
NET.WORKS.

25-27 HORSELL ROAD, LONDON, N5 1XL

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**NET.WORKS RESPONSE TO THE MAYOR'S INITIAL,
INFORMAL CONSULTATION ON THE LONDON PLAN**

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1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 Co-working spaces and flexible office use should be specifically recognised as a concept in the new London Plan. Moreover, the new London Plan should make clear that the concept should be actively supported, given the role it can play in helping to boost local economies and communities.
- 1.2 Co-working space is flexible and affordable. It supports businesses at various stages of their development, from freelancers and start-ups to businesses that are expanding. The growth in the number of self-employed workers and new start-ups across the capital justifies supporting this model over the period of the next London Plan.
- 1.3 In addition to specific recognition for co-working spaces across London, we need to see additional policy changes to allow more such spaces to be built. In particular, policies in the new London Plan are needed to better protect existing office space, make it easier for change of use back to office space in certain circumstances and locations, and better enable the expansion of appropriate sites to enable suitable locations to be developed in an efficient manner.

2. ABOUT NET.WORKS

- 2.1 Net.Works is a leading co-working space and flexible office provider. Our facilities are home to creative freelancers and start-up businesses from a variety of different industries, and our spaces are brimming with inspiration and innovation. Our first location opened in Islington in 2015 and is now home to 43 companies across 17 different industries, with a total of 379 members.
 - 2.2 Net.Works is expanding across London with Fulham and Borough opening in Early 2017. We hope to soon launch new branches in Clapham, Peckham, Old Street and Dalston.
 - 2.3 We have the flexibility to support freelancers, start-ups, or companies that are looking to scale up their organisation, with variable and affordable membership costing from just £20 per day for access to the lounge, and from £399 for a private office. Our monthly flat rate includes everything to let companies get on with what is important. Bills, business rates, utilities, wifi, manned reception, 24-7 access, furniture, security, daily cleaning and maintenance, and even complimentary coffee, are all part of the package.
 - 2.4 We believe that affordability doesn't have to mean austerity. Comfortable, collaborative, functional work areas with bespoke furniture and lighting, each space is ergonomically enhanced to fit around you and the way you work. Across the Net.Works. co-working space, we have games rooms, break out, lounge and relaxation spaces, kitchenettes, meeting rooms, showers and more.
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2.5 We also believe that we can add value beyond simply providing office space. We love seeing our members' businesses grow and flourish. Net.Works. provides a platform for members to pitch their businesses to potential investors. We have teamed up with leading venture capitalists and a number of individual investors to provide advice, raise funding and set members on the right path to give them access to the capital their business needs. Being a member of Net.Works. provides the opportunity to share ideas and participate in numerous workshops and training events.

2.6 Some views of our internal co-working spaces and café at our Net.Works site in Islington



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3. CO-WORKING SPACE AND FLEXIBLE OFFICE USE IN THE LONDON PLAN

- 3.1 The current London plan does not make specific mention of co-working or flexible office use, although it does skirt around the subject: for example, policy 2.9 states that the Mayor should support the *'availability of appropriate workspaces for the area's changing economy.'*
- 3.2 Likewise, the new Mayor of London's *'A City for All Londoners'* document makes mention of associated issues: for instance, p54 notes that the Mayor wants to see *'new commercial developments include affordable business space, in line with different and changing business demands.'* But, like the current London Plan, the document does not make the logical leap and specifically advocate co-working or flexible office use.
- 3.3 **We believe that the new London Plan needs to specifically reference and support the concept of co-working spaces and flexible office use.**
- 3.4 Support of this kind is merited by the way London has changed in the short period since the last London Plan was produced. Co-working and flexible office use are not new concepts. However, since the last London Plan was published back in 2011 there have been significant changes to the economy, the jobs market, and the way people work and wish to work.
- 3.5 17.2% of Londoners are now self-employed¹, and the number of births of new enterprises in the capital has more than doubled from 52,755 in 2010 to 100,920 in 2015.² Whilst not all of those entrepreneurs will be running businesses that are office-based, the fact is that significant numbers of them will need access to affordable, flexible work space. This has been true, in particular, for London's growing tech and creative industries, which the Mayor has highlighted as being particular sectors he wishes to support.
- 3.6 Whilst co-working and flexible use office space supports start-ups and freelancers, it also allows companies to scale up their operations quickly and efficiently when they need to. At Net.Works we are seeing this at first hand, with growing businesses keen to benefit from the quality, affordable serviced office environment we provide.
- 3.7 As a result, a change to the London Plan to offer support to co-working and flexible office use would be beneficial in supporting the growth and expansion of the capital's economy. We believe that such support would be particularly beneficial to areas outside the centre of London, and especially in zone 2 boroughs. This would support the Mayor's welcome vision of ensuring economic growth and increased employment across the whole of London.

¹ Office for National Statistics Annual Population Survey, Labour Force and Employment Statistics 2015

² Office for National Statistics Business demography, UK: 2015 - Births of New Enterprises, 2010-2015

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4. ASSOCIATE PLANNING ISSUES

- 4.1 In addition to the new London Plan giving overdue recognition to co-working and flexible office use, we believe there are a number of other, more general policy areas to be addressed to ensure the needed quantities of this type of workspace is delivered across the capital.
- 4.2 **Protecting office space across London.** The need for substantial quantities of new housing across the capital has seen a reduction in office space across the capital since the last London Plan was published. We support the new Mayor's various statements in 'A City for all Londoners' that he will *'seek to protect land for employment use'* and *'promote viable strategic locations for office space, including in Outer London.'*
- 4.3 **Change of use.** There will be occasions where it will be appropriate not just to protect existing office space but also to convert units back into office use. Whilst we recognise that the Mayor has charged his administration with prioritising increasing the supply of affordable housing, we would counter that if he also wants to see affordable office space he also needs to show flexibility around change of use.
- 4.4 **Mixed use.** For similar reasons, we welcome the Mayor's statement in 'A City for All Londoners' that *'it may be feasible for housing and industrial activity to co-exist in certain areas.'* We agree that residential and office space can co-exist, and would point to our Islington offices as a prime example of how this can be made to work.
- 4.5 **Planning applications.** As with many other developers we have often experienced frustrations with the length of time it can take to work our way through the planning process. Different boroughs can vary greatly in the speed and quality with which they deal with planning applications. We hope that the Mayor can work with the Government and London councils to try and drive up the standard of service offered by the capital's planning departments which will be beneficial for economic growth across the board.

5. CONTACT

- 5.1 If you would like to visit Net.Works and see how we are contributing to the growth in the number of successful businesses in London, we would love to show you around our Islington offices.
- 5.2 To arrange a visit, or for further information on any of the issues outlined in this response, please contact Chris Davies at Net.Works on hello@net-works.london or 07824 358 827, or David Park at Nudge Factory on david@nudgefactory.co.uk or 07944 145 387.
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