



HEALTH AND WELLBEING

What is it and what does it mean to property investors?

Problems relating to breathing, vision, posture and mental health are all on the rise, and research published in October 2017 by CMS states that 86% of office workers agree that the office has a significant impact on the physical and mental wellbeing of employees.

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“Stress at work has more than doubled since the 1990s at an estimated cost of £16bn per annum to the UK economy. Companies want an antidote to this.”

Harry Bradham,
AXA IM Real Assets

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As a result, effective property management is no longer simply concerned with looking after the physical asset, but it is increasingly important to provide environments within those assets to enhance the users' experience. This includes their productivity, supports their physical activity, promotes social interaction, provides access to vital services, and contributes to the health and happiness of all that use the property.

With occupiers now significantly better informed about the quality of the space in which they work, shop or spend their leisure time, and with the ability to share these views instantly via social media, property managers must have access to accurate real time data in order to influence the user experience. With this fundamental understanding of a building and the way in which it is working, property managers can ensure that they can positively control the environments which they manage.

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Along with the importance of real-time data, the need for practical assessments to understand how environments affect users is also key. Aspects such as noise levels, air quality or lighting levels are tangible and therefore measurable. Other areas are harder to define – impact on mental and physical wellbeing or an occupier's productivity – but the available data on absence, footfall, dwell time etc. can provide an initial insight into how a property performs for its occupiers. There are also numerous consequential impacts that need to be considered, which will be better understood as this field is fully explored. For example, increasing the biophilia in an office reception improves the air quality (measurable and proven) and can also lift the mood of the staff walking through, along with potentially improving productivity of the reception team working in that environment.

EVALUATING HEALTH AND WELLBEING IN COMMERCIAL PROPERTY

Unquestionably, the main driver in the growth of health and wellbeing is the emerging research across the industry that these initiatives make a difference to performance and productivity. Quite simply, people perform better in better environments, but the challenge for our clients and us as managing agents is to take existing space and enhance it in ways that will improve performance and measure those factors.

Having reviewed the two predominant standards for health and wellbeing, The Fitwel Certification System and The WELL Building Standard, there are a number of examples of their application in 'new' space – blank canvases in which the space can be adapted with the standards in mind. There are some excellent examples of best practice and for occupiers they provide a checklist of different criteria that every new fit out should be aiming to achieve. Our experience of project managing recent office refurbishment projects has shown, however, that most clients are looking to implement the most practical aspects of these on a case by case basis, rather than looking purely to achieve the overall certification which are primarily designed for occupier fit-outs rather than whole multi-let assets. We believe that if the certifications were refined further to more accurately reflect the different project scenarios, more clients would seek to obtain them.



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DEVELOPING THE WELL-BEING STANDARDS FOR MULTI-LET ASSETS

However, at present there are few examples of how these accreditations function for multi-let space, in which owners and managers have little influence on demised space but still want to achieve the same best practice accreditations for the shared space that we do control. Workman are now working with both accreditation bodies to expand on a version that focuses on multi-let property, rather than occupied space and to make the certification about landlord controlled space. As a test case, we are working with FitWel on a shared parts certification and our Environmental Manager Nick Hobbs has become an FitWel Ambassador in the process. We are also aware that not all clients may look for an accreditation, but with the experience we have gained of the process, we can pick out several areas of the checklists to make a significant difference and have an immediate positive impact on a building.

Our recent experience of implementing 'easy win, low cost' works across a number of managed shopping centres, as part of the [UKGBC Wellbeing Lab: Retail Initiative](#), clearly demonstrated a direct correlation between initiating improvements in shared spaces and a reduction in negativity. For instance, we carried out LED lighting improvements to car parks which significantly reduced energy with improved lux levels, while also aiding users to feel immediately safer; with that improved feeling of wellbeing and safety encouraging people to visit the shopping centres.

OUR ROLE AS PROPERTY MANAGERS

At the very least, any health and wellbeing initiative should make the property a place the staff prefer working in and take pride in, as we have seen with our roof garden and external planting at The Prospect Shopping Centre in Hull. Not only have we provided staff and shoppers with additional biophilia and a tranquil environment, the roof garden allotment provides food for local charities and planting for the centre at no cost to the service charge – a winning situation for all.



This retail initiative, clearly demonstrated a direct correlation between initiating improvements in shared spaces and a reduction in negativity.

Increasingly, Workman are seeking further opportunities to implement health and wellbeing initiatives across all types of managed property. For example, [Birmingham Business Park](#) presented us with numerous opportunities given the vast amount of shared outdoor space which now boasts a wide array of fitness activities throughout; ranging from open air gym equipment, a cycling club, a walking club, yoga, table tennis, woodland walks and pool bikes. Their '[What's on](#)' guide shows just how embedded health and well being is into their weekly events.



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Likewise, Crystal Peaks Shopping Centre's 'Year of Health' initiative brought together many opportunities, such as our on-site team's participation in Sheffield's 'Move More' campaign, fitness classes, step challenges, and utilising empty retail space for pop up events such as alcohol and wellness interventions.



However, we do not require external space to make health and wellbeing a feature of a property. We illustrated this across a number of central London offices in which we introduced charity bike maintenance team's into the buildings; through this initiative we engaged with local charities as well as occupiers, provided apprenticeship opportunities and encouraged tenants to cycle, overall improving fitness and health.

We have also seen how implementing innovative and [modern bicycle storage solutions](#) have been able to drastically increase the bicycle storage facilities so valued by occupiers.

Additionally, we have worked with suppliers such as Step Jockey, in which the focus was to encourage occupiers to move around buildings, through incentivising the use of stairs and looking at design solutions to promote this within the existing building. This is a great example of a collaborative approach to health and wellbeing between owner, property manager, occupiers and their staff.

More targeted approaches include [Workman's Sensory Shopping Days](#) which ran across twelve Ellandi Shopping Centres. Each centre hosted and took part in various events aimed to make the centre a more welcoming and comfortable place for people with autism and other sensory processing conditions, as well as their accompanying family and friends. The positive feedback received from shoppers was a testimony to the efforts of all involved.



WHERE TO START?

There are many areas to consider and a number of approaches to take whether working towards an accreditation or simply to adopt best practice. Our recommendation is to start by assessing what the organisation is looking to achieve – points in GRESB (in which health and wellbeing now forms a module), an accreditation, or purely to enhance the working environment of the occupiers' employees. This will then inform the decision-making process of what initiatives are best to pursue.

Workman seek to work with all our clients to integrate health and wellbeing into a holistic approach to property management and can assist with the implementation of your wellbeing strategy at an asset level.



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