



Going (anti)-viral

THERE HAVE BEEN TANGIBLE CHANGES TO THE WAY WE APPROACH THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT POST-COVID-19 WITH FRESH AIR, SPACE AND HYGIENE HIGH ON THE AGENDA.

IN THE QUEST TO PROVIDE A VIRUS-safe working environment, building ecosystems are evolving, our approach to where and how we work is changing, and in the public realm, green open spaces are pushing for pole position.

The pandemic's need to distance people and create barriers is in direct contradiction to the proclivity for collaborative, communal spaces that we'd been witnessing ahead of 2020.

The built environment will clearly need to change to ensure that function and form are on the same page in supporting health, safety and sustainability.

What's more, with proof that business can continue with high levels of agility and remote working – albeit

with pressures on corporate culture, leadership, human connection and accountability – there needs to be a good reason for people to go to the office, use public amenities and shop face-to-face.

Bayleys global real estate partner Knight Frank recently spoke with the managing director of development for one of the world's biggest developers, Lendlease, about the ways COVID-19 is reshaping the built environment.

Singapore-based David Hutton claimed the pandemic may have shifted the dial, with the proven adage "location, location, location" being superseded by three new elements – connectivity, amenity and place.

Hutton said the places where people spend their work time, their leisure time

and their home life are increasingly important, and muses that the city will have a more significant role to play as the world adjusts to a new normal.

"I believe proactive governments and proactive developers will really seek to bring green into the cities to ensure there is ample open space.

"Given where the world is going with technology and autonomous transport, a fantastic opportunity exists to replace a lot of hardscape, black top and quite harsh environments with more green space for people to enjoy."

Total Property scans in with leaders in the commercial property space to see how 2020's narrative has impacted the way they do business.

The use of touchless technology to minimise physical contact with potentially virus-transmitting hard surfaces and the traceability of individuals' movements as they transit through buildings are firmly on Precinct's radar.

"Via the use of Gallagher access control systems, we already have robust measures in place for tracking and contact tracing individuals that pass through our buildings," said Pritchard.

"There is a move to being able to use your mobile phone for seamless passing through lifts and doors which would streamline movements.

"However, depending on the age of the assets and the differing versions of lift and access control within those buildings, some serious upgrades or integration are still required on most existing assets in the marketplace – not just Precinct-owned ones – to achieve this."

With the greater emphasis today on fresh air and open space to allow for social distancing measures, Pritchard agrees that outdoor green space will become even more important within the design narrative.

"Our new developments like Bowen Campus in central Wellington and the PwC Tower at Commercial Bay, Auckland have a strong focus on this," he said.

"We work alongside landscape architects to create spaces where clients and the public want to spend time – whether it's to eat lunch, have a meeting, or just spend time away from the office.

"The provision of large outdoor spaces within a city in general are important, and the spaces that council are creating in Auckland for example, are great.

"DESIGN FOR OFFICE SPACE HAPPENS IN CONJUNCTION WITH CLIENT REQUIREMENTS, BUT WE ARE SEEING A MOVE TO LESSER DENSITIES THAN PRE-COVID-19 TIMES."

PRECINCT PROPERTIES CEO
SCOTT PRITCHARD

"We are seeing that after the events of 2020, people want to come back into the city and foot traffic in Commercial Bay and numbers of people in the offices are returning to what we'd call expected pre-pandemic levels."

NEED FOR ROBUST SYSTEMS

Andrew Eagles, chief executive of the New Zealand Green Building Council (NZGBC), said the disruptions caused by the global pandemic and the wellness learnings that have followed, have solidified the work it does.

"The biggest takeaway has been highlighting the risk of airborne infection spread and reinforcing the need for fresh air, ventilation and filtration to create buildings that provide clean, healthy spaces," said Eagles.

"We know healthy buildings need to be equipped with the right systems and at a time when everyone is hyper-conscious of health and the spread of infection, green buildings offer a ready and accessible way to take action to help keep staff well, happy, and productive."

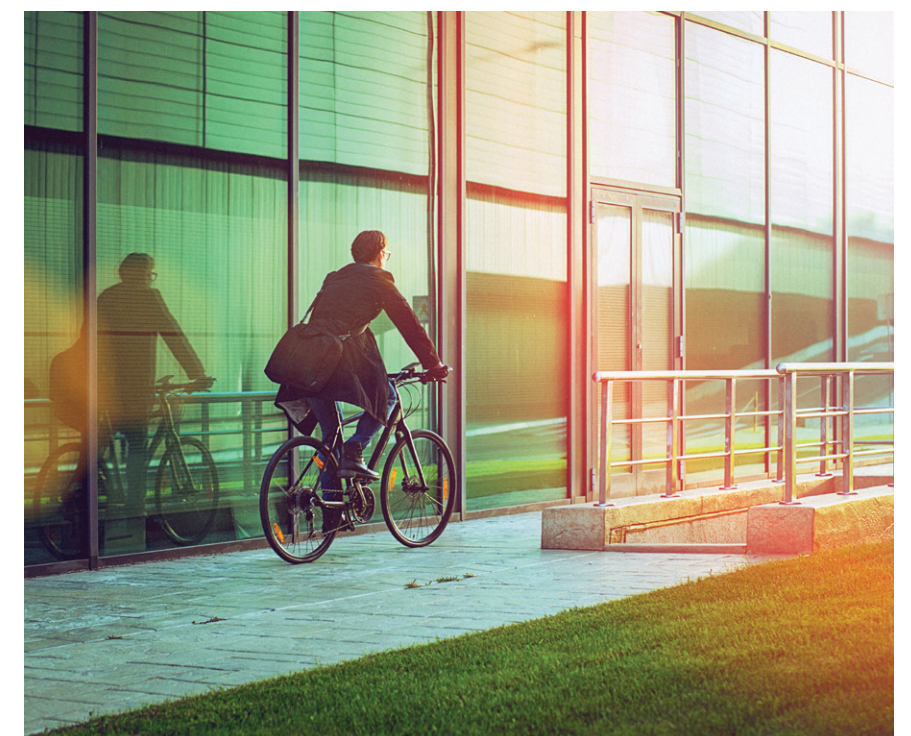
ROBUST MEASURES

As industry leaders, NZX-listed Precinct Properties is ahead of the curve with the design and construction credentials of its vast inner-city commercial portfolio across the Auckland and Wellington markets.

Precinct's chief executive, Scott Pritchard said fresh air, ventilation, seamless and traceable movement through buildings, and greater personal space are factors highlighted by the pandemic, its associated health response and our thinking around the built environment going forward.

"As we design new builds to minimum 5-Green Star ratings by default, the ventilation rates in our assets are already 1.5 to two-times above code, and all material selections meet Green Star requirements too," said Pritchard.

"With regards to physical layouts, design for office space happens in conjunction with client requirements, but we are seeing a move to lesser densities than pre-COVID-19 times."





Eagles said NZGBC continues to promote the uptake of better building standards and better transparency, and to support the work of those building sustainably.

“What has become all the more urgent is the need to retrofit our existing buildings to get up to these standards and ensure they have good systems in place.

“We have thousands of buildings which could better serve the people in them and now, more than ever, we need to consider upgrading ventilation, retrofitting in smart, healthy, and efficient ways, and ensuring the health of the occupants is a key consideration in design and build.

“What makes a great building and how we certify, continues to evolve alongside the sector and we're connected with other Green Building Councils around the world so will continue to learn from them and ensure our buildings can embed new thinking.”

Eagles said construction materials and the products used to maintain buildings, also need to be scrutinised.

“We need to ensure basic things like cleaning products, deodorising products, chemicals in building materials and furniture aren't polluting our air.

“That's why we encourage the use of low environmental impact applied coatings, no ozone-depleting refrigerants, good levels of daylight in office areas and low VOC flooring, adhesives and sealants.

“Simple things like that are why people working in green buildings think better at work, are more productive and sleep better when they get home.

“For example, tenants of the amazing refurbished character Mason Brothers building in Auckland's Wynyard Quarter have reported a 25-percent drop in absenteeism since moving into the 6-Green Star rated and 5-Star NABERSNZ energy-rated workspace.”

“THE CHALLENGE IS TO ENTICE PEOPLE BACK INTO THE WORKPLACE TO MAINTAIN CRITICAL SOCIAL, COLLABORATIVE, CREATIVE AND INTERACTIVE TEAM ACTIVITIES, WITHIN A SAFE AND SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT.”

JASMAX ASSOCIATE PRINCIPAL
AND SENIOR INTERIOR DESIGNER
REBECCA BURTON

Eagles said conversations also need to be happening around building occupation and transparency, with the pandemic shifting the way New Zealanders use buildings and office spaces.

“People have a heightened awareness of their ability to work from home, which opens up dialogue about how efficiently we're occupying office buildings, how well homes are equipped to provide healthy space to work from, and the need for these things to be transparently reported on.”

UNDERSTANDING NEW WORK STYLES

Multi-disciplinary design practice, Jasmax, is active across New Zealand in creating forward-thinking commercial workplaces, residential precincts and civic amenities.

Associate principal and senior interior designer Rebecca Burton said as workplace specialists, Jasmax sits at the forefront of the pandemic-related changing landscape of workplace design.

“With a post-COVID lens, organisations are focused on keeping staff safe and well-supported, while safeguarding business continuity and productivity,” she said.

“We've been working with our clients to develop workplace accommodation strategies that reflect the need to be super agile and adaptable now, and in the future.

“While fiscal considerations are still important – there is now less focus on simply getting the best occupancy rates per square metre.

“Because the proportional make-up of at work activities is changing – collaborative versus focus – there is more emphasis on understanding new ways of working, what activities actually need to happen in a space, and how the workplace design can support that to get the best value out of the existing real estate.”

Burton said Jasmax is seeing a clear move away from mostly open-plan desking with supporting amenities, to a new hybrid flexi-workstyle approach.

“This facilitates a higher proportion of collaborative and interactive activities within the workplace itself and provides solutions that support people to carry out more high focus work remotely, that is, away from the workplace,” she explained.

“It's a bit of a balancing act, as while it's imperative to support an increase in flexible remote working, the challenge is to entice people back into the workplace to maintain critical social, collaborative, creative and interactive team activities, within a safe and supportive environment.

“Striking the perfect balance will result in an optimal working model for an organisation and provide the best framework for excellence and productivity as we move into the future.”

The “new normal”, said Burton will not only require flexible spatial solutions but will also require a huge shift in management styles, recognition and support of cultural shifts, and clear communication around the need for change and maintaining trust.

At a micro level, Burton said there's more interest in the use of antibacterial or antimicrobial products within workplaces, and Jasmax is developing a database of hardware, materials and finishing solutions that support a higher level of hygiene.

“Further, there's more focus and interest on providing touchless amenities in buildings, through hands-free entry points and access through buildings, and dealing with high traffic touch points – such as kitchens and bathrooms where sensor taps, automatic openers and other touchless devices are increasingly being seen.”