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# **Diversifying Real Estate: Sexuality**

**Guidebook commissioned by CPA & WPA NextGen**

**2026 edition**

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London Property Alliance

**WPA | CPA**  
Westminster Property Association | City Property Association

**freehold** 

**GT** GARDINER & THEOBALD

# Foreword

This guidebook aims to help individuals and organisations make central London's real estate sector more welcoming and inclusive for people who identify as LGBTQIA+. 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 LGTBQIA+ people.

The original edition was published in June 2021, the third edition of a series of themed diversity guidebooks commissioned by Westminster Property Association (WPA) and City Property Association (CPA) NextGen networks, produced by London Property Alliance and supported by our NextGen champion Gardiner & Theobald.

Five years on this updated guidebook reflects the move away from the impact during Covid to present day data and policy. The original guide drew on a London Property Alliance roundtable with our members, experts, and local government stakeholders; a podcast and blog examining Pride in the built environment; and interviews and meetings with leading activists, industry figures, and diversity and inclusion networks.

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

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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.

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**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 LGBTQIA+ 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 statue books until repealed in England 2003 (just 23 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 LGBTQIA+ community was being replaced by positive recognition, role models and acceptance.

Inevitably, negative LGBTQIA+ 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 LGBTQIA+ 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

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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 LGBTQIA+ 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 LGBTQIA+ 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 LGBTQIA+ communities.

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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 LGBTQIA+ 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**  
Ambassador - Freehold  
Chair - The Young Westminster Foundation  
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# 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 such as those who identify as LGBTQIA+. A 2024 Estates Gazette survey showed that only 36% of respondents believe enough is being done to promote inclusion of LGBTQIA+ professionals across the industry.<sup>1</sup>**

The survey following this, conducted in 2025, highlighted a decline in visible representation: 59% of respondents said they see visible LGBTQIA+ role models at work, down from around 70% in the previous survey cycle. These results show that, despite growing attention on diversity, visible progress for LGBTQIA+ inclusion remains limited.<sup>2</sup>

The survey indicates that, although many organisations have strengthened their DEI policies, everyday experiences of inclusion have not kept pace. The drop in visible role models is particularly significant, as representation at senior levels shapes workplace culture and signals that LGBTQIA+ talent can thrive and progress. Role models validate belonging and ambition, helping to draw diverse LGBTQIA+ professionals into the industry.

Real estate organisations may find value in prioritising representation, visibility and belonging for LGBTQIA+ professionals. This guide aims to support that effort by highlighting best practice, showcasing ways to promote inclusion, and offering ideas that could help ensure LGBTQIA+ talent feels valued, represented and able to succeed.

## Key challenges in making the real estate sector inclusive to LGBTQIA+ 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 LGBTQIA+ are 1.6 times more likely to feel included in an organisation when leaders place diversity and inclusion on their strategic agenda.<sup>3</sup> However, new research shows that 39% of LGBTQIA+ employees still hide their identity at work and 26% have experienced negative comments or conduct from customers or clients because of their identity.<sup>4</sup>**

## 1. Visible role models and allies

Attendees at the London Property Alliance roundtable in 2021 agreed that a lack of visible role models and allies within the real estate sector makes it difficult for LGBTQIA+ identifying people to feel as though they are welcome in the industry. Meanwhile, research by Stonewall (2025) found that almost 40% of LGBTQIA+ employees still hide their identity at work.<sup>5</sup> When organisations promote LGBTQIA+ inclusivity through visible role models and allies those employees can feel comfortable to be themselves in the workplace.

Providing a visible forum for LGBTQIA+ 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. Offering 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 provides an Allies Toolbox Talk that aims to educate workforces and empower colleagues to become active allies to the LGBTQIA+ community. The resource, with accompanying support pack and slides covers frequently asked questions, resources and recommendations.

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

## 2. The power of networks

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

### External networks for LGBTQIA+ working in real estate

- **Building Equality**

<https://www.buildingequalityuk.com>  
@BuildingEqLGBT

- **Changing the Face of Property**

@propertyneedsu

- **Freehold**

<https://freeholdlgbt.com>  
@freeholdlgbt

- **LGBT Property Professionals**

@LGBTProperty

- **Planning Out**

@PlanningOut

Setting up an internal network within your organisation could show your LGBTQIA+ 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 LGBTQIA+ colleagues and allies.

Participants of an Alliance podcast back in 2020 explored Pride in the built environment and discussed their career experiences in the early noughties, commenting upon employers asking them to remain in the closet when dealing with specific clients.<sup>6</sup>

Whilst our participants were reflecting on their experiences nearly 20 years ago, more recent research has revealed that LGBTQIA+ staff still face instances where clients ask that they be removed from a team because of their sexuality.<sup>7</sup> By having an internal LGBTQIA+ 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 LGBTQIA+ staff within the organisation, the company launched its employee-led network, Pride@Grosvenor, in 2020. The network was created to bring together colleagues from across the business to meet, celebrate, and share experiences of diversity and Pride in all its forms. Open to both LGBTQIA+ employees and allies, Pride@Grosvenor encourages staff to engage in constructive conversations about sexuality, helping to foster a culture of equal opportunities for all.

Since its launch, Pride@Grosvenor has hosted a wide range of initiatives, including virtual and in-person events, awareness campaigns such as encouraging pronoun inclusion in email signatures, and sharing educational resources and personal blogs about LGBTQIA+ experiences. The network also marks important dates such as Bi Visibility Day, Trans Awareness Week, International Day Against Homophobia and Pride Month, helping to raise awareness and create ongoing dialogue throughout the organisation.

Grosvenor has embedded inclusion into its policies and practices, including a Transitioning Policy for transgender employees and support through a network of mental health first aiders, several of whom sit on the Pride committee. The company also works with leading inclusion organisations, such as Stonewall and Out & Equal, to provide allyship training and ensure HR policies and practices are fully inclusive.

<https://www.grosvenor.com/about-us/how-we-work/diversity-inclusion/pride-network>

## 3. Training

Research by Stonewall revealed that more than 1 in 4 LGBTQIA+ people experienced negative comments or conduct from customers or clients because of their identity.<sup>8</sup> Nearly a third of LGBTQ+ employees (31%) did not agree they could be themselves at work. Of these, 53% have experienced discrimination, such as receiving verbal or physical abuse, or feeling excluded.<sup>9</sup> 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.

### Stonewall LGBTQIA+ workplace training

Stonewall provides a range of practical tools to support organisations in turning commitment into action. These resources include inclusive training and learning for employees and leaders, guidance on pronouns and inclusive communication, advice on setting up and sustaining internal LGBTQIA+ staff networks and ally programmes, and a clear glossary of commonly used terminology. Together, they offer accessible, practical support for embedding inclusion into everyday workplace culture.

- **LGBTQ+ workplace training**  
<https://www.stonewall.org.uk/inclusive-workplaces/lgbtq-workplace-training-events>
- **Pronouns guidance**  
<https://www.stonewall.org.uk/resources/workplace-trans-inclusion-hub/a-beginners-guide-to-pronouns-and-using-pronouns-in-the-workplace>
- **Employee network guidance**  
<https://www.stonewall.org.uk/young-futures/lgbtq-support/know-your-rights/lgbtq-staff-network-groups>
- **LGBTQIA+ terminology**  
<https://www.stonewall.org.uk/resources/list-lgbtq-terms>

# Inclusivity for all

**Research by Stonewall showed that 51% of Black, Asian and minority ethnic LGBTQIA+ people have experienced discrimination or poor treatment from others in the LGBTQIA+ community because of their ethnicity.<sup>10</sup> 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. In 2021, the leadership of Pride in London faced criticism, with critics at the time saying the festival organisers had created a hostile environment for people of colour and showed a lack of commitment to diversity.<sup>11</sup>

While LGBTQIA+ inclusion is often discussed as a single experience, it is important to recognise the diversity within the community itself. Non-binary, intersex and gender-diverse people may face distinct barriers, including invisibility, misgendering or a lack of appropriate policies and facilities, which can be compounded by other aspects of identity such as ethnicity, disability or socioeconomic background.

**Resource:** The Progress Pride Flag represents a more inclusive representation of the LGBTQIA+ community. The flag features black and brown stripes to represent marginalised LGBTQIA+ 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 LGBTQIA+ 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 LGBTQIA+ people of diasporic communities.

The organisation aims to ensure that the UK Black Pride festival event will be inclusive and aims to raise awareness around the experiences of the UK's Black LGBTQIA+ community.

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



# Celebrating identity

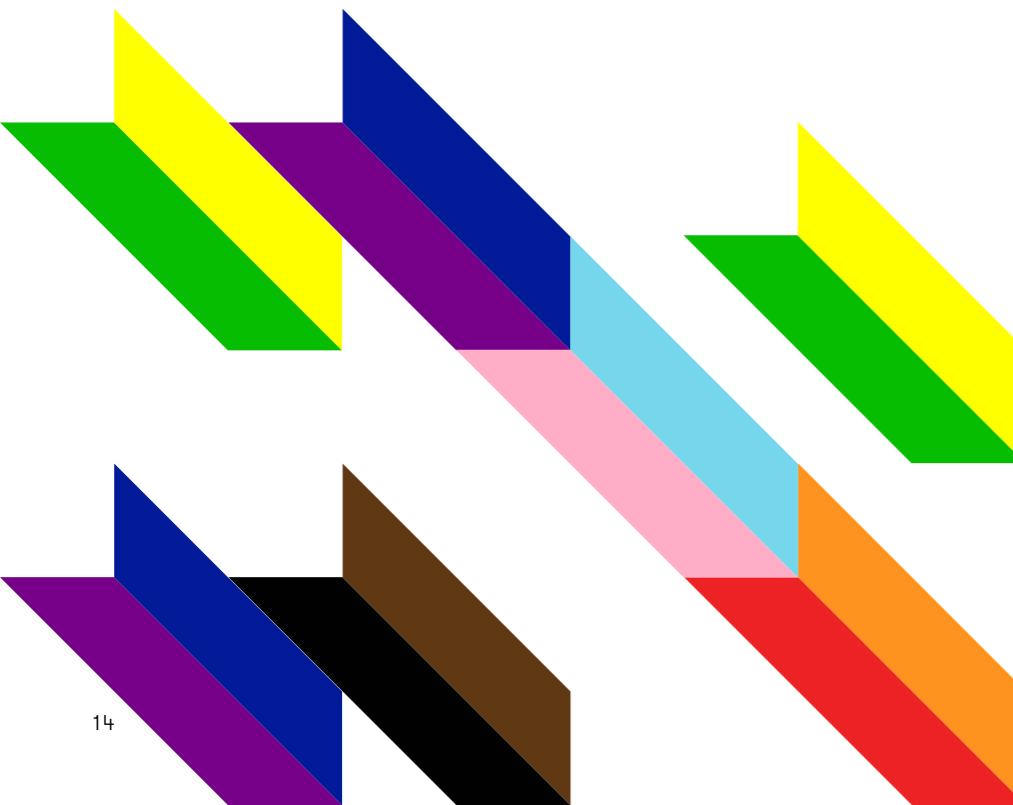
**Transgender, non-binary and intersex people can feel disrespected, invalidated and alienated when assumptions are wrongly made about their gender identity. Encouraging the inclusion of pronouns in employee's email signatures can help colleagues feel that the gender they identify with is acknowledged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

Creating environments where people feel able to express their identity also means recognising those whose gender or sex characteristics may not fit binary norms. Simple measures – such as inclusive language, flexible policies, and avoiding assumptions about gender – can help ensure non-binary and intersex colleagues feel respected and represented.

# Ways the built environment can support LGBTQIA+ people

| At Board level   | At middle management  | At NextGen  |
|--|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ensure your business strategy helps promote diversity through an inclusive organisational culture and values</li><li>• Allocate budget for training so all employees can understand sensitivities</li><li>• Encourage employees to display their pronouns in their email signature</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Find ways to spread awareness of LGBTQIA+ culture and history – including but not limited to LGBTQIA+ History and Pride months</li><li>• Set up support systems and networks for LGBTQIA+ colleagues and allies</li><li>• 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</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Call out colleagues that make microaggressions<sup>12</sup> and derogatory comments – even if made as 'banter'</li><li>• Join networking groups that encourage openness and inclusivity</li></ul> |



# Creating spaces for diverse communities

Research by the Greater London Authority found that more than half of London's LGBTQIA+ venues closed between 2006 and 2022.<sup>13</sup> As safe spaces, LGBTQIA+ venues serve an important role and purpose for the community, their welfare and their mental wellbeing. Property owners and developers have the opportunity to create safe spaces that support LGBTQIA+ communities.

## 1. Queer spaces

Historically LGBTQIA+ 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 LGBTQIA+ to feel welcome and safe in all public spaces, there is still a demand for traditional LGBTQIA+ 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 LGBTQIA+ people – is estimated to be around £6bn per year in the UK alone.<sup>14</sup> By acknowledging the LGBTQIA+ 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:** In 2021, Arup in partnership with the University of Westminster, launched the 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 LGBTQIA+ history by celebrating and promoting its culture. The charity has developed the UK's first museum of Queer culture and boasts a fascinating archive as well as the world's first virtual reality museum dedicated to celebrating the stories and artwork of LGBTQIA+ people and preserving queer personal histories.

The museum was conceptualised at the Queer Britain Art Show in 2017 and officially opened its doors to the public in King's Cross in 2022. It provides a safe and inclusive space for the LGBTQIA+ community.

[www.queerbritain.org.uk](http://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 LGBTQIA+ spaces. Preserving the character of sites through listing and requirements built into planning guidance would help the LGBTQIA+ community feel more involved in the planning process.

Better engagement during consultation with local LGBTQIA+ communities and groups would help transition planning into a 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 LGBTQIA+ 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 LGBTQIA+ 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/>

# References

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- 10 [https://www.stonewall.org.uk/sites/default/files/lgbt\\_in\\_britain\\_home\\_and\\_communities.pdf](https://www.stonewall.org.uk/sites/default/files/lgbt_in_britain_home_and_communities.pdf)
- 11 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/mar/20/calls-overhaul-pride-in-london-after-resignations>
- 12 Microaggressions are verbal, behavioural or environmental slights that communicate hostile, derogatory or negative attitudes directed towards stigmatised or marginalized groups.
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- 14 <https://www.crunch.co.uk/knowledge/running-a-business/pursuing-the-pink-pound-how-big-is-the-uks-lgbt-market/>

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