

Embracing space to thrive in the South West – the exciting opportunities our new Exeter home offers

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On the opening of our Exeter team's new office, we spoke to our partners Claire Cornish and Nigel Lyons to discuss the move and the firm's exciting new premises.

We've been building strong client relationships in the South West for over 10 years. We've now relocated from Paris Street to a new space on the ground floor of Keble House, Southernhay Gardens, in the heart of the city.

Nigel Lyons, Partner

"Exeter is the perfect location for the firm to support our footprint for growth in the South West."

What are the reasons behind the Exeter office move?

Claire: First and foremost, we want to ensure the office is in keeping with our ambitions both in the region and nationally. We are very much looking forward to showing clients the new space as well as hosting client events to properly showcase who we are and our key strengths.

With the arrival of Senior Associate Anna Clifford, to support Sam Trevor now qualified as an Associate, we've expanded our South West real estate presence. We've already started running some successful autumn and spring drinks, which began with a real estate focus but which we have recently broadened successfully.

We're working hard within the local property circles, which has improved our visibility within the real estate market. Moving forward, our plan is to host events in the new office to make use of the client meeting space being able to open up to operate as a theatre style space.

Nigel: We believe that Exeter is the perfect location for the firm to support our footprint for growth in the South West. The arrival of new industries, such as renewables and the tech sector, industrial and engineering firms, together with a leading university, plus the fact that the Met Office is here, as well as other big organisations and businesses, means Exeter is thriving at a time when there's a big move to net zero by 2050. We're excited about what the new office offers us and our clients as we develop and grow our South West presence.

In terms of the design and layout of the office, can you talk us through the key features?

Claire: I think the first thing to touch upon is the new office's location. It's in the heart of the city's financial and business district. It's adjacent to the court, as well as other key names from the legal and business world.

In terms of internal design, the office has a similar feel to other Browne Jacobson offices. The working space has a very similar look and feel to our Birmingham and Manchester offices, for example. The main workspace is open plan, with planting on the desk dividers and

living walls, supporting our collaborative working approach. Our client facilities are quite versatile, with the option to either set these up as a table format or theatre style.

Nigel: The key vision for the office is that it will encourage collaboration and has great potential for hosting big client events in the area. The hope is that we'll be able to host a whole range of events in house, such as employment clubs, mock trials, claims clubs, inquest training for local authority clients, education conferences, real estate events, as well as social mobility initiatives.

Have there been any surprises or challenges which have cropped up as part of the move?

Claire: It's the first time I've been involved in an office move or opening, so I think I possibly underestimated what was involved from a practical perspective to facilitate it. It's all been expertly well managed by our project team, with everything properly triaged to deliver an 'on time' go live!

My key focus moving forward will be to ensure we're all aware of the space and its potential. No matter which office you are based in, it's an opportunity for everyone across the firm to think about the facilities we have here and how we can use this space to link up with key clients in this region.

What is the vision for the office going forward?

Claire: Our key goal is to continue our work in raising the firm's profile in this part of the country, so everyone is aware that we're here. We really do have a breadth and depth on our bench that very few other legal firms in the region can compete with.

Nigel: We're in a very fortunate position, now having the combination of the Birmingham and Exeter offices. I feel it is important for a firm of our size to be pushing further into the market in the South West and presents a great opportunity we can take advantage of. We have great contacts in the Devon and Cornwall markets.

Claire: Nigel's point on our offices combining to cover the South West in a triangle is quite key. By doing so as a legal provider, we now offer something unique.

How does Browne Jacobson stand out in the South West market?

Claire: We handle a real breadth of work: real estate, education, health and safety, regulatory work, for both public and private sector clients. We've really cemented our reputation in the region. In addition, we manage a key FSI client from this office.

Nigel: Another element to it is our commitment to diversity and inclusion and social mobility. We've been doing a lot of work with universities, as well as looking to potentially help several businesses with diversity and inclusion training. We put our money where our mouth is on these things and that's very impactful when it comes to recruiting and retaining talent.

Claire: Yes, we've had a number of good link-ups come through thanks to our FAIRE programme. Caroline Green has been invited to be a speaker at an event in July organised by the South West Social Mobility Commission and the South West Business Council. That has come through our close links with the University of Exeter and our leading reputation in this sphere, having topped the Social Mobility Employer Index for the past couple of years.

One final question: what are you most excited about with the new office?

Nigel: The living wall, and the whole office feeling so much lighter. It's a fantastic space for colleagues and clients.

Claire: For me, it's the ability to get clients physically in the door, to be able to host our own events and show off the new office space. That's the cherry on the cake for me.

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