

Diversifying Real Estate: Sexuality

Guidebook commissioned by CPA & WPA NextGen

June 2021



This guidebook aims to help individuals and organisations make Central London's real estate sector more welcoming and inclusive for people who identify as LGBTQ+. It provides best practice examples, signposts to resources and reflects on personal experiences. The guidebook also offers insights into what the built environment sector can do to better develop and protect spaces for LGBTQ+ people.

The research has been informed by a London Property Alliance roundtable attended by our members, co-opted experts and stakeholders from local government; a London Property Alliance podcast and blog exploring Pride in the built environment; a key note address for members and a podcast by London's Night Czar Amy Lamé; conversations with Westminster City Council's LGBTQ+ Lead Member Cllr Ian Adams; and meetings and interviews with leading activists, industry figures, diversity and inclusion bodies and networking groups.

We hope the guidebook will inspire and inform Westminster Property Association (WPA) and City Property Association (CPA) members so that together we can make our profession more representative of London's diverse communities.

The guidebook is part of a series of themed diversity publications commissioned by WPA and CPA's NextGen networks, produced by London Property Alliance, and supported by Gardiner & Theobald.

Foreword

I joined the real estate sector (accountant not a surveyor!) in April 1983. Looking back, although it feels like it wasn't so long ago, the changes in the intervening 38 years across society and the way the work environment has changed were nowhere on the horizon.

For the LGBTQ+ community in 1983, the partial decriminalisation of homosexuality in 1967 was a recent event and its public acceptance was far from the norm. The notorious Section 28 legislation to outlaw the "promotion of homosexuality" in schools was introduced by the Government in 1988 with considerable public support, saying much about the national and political mood of hostility and suspicion, and it should be remembered it remained on the statute books until repealed in England 2003 (just 18 years ago).

However, the mood and pressure for change was growing in the early years of the new millennium and the Civil Partnerships Act, implemented in 2005, marked a sea-change, when a grudging tolerance of the LGBTQ+ community was being replaced by positive recognition, role models and acceptance.

Inevitably, negative LGBTQ+ stereotypes and behaviours found a natural home in the real estate sector, with its straight, male, often "rugby club" culture and the sector was generally perceived as aloof from the wider business world and resistant to change.

In 2011, David Mann, a building surveyor and partner at TFT, and Saleem Fazal, a real estate litigation partner at Taylor Wessing, founded Freehold - the first group in the sector to give its LGBTQ+ community both a voice and visibility. Both were genuinely worried that publicly coming out and challenging the prevailing norms ingrained in the sector would be at best career-limiting and, at worst, career suicide! Despite active support from Stonewall, the early engagement was not promising; professional bodies and employers responses were somewhere between lukewarm and disinterested, best summed up as "We don't have any gay staff or members but if we have, we never hear from, so there are no issues to address"; effectively a don't ask/don't tell group think response.

Fast forward to today and our industry is in a much better - but not yet perfect - place. Addressing the rapid changes the sector is facing, the need to broaden its talent base and better

understand and represent the expectations of a society for whom we are providing a life-shaping built environment, has made respecting and embracing diversity and encouraging an inclusive culture widely-acknowledged imperatives.

The LGBTQ+ community is now represented by a number of groups, which are working alongside others focussed on gender, ethnicity, religion, disability and social mobility. Freehold's contribution to this progress, and the actions those businesses and individuals it inspired to challenge outdated and unacceptable attitudes, was recognised in November 2018 when the Estates Gazette awarded it their annual Lifetime Achievement Award. More importantly, David and Saleem's careers continued to flourish and their role model profile encouraged others to join them "Out and Proud".

So where do we go from here?

For the LGBTQ+ constituency in real estate, undoubtedly more progress has been made in the last 10 years than the previous 30. However, complacency is always a risk and progress should never be taken for granted, particularly as we are seeing in some countries and societies the clock being turned back to the dark days of intolerance and outright hostility to their LGBTQ+ communities. In addition, the Covid-19 pandemic is accelerating structural change in our working patterns and environments and wider societal trends are now having a material impact of the future direction of our industry and the built environment, and our role and reputation in society.

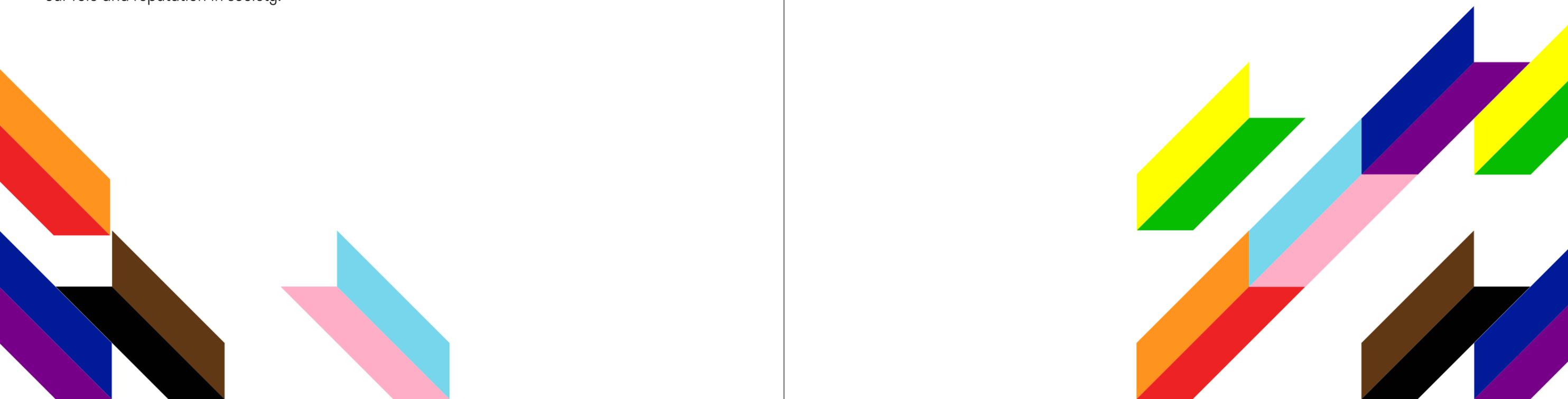
With these new challenges, and others which will inevitably appear, promoting a workplace culture that positively and proactively gives voice and recognition to each of our industry's constituent groups has never been more important. Unleashing individuals' potential and harnessing the diversity of thought which comes through different lived experiences, rather than marginalising or excluding people because of who they are, will be critical in finding solutions to those challenges and the wider perception of our sector.

So whilst much has been achieved, this invaluable guide is a timely reminder of the issues that still need to be tackled and provides practical advice on how businesses and individuals can play their part in ensuring the LGBTQ+ community has an important role in diversifying our industry and how we all play our part in shaping the built environment in the years ahead.



Brian Bickell

Shaftesbury – Chief Executive
WPA Deputy Vice Chair
Freehold – Board member



Changing perceptions of real estate

Connotations of the property sector being ‘male, pale and stale’ can make the industry seem unapproachable to those from less represented backgrounds. In particular, the sector has a lot to achieve in supporting those who identify as LGBTQ+. A 2021 EG Attitudes Survey revealed that just 22.5% of respondents felt that enough was being done to promote inclusion of the community within the industry.¹ Our sector should take action to change these perceptions, become more inclusive and ensure LGBTQ+ talent can thrive.

Analysis from the EG survey suggests that Covid-19 provided an unwelcome distraction as many real estate organisations focused on remaining in business and supporting colleagues with additional caregiving needs (such as home schooling) rather than driving forward the LGBTQ+ agenda. When comparing the 2021 EG survey results with a similar survey carried out in 2019, it appears that progress has been hindered: In 2019 6% more respondents felt that enough was being done to promote inclusion.² As we enter a post-pandemic world, it is important that real estate organisations focus their priorities to regain lost momentum across all areas of diversity and inclusion. This guide has been written to help support organisations and individuals to do just that. It highlights industry best practice to promote and support LGBTQ+ identifying people in the sector and addresses some of the key challenges to achieving greater LGBTQ+ representation.

Key challenges in making the real estate sector inclusive to LGBTQ+ people



Visible role models and allies



Organisational culture and values



Lack of internal network groups



Training opportunities



Supporting an inclusive workforce

Research by McKinsey & Co found that those who identify as LGBTQ+ are 1.6 times more likely to feel included in an organisation when leaders place diversity and inclusion on their strategic agenda.³ With 83% of respondents to the EG Attitudes Survey stating that their organisation had HR policies in place that promote diversity and inclusion, it would seem that positive change is taking place within the sector.⁴

When leaders within an organisation focus on ensuring that their actions are transformative as opposed to performative, wider organisational culture and values will change. For example, organisations need to introduce actual change measures as opposed to just making statements that support diversity and inclusion. This will help all employees feel as though they are recognised and apart of the company culture.

1. Visible role models and allies

Attendees at the London Property Alliance roundtable agreed that a lack of visible role models and allies within the real estate sector makes it difficult for LGBTQ+ identifying people to feel as though they are welcome in the industry. Meanwhile, research by Vodafone and Out Now found that 41% of young LGBTQ+ people went back into the closet when starting their first job out of fear of discrimination.⁵ When organisations promote LGBTQ+ inclusivity through visible role models and allies those employees can feel comfortable to be themselves in the workplace.

Providing a visible forum for LGBTQ+ employees (see page 9: The power of networks) and setting up an allies programme could help your organisation feel more inclusive for all staff, regardless of their sexuality. Providing straight-forward guidance on how all employees can be an ally will encourage members of staff to take this role more seriously, and nominating senior, visible allies would send a strong message both internally and externally.

Resource: Building Equality has launched an Allies Toolbox Talk that aims to educate workforces and empower colleagues to become active allies to the LGBTQ+ community. The resource, with accompanying support pack and slides covers frequently asked questions, resources and recommendations.

<https://www.buildingequalityuk.com/resources>

2. The power of networks

External networks have helped shift the conversation amongst LGBTQ+ people working within the sector by providing a unique support network and safe space where they can share their experiences.

External networks for LGBTQ+ working in real estate

- **Building Equality**
<https://www.buildingequalityuk.com>
@BuildingEqLGBT
- **Changing the Face of Property**
<https://www.propertyneedsyou.com>
@propertyneedsu
- **Freehold**
<https://freeholdlgbt.com>
@freeholdlgbt
- **LGBT Property Professionals**
@LGBTProperty
- **Planning Out**
@PlanningOut

Setting up an internal network within your organisation could show your LGBTQ+ employees that the organisation takes seriously its commitment to supporting their professional and personal development, and can provide a supportive environment for raising issues and ideas with LGBTQ+ colleagues and allies.

Participants of an Alliance podcast exploring Pride in the built environment discussed their career experiences in the early noughties and commented upon employers asking them to remain in the closet when dealing with specific clients.⁶ Whilst our participants were reflecting on their experiences nearly 20 years ago, more recent research has revealed that LGBTQ+ staff still face instances where clients ask that they be removed from a team because of their sexuality.⁷ By having an internal LGBTQ+ network, your organisation is making a public commitment to supporting its employees and signalling a clear message to your clients that you support diversity, equality and inclusion of this community.

Case study: Pride@Grosvenor

Grosvenor is one of the world's largest privately-owned international property businesses. A key part of Grosvenor's work is to nurture inclusive communities wherever it operates. The business also recognises the importance of creating a working culture where people with a diverse range of backgrounds and opinions can thrive.

To enhance the sense of belonging for LGBTQ+ staff within the organisation, the company recently launched its employee-led network, Pride@Grosvenor. The network brings together people from across the business to meet, celebrate and share experiences of diversity and Pride in all its forms. It is open to both members of the LGBTQ+ community as well as allies, encouraging all staff to engage and interact with the network, and helps create opportunities for constructive conversations about sexuality and diversity.

The network was launched with strong endorsement from the senior leadership teams across all of Grosvenor's global operating companies. As part of the launch, employees shared their personal stories about their own experiences of being LGBTQ+ within the workplace, and many staff contributed to a Pride collage to show support. The business also became a Stonewall Diversity Champion and has since worked with Stonewall to review all its HR policies to ensure they are inclusive to employees from all backgrounds. A set of LGBTQ+ Frequently Asked Questions was also developed to help demystify sexuality, gender and LGBTQ+ language within the business.

Despite a virtual-only launch due to Covid-19, the network has been well received by staff and continues to grow. Following the launch, it has initiated several company-wide events and initiatives, including virtual Pride Mixers; a campaign to encourage staff to include their pronouns in their email signatures; and a range of materials and talks shared on the network's intranet page to encourage knowledge sharing about the LGBTQ+ community.

By sharing personal stories and providing educational materials, Grosvenor is working to create positive conversations that encourage staff to bring their whole selves to work.

<https://www.grosvenor.com/>

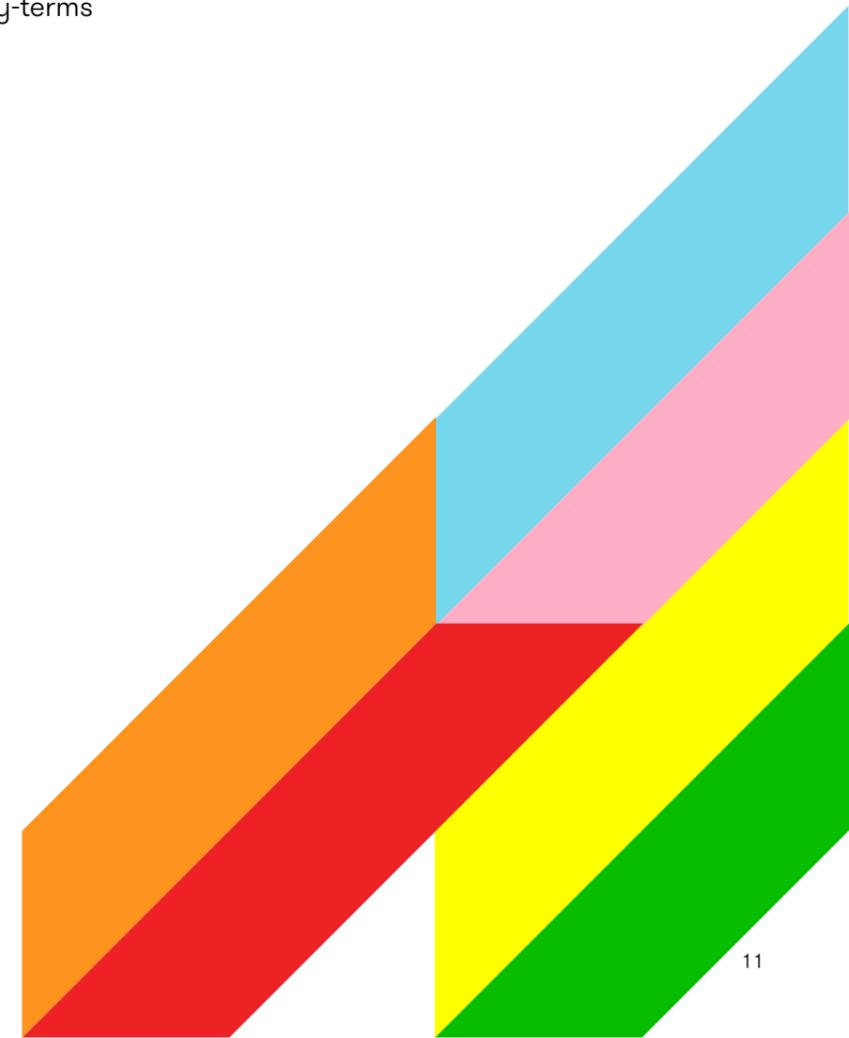
3. Training

Research by Stonewall revealed that almost one in five LGBTQ+ employees in Britain have been the target of negative comments or conducts from colleagues because of their sexuality.⁸ Developing mandatory training that focuses on diversity and inclusion best practice can help employees avoid creating stigma.

Attendees at our roundtable discussion agreed that when the correct training has been provided within an organisation, colleagues are more likely to understand the issues at hand and 'call out' inappropriate comments that could offend and exclude valued staff members.

Resource: Stonewall has created a Glossary of Terms that allows employees to be trained in the language of LGBTQ+. It provides easy read definitions of LGBTQ+ issues and makes employees aware of how to use the correct language when dealing with sensitive topics.

<https://www.stonewall.org.uk/help-advice/faqs-and-glossary/glossary-terms>



Inclusivity for all

Research by Stonewall showed that 51% of Black, Asian and minority ethnic LGBTQ+ people have experienced discrimination or poor treatment from others in the LGBTQ+ community because of their ethnicity.⁹ It is important to factor intersectionality into inclusion strategies and understand that those from different groups have different experiences.

Real estate organisations should better reflect the communities that they are working with, and efforts should be made to understand that equality is multifaceted. Recently the leadership of Pride in London has faced criticism, with critics saying the festival organisers have created a hostile environment for people of colour and showed a lack of commitment to diversity.¹⁰

Resource: The Progress Pride Flag represents a more inclusive representation of the LGBTQ+ community. The flag features black and brown stripes to represent marginalised LGBTQ+ communities of colour and pink, light blue and white stripes to represent those from the Transgender community. In 2021, the flag was updated to include a large yellow triangle with a purple circle placed in the centre to support and include the intersex community. Using the Progress Pride Flag in place of the more widely recognised rainbow flag signals that your organisation understands that equality is multifaceted.

<https://www.gaytimes.co.uk/culture/lgbtq-flag-2021-redesign-to-better-represent-intersex-community/>

Case study: UK Black Pride

UK Black Pride is Europe's largest celebration for LGBTQ+ people of colour. The celebration is a safe space to celebrate diverse sexualities, gender identities, cultures, gender expressions and backgrounds. It promotes unity and cooperation among LGBTQ+ people of diasporic communities.

The organisation aims to ensure that the UK Black Pride festival event (which takes place between 2 and 4 July in 2021) will be inclusive and aims to raise awareness around the experiences of the UK's Black LGBTQ+ community.

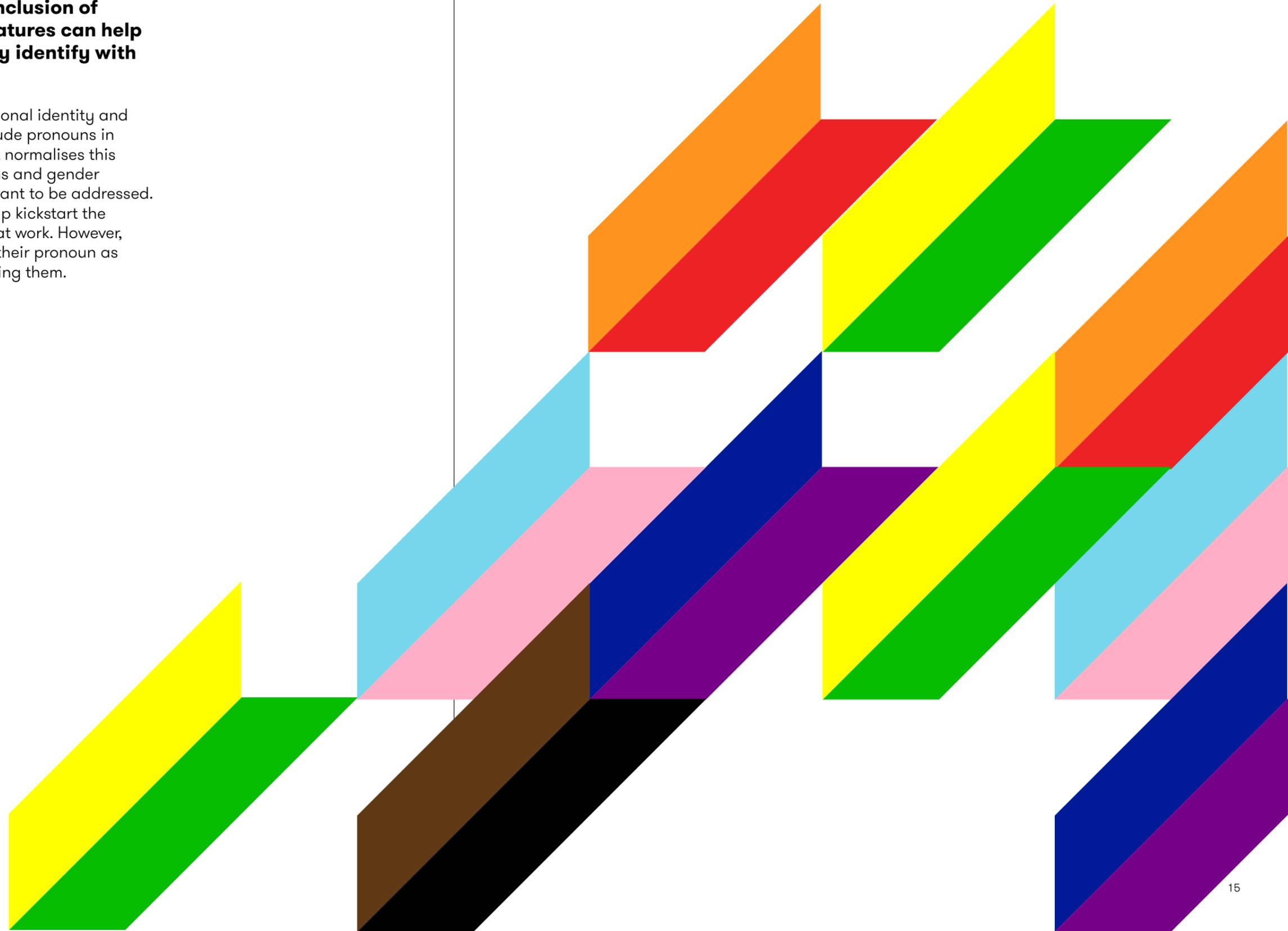
<https://www.ukblackpride.org.uk/>



Celebrating identity

Transgender, non-binary and intersex people can feel disrespected, invalidated and alienated when assumptions are wrongly made about their gender identity. Encouraging the inclusion of pronouns in employee's email signatures can help colleagues feel that the gender they identify with is acknowledged in the workplace.

When cisgendered people (those whose personal identity and gender corresponds with their birth sex) include pronouns in email signatures and social media profiles, it normalises this process for everyone and better enables trans and gender diverse colleagues to be clear on how they want to be addressed. Such initiatives also build awareness and help kickstart the conversation behind diversity and inclusion at work. However, employees should not feel forced to include their pronoun as they may not feel ready or comfortable sharing them.



Ways the built environment can support LGBTQ+ people

At Board level	At middle management	At NextGen
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ensure your business strategy helps promote diversity through an inclusive organisational culture and values• Allocate budget for training so all employees can understand sensitivities• Encourage employees to display their pronouns in their email signature	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Find ways to spread awareness of LGBTQ+ culture and history – including but not limited to LGBTQ+ History and Pride months• Set up support systems and networks for LGBTQ+ colleagues and allies• Engage with the ‘silent majority’ on sexuality issues and encourage them to interact and share their views• Introduce a diversity and inclusion behavioural competency in appraisals• Create safe space within your team structure for colleagues to feel they can be open about their feelings without being exposed to discrimination or harassment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Call out colleagues that make microaggressions¹¹ and derogatory comments – even if made as ‘banter’• Join networking groups that encourage openness and inclusivity

Creating spaces for diverse communities

Research by the UCL Urban Lab found that 62% of LGBTQ+ venues in London closed between 2006 and 2017.¹² As safe spaces, LGBTQ+ venues serve an important role and purpose for the community, their welfare and their mental wellbeing. During the Covid-19 pandemic, when these venues were closed, feelings of loneliness amongst LGBTQ+ people more than doubled, with 56% of the community experiencing loneliness “very often” or “every day”.¹³ Real estate organisations should feel a responsibility for creating safe spaces that support LGBTQ+ communities.

1. Queer spaces

Historically LGBTQ+ inclusive venues have provided a safe and inclusive space, free from shame and often away from the public gaze. Whilst it is important for people that identify as LGBTQ+ to feel welcome and safe in all public spaces, there is still a demand for traditional LGBTQ+ spaces as a means of forging a sense of identity and community.

The business case for creating spaces for queer communities is strong. The Pink Pound – the term coined for the spending power of LGBTQ+ people – is estimated to be around £6bn per year in the UK alone.¹⁴ By acknowledging the LGBTQ+ financial market, developers and built environment practitioners should be able to recognise the financial benefits of producing such spaces. However, in light of intersectionality and inclusivity, there must be an awareness of type of venues that are being developed and efforts made to ensure they appeal to a broad and diverse range of the community.

Resource: Arup, in partnership with the University of Westminster, has launched a research report *Queering Public Space*, exploring the relationships between queer communities and the various ways to ‘queer’ the public realm and spaces. The report suggests recommendations of design characteristics that can make a space more inclusive and welcoming – from lighting to seating – and addresses the various ways that built environment practitioners can protect queer history in cities.

<https://www.arup.com/perspectives/publications/research/section/queering-public-space>

Case study: Queer Britain

Queer Britain’s main purpose is to advance the shared British LGBTQ+ history by celebrating and promoting its culture. The charity, which will be developing plans for the first national museum focused on LGBTQ+ people, works to reclaim the past, preserve the present and inspire the future.

The proposed museum, which was conceptualised at the Queer Britain Art Show in 2017, would help future generations understand their history, imagine a host of possible futures and recognise the achievements of those who came before them. It will also act as a safe social place for all communities – LGBTQ+ or not – and will steer clear of the more recognised LGBTQ+ venues that are shaped around alcohol consumption that isolate some members of the community.

www.queerbritain.org.uk

2. Planning regulation

There is room and opportunity for the planning sector (ranging from local authorities, planners, developers) to work together to shape policies and regulations so they better support and protect Central London’s LGBTQ+ spaces. Preserving the character of sites through listing and requirements built into planning guidance would help the LGBTQ+ community feel more involved in the planning process.

Better engagement during consultation with local LGBTQ+ communities and groups would help transition planning into more inclusive practice and is likely to assist in the preservation of queer memory and culture.

Case study: The Joiners Arms

When plans to demolish the well-known LGBTQ+ pub The Joiners Arms in Tower Hamlets were announced in late 2014, a community group – Friends of the Joiners Arms – campaigned so the pub could become London’s first community-run, late-license LGBTQ+ pub.

After the campaign’s success in 2017, the London Borough of Tower Hamlets used a Section 106 to require that the redevelopment to include a space that would remain a lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender-focused venue.

<https://thejoinersliveson.wordpress.com/>

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- 10 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/mar/20/calls-overhaul-pride-in-london-after-resignations>
- 11 Microaggressions are verbal, behavioural or environmental slights that communicate hostile, derogatory or negative attitudes directed towards stigmatised or marginalized groups.
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