

# Planning a Refurbishment Project in Occupation?

Rising rents and a limited supply of quality new laboratory/office space have made refurbishment (renovation) an attractive option for many businesses. A cost-effective alternative to relocation, refurbishment in occupation avoids the disruption of a relocation for both staff and clients. However, the presence of construction activity in the workplace environment (also called live environment) can cause disruption and create health and safety issues.

In this article we provide useful tips for completing a successful refurbishment project.



## **Key points to ensure a smooth running project include:**

### **1. Planning and communication**

Careful planning and effective communication are essential for a successful project. It is important to achieve staff buy-in and to set realistic expectations from the beginning.

The creation of an internal communication campaign including

- regular project bulletins,
- staff meetings to report on progress and address any concerns of staff,
- display of updated plans and programmes throughout the workplace and

- appointing project champions

could prove highly effective.

## **2. Highlight benefits**

Change is unnerving for internal and external stakeholders. Reassure customers and suppliers that it is very much 'Business as usual' during the refurbishment. Promote the project as a positive move to deliver better customer service and an excellent opportunity to position your organisation for growth.

## **3. Detailed programme**

The logistics of a refurbishment in occupation are complex. A carefully constructed project programme detailing every stage with key dates is the blueprint for a successful project. Each staff member should move no more than twice – once to a temporary position and then on to a permanent location. Provide individual move plans showing when and where the moves will take place.

Free up larger areas of the workspace by transferring entire work groups to a temporary location or take short-term space in serviced offices. If your organisation is multi-sited you may be able to temporarily transfer some task groups to other locations.

If possible, encourage staff to work from home (with appropriate IT and virtual network support), off-site meetings (outside venues) or scheduling conferences and training courses during the refurbishment period.

## **4. Minimise noise**

Traditionally considered one of the biggest disadvantages of a refurbishment in occupation, effective programming will ensure that noise pollution is reduced to a minimum. Schedule the more disruptive works out of hours, in quiet business periods and use shift working.

Where some noise is unavoidable during the working day it is important that everyone affected is kept fully informed so they may plan accordingly and schedule meetings or telephone calls in quieter periods.

If you are in a multi-occupied building be conscious of other tenants. It is essential to keep them in the picture as your refurbishment may well have a direct impact on them.

## **5. Efficient project management**

With the programme in place, the task of managing the project begins – ensuring key programme dates and budgets are met. The Project Manager must liaise

closely with any interested parties outside the organisation. These groups can include landlords, local and statutory authorities and fellow tenants or private citizens in a mixed business/residential area. Indeed, anyone who could be affected by increased noise, site traffic or out-of-hours working. Working in the major city centres can involve significant constraints including restricted delivery times for the arrival of larger deliveries.

## **6. Business as usual**

Maintaining the tools your staff need to carry out their task, i.e. voice and data connectivity, is obviously critical. A viable working environment must be maintained with heating, ventilation, and air-conditioning working to acceptable standards.

Again, careful programming and project management will ensure that vital systems do not fail and that business continuity is maintained.

## **7. Control costs**

Prudent financial planning from the start could save you money. Contributions from landlord to incentivise tenants to renew the lease and tax relief by use of capital allowances are worth investigating.

Once the project is underway you may decide to change the specification of some fixtures and fittings – what this will do to the budget is worth considering.

## **8. Health & Safety**

The presence of construction activity in a commercial environment creates health and safety issues. It is important to protect workers, clients and neighbours who could be affected.

The following guidelines illustrate key health and safety issues that must be addressed when undertaking a refurbishment in occupation.

### **Steps to safety**

In UK, the Construction (Design and Management) Regulations 2015 ([CDM 2015](#)) apply to most construction projects including refurbishments in occupation.

**Please note that projects in India or any other countries will have to adopt their own regulations. However, the key points explained below could prove helpful in understanding a general approach to safety during refurbishment in occupation.**

Under the CDM regulations, if more than one contractor is involved, the client will need to appoint (in writing) a **principal designer** to plan, manage and coordinate the

planning and design work. They should understand types of risks and try to avoid them when designing your project. Appointing them as early as possible can help you gather information about the project and ensure that it can be built safely. A **principal contractor** is required to plan, manage and coordinate the construction work. Appoint them as early as possible so that they are involved in discussions with the principal designer about the work. The principal contractor should manage the risks on site and has to draw up a plan explaining how health and safety risks will be managed. The health and safety file – a record of information of key health and safety risks that have to be managed – should always be accessible on site.



## Managing risk

- Where work takes place within occupied buildings, the client and the principal contractor will need to manage not only the risks created by their own work, but also those created by sharing the workplace.
- Where CDM apply, the client must pass relevant information on to the planning supervisor and design team and this should be included in the pre-tender stage health and safety plan.
- Where CDM does not apply, joint agreements between the occupiers and contractors are still needed to ensure health and safety risks and precautions are properly managed and co-ordinated.
- Agreements should cover respective responsibilities, mechanisms of co-operation and co-ordination, provide information about risks, control access to the construction area and outline emergency procedures.
- During refurbishment, the upgrading of services may mean breaching fire-stops in services, recesses, ducts, and voids where fire can spread rapidly – care should be taken that occupants are not put at risk during this work.

## **Deliveries and rubbish disposal**

- Deliveries should be scheduled for 'quiet periods' or out-of-hours.
- Waste/rubbish disposal and removal should take place out-of-hours. Alternatively, rubbish can be efficiently and cost-effectively removed in wheeled containers to a waiting lorry or contractor.
- A large build-up of wood-type debris in the construction area will create a fire risk.

## **Noise**

- Out-of-hours working can help ease problems with noise levels and vibration which may affect other occupants of the building.
- Using noise-reduced compressors and other machinery can significantly reduce noise levels.
- It is important that everyone affected is kept fully informed so that they plan accordingly.
- When dust or noise levels form part of conditions written into a contract, the contractor must carry out a monitoring exercise to ensure compliance.
- Where out-of-hours noise could affect nearby residents, the local Environmental Health Department should be notified.

## **Access**

- Where a building has more than one access, set apart a separate route e.g. a rear entrance, for use by the contractor.
- Measures should be taken to protect access ways from falling materials, dust, vibration, fumes and other hazards.
- Fire exits and escapes must be maintained and kept clear at all times. If work on a dedicated fire escape route has to be done during working hours an alternative route must be provided and everyone should be informed.

## **Maintaining services**

- A working fire alarm must be maintained. If, for any reason, the fire alarm system has to be disconnected a temporary system must be installed.
- The smoke alarms are normally capped-off while work is underway as they may get triggered by dust. The site manager must issue a written permit to allow smoke alarms to be capped.
- Gas, electricity, water and drainage to the occupied section of the building must be maintained.

## **Toxic substances**

One of the most potentially serious problems is the discovery of asbestos. Those responsible for workplace premises will require to:

- Undertake a survey for asbestos in their buildings and record their findings.
- Assume that asbestos is present unless it isn't.
- Prepare and carry out plans to manage the risks from asbestos.
- Provide information to anyone likely to come into contact with asbestos.

Remember that asbestos-containing materials pose no risk if they are in good condition and left undisturbed. Problems arise when they are not properly managed.

Other substances that are hazardous to health: toxic, harmful, irritant or corrosive- must be managed under the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulation ([COSHH](#)).

## **9. Conclusion**

Refurbishment in occupation needn't be a difficult experience. It presents an opportunity to improve your workplace and with it the productivity of your staff and the profitability of your business. It is important to understand the project objectives. The refurbishment of existing premises can take place for many reasons and indeed many organisations realise unexpected benefits by understanding the process.

The benefits could include:

- The creation of an additional space or utilising a redundant space.
- Re-negotiating the lease, possibly with the change of floor plan and often a new brand.
- Re-enforcement of a cultural change.
- Introduction of new working styles, new meeting places and collaboration areas.
- Updated technology.

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