

Press release

12 November 2003

Scottish Gas Headquarters Sets New Standard for Contact Centres

Scottish Gas Headquarters in Edinburgh, designed by Foster and Partners, which opened officially on 12 November 2003 has reinvented the customer contact centre for the 21st century.

Number One, Waterfront Avenue was commissioned by SecondSite Property and built for Scottish Gas, part of Centrica plc. The 10,500 square metre building has the quality of a corporate headquarters, but is a functional high-density workplace, accommodating 1800 staff in two shifts. Designed for flexibility it can, in the longer term, be partitioned and reconfigured internally for another use.

Number One is on four storeys. The ground floor accommodates meeting rooms, administration, IT, occupational health and a staff restaurant. Lifts and cantilevered staircases take staff up to the three call centre floors open plan workspaces arranged on either side of the atrium, with views through the building. From the upper levels, break-out spaces open into the atrium and onto staggered bridges that link the buildings two sides.

Throughout, Foster and Partners have worked closely with consulting engineers Battle McCarthy to plan its environmental efficiency, with the result that it has achieved the coveted excellent BREEAM rating.

Constructed on a concrete frame, the buildings glazed faade is surrounded with a silver-coloured aluminium brise soleil, which forms a rectangular veil over the irregular U shape of the footprint. A deep recess, clad on either side in blue glass, draws employees in from the new plaza in front of the building. Beyond is the atrium, whose high roof is covered with a lantern of white glass, through which diffused daylight fills the space.

The fit-out gives flexibility for changing shifts, personal storage for each employee, and optimum use of space. Unusually for a customer contact centre, large shared desks are provided. This system has been found to be more productive than enclosed booths and, thanks to acoustic insulation, is no noisier.

Leaving behind an environment with very little natural light, Scottish Gas has taken its staff into a light-filled building with 360 degree views that include the Forth Bridge. Although just six square metres are allocated per person, it feels spacious. The Scottish Gas Headquarters already looks likely to secure greater staff retention. After only a short time, people say they feel more focused and work more effectively and management reports that productivity is up.

The Scottish Gas Headquarters realises the first part of Foster and Partners Granton Masterplan for SecondSites 110-acre former gasworks site overlooking the Firth of Forth. Now renamed the

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ForthQuarter, it is at the heart of a site that has been transformed from a former industrial landscape heavily polluted landscape into a clean area with utilities eight hectares of public parkland, public parks and transport infrastructure including a planned new tram link to the city centre.

This is the first building that Foster and Partners have completed in Edinburgh.

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