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To whom it may concern

Importance of temperature control in commercial buildings

I am writing to provide you with my thoughts relating to the installation of air conditioning to office buildings in general and in particular relating to 3 The Stables, Parrswood Entertainment Centre, Manchester.

I have been a leasing agent in the Manchester office market for over 30 years and my practice, Canning O'Neill is responsible for more lettings in South Manchester than any other firm of surveyors in the North West of England.

Over the last 3 to 5 years I have experienced a greater demand for air conditioned office space from occupiers. This is due to a number of factors including a general presumption that landlords need to provide air conditioning as a basis of their general office specification. In addition, the warmer summers (only likely to get warmer due to global warming/climate change) we are experiencing means that air conditioned space is now a very important factor when making on a decision on a relocation to a new office space.

The lack of air conditioning in an office space/commercial building naturally leads to the space being more challenging to let and also impacts on a lower rental value. Air-conditioned space tends to attract a £2.00 per sq ft 'premium' compared to none air-conditioned space.

Post Covid, the office market has gone through a lot of changes and one of these has been a reduction in space required due to the 'working from home culture' and also a movement towards 'hybrid working'. A lot of businesses are still struggling with employees working from home and would prefer them to be working in the office. When looking to move offices we have seen what many call a 'flight to quality' as business's are looking for less accommodation (20 to 30% is the general trend) but higher specification space in order to encourage a 'home from home' experience for their staff.

Air conditioning is very high up most occupiers list of a required specification when contacting us to try and identify their new home for their business. A good temperature-controlled environment is fast becoming a key requirement.

From a landlords' point of view not having space with air-conditioning not only means a lower rental but also longer void periods and hence higher 'holding' costs on vacant offices. Inevitably this will increase the risk of building maintenance being neglected. There is a growing risk post-Covid that office buildings (particularly of older age) falling into long term disrepair and neglect.

Without giving specific examples, there are several offices in the North West that have remained vacant for a long time because of lack of adequate air-conditioning. It is also more of a factor now given the push toward higher specification to encourage a return to office working. Older buildings that are more difficult to modernise are more likely to become prone to remaining vacant, with obvious adverse community problems being created (e.g. vandalism, rodents etc).

We have historically been involved with The Stables office scheme over the years and most recently with 3 The Stables. We advised the previous owners on the sale of the building to the current owner.

When I first inspected the space, it did not benefit from adequate temperature control system and the lack of it was clear as they experienced problems with keeping the building warm in the winter and cool in the summer. I witnessed portable a/c units when the temperatures were high in the summer months which were unsightly and needed tubes to hang out of windows etc which was not easy or attractive externally in a property with a lack of window openings at 1st floor level.

I recall that there were occasions where staff had to be sent home as it was just not a comfortable / healthy working environment and no doubt may have been an influencing factor for the sale of the property by the previous owners, so that the business could relocate to a more modern environment offering good temperature control.

We have also dealt with another property scheme in the Didsbury area, commonly known as the Towers Mansion. This property is Grade II listed and does benefit from partial air-conditioning. This has no doubt allowed the project to pre-let as small units, which may otherwise have remained vacant.

Well-being for staff is incredibly important for the modern business in the year 2023 and a comfortable working environment is very important and quite possibly a legal obligation for employers. Having no air conditioning in an older property with a lack of good natural ventilation is a real challenge, that will only intensify moving forward.

In conclusion, the provision of air-conditioning in office space is much more the norm than it ever has been and the benefits to the people who work in the buildings is clear. There is no doubt that the provision of adequate temperature control equipment, particularly air-conditioning will also increase the chances of the building staying in productive use in the longer term. This in turn will avoid an exacerbated potential future problem of a build-up of empty properties that brings its own set of challenges for any community and its people.

Your faithfully

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'James Dickinson', with a long, wavy horizontal line extending to the right.

James Dickinson
DIRECTOR