debate is finally becoming a real issue. For the past 20 years or so the two options have coexisted. However the recent growth in out of town office development in Carlisle has started to question the viability of remaining in the city centre. The supply of new modern offices is enticing and occupiers are being forced to consider their future. The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) continues to change office environments forever – at a cost. Advancements in IT, the internet and broadband have made time of the essence and placed new demands on accessibility, speed and corporate image. This is challenging the traditional office core which must now react to keep up.

A local developer has recently upped the stakes in the Carlisle office market. Stewart Williamson has developed a 12,000 sq ft office building at Parkhouse Business Park close to the M6/M74 motorway at Junction 44. Walton Goodland are instructed as sole letting agents from which Stephen Sewell comments, *“The offices have been designed from both a practical and functional perspective and comprise two 3,000 sq ft floor plates at ground and first floor levels. These can be further split into suites of 1,500 sq ft and we are currently in negotiations with a number of potential tenants.”*

Internally, the design is completely bespoke with a blank canvas supplied ready for tenants to select their chosen layout. The standard design is however far from basic with raised floor cable access, carpet tiles, suspended ceiling with Cat 2 lighting and moveable integrated panel heating system. The offices are bright, airy and uncluttered with no radiators or perimeter trunking restricting use. Disabled access, toilet and kitchen facilities are available to all floors.

So what are the benefits of moving “out of town”? Whilst relocating to a business park is as much about image, the attraction remains ease of access, free car parking, modern state of the art facilities, aesthetic appearance, commuter friendly and disability compliant. However it equally represents prestige. Locating in an environment that is attractive to employers and employees alike that appeals to clients and competing businesses speaks volumes. It is about making a statement. It implies a company is progressive, image conscious, cutting edge and forward thinking. All of which provides for an altogether better product with rental levels ranging from £10.00 - £12.00 per sq ft depending on individual requirements.

The increased cost of which can be offset by considering the likely savings involved. Compare the modern office environment to more rapidly depreciating traditional town centre premises. For example, the savings on annual repairs, refurbishment, updating network systems, re-wiring, redecoration, old service media and plant, conversion to disabled access (ramps, lifts, toilets) and parking. Then consider the plausibility of obtaining planning permission to carry out these works in a Grade II* listed building in a Conservation Area.

That is not to say that city centre office premises do not have a future. Traditional period buildings make a bold statement unlike any other. It is also necessary for certain occupiers to locate in the Central Business District of a town or city due to the nature of their business. Accessibility to the public on foot and via bus and train services cannot be overstated. Prominent central offices with car parking are a rarity and subject to refurbishment equally attractive, especially where original features such as cornices and coving are preserved and the architectural style and appearance enhanced. Mix this with modern service media installations and creative design and a unique product is formed.

Walton Goodland are actively involved in the local and regional office market and offer a range of office premises both in and out of town. Occupiers need to consider the positives and negatives of both and property owners must learn to adapt quickly to changing market circumstances and new improved competition.

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