CITY RENTS HOLD WHILE WEST END DROPS FOR 2ND QUARTER

RESEARCH CENTRAL LONDON PRIME YIELDS REMAIN STABLE SUPPLY CONTINUES TO INCREASE ACROSS LONDON

CENTRAL LONDON QUARTERLY - OFFICES Q4 2016

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In January 2017, Prime Minister Theresa May set out her negotiating position for talks on leaving the European Union. That speech smacked of hard Brexit, and the EU leaders responded with their previous line of “no Brexit a la carte.” For both sides, this is their opening position, and in the final deal they will meet somewhere in the middle.

Brussels is known as the capital of compromise, and in reality the EU probably does want Brexit a la carte. Losing access to the City of London, the marketplace for 78% of European foreign exchange deals, presents a huge threat to business continuity in Europe. However, shutting British car firms out of the single market presents opportunities for the remaining EU nations, but with fewer systemic risks.

In short, both sides have something they want from the other, and that is the basis of all negotiations.

Setting aside those financial lines of business that require EU access (which are a minority, both in jobs and revenue), for London the outcome of the Brexit talks is not a cliff hanger that will hold up decision making indefinitely. Indeed, swathes of London’s tech community have already shrugged Brexit off and continued expanding. Following Apple’s big office pre-let deal in Q3 2016, Amazon decided in Q4 to take the remaining space in Principal Place, while in January Snapchat said it already in place.

China and Hong Kong were the largest source of foreign investment, accounting for £2.9 bn, which was 60% more than that deployed by Europeans. This pattern will play out in other parts of the London economy with ease, given that tech has always been US-biased and finance historically traded across the time zones. A new growth pattern for the London economy has already emerged, and will now gain momentum, which harks back to its day as the hub of the Commonwealth trade system. The new model is closely entwined with North America and Asia-Pacific, built around common ground on language, law and business practice. Within this new system, London has a Switzerland-like role, as a safe haven to park money as an insurance policy against the unforeseen. The attraction of London to the office occupier or property investor is that this “Back to the Future” scenario is not science fiction, it is already a functioning reality.

On business uncertainty, we are at the thick end of the wedge, as new firms know the UK is leaving the single market, logic dictates they should build up new, non-European lines of business. In 2017, London companies will send their rainmakers and salesmen to North America, Asia-Pacific, and the rest of the world, in search of new customers. As the Brexit talks progress, the UK economy will gradually reduce its exposure to Europe, and an EU trade deal will become a case of preventing a cliff edge not building a future.

For London real estate, the shift towards a wider world of occupiers and investment capital is at an advanced stage. Seven of the ten largest occupier deals in 2016 were to overseas corporations, particularly from North America, which is the same as in 2015. Of the £9.3 bn of overseas money invested in Central London offices in 2016, 80% came from outside of Europe.

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Partner, Chief Economist

“While we should be ready for volatile sentiment, the reality is market fundamentals are solid. Yields are steady, demand from international investors is strong, while in this occupier market the tech firms are expanding again. Clarity is needed on the future of London’s financial cluster, although occupier demand is more diverse today than back in 2007.”

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HEAD OF CENTRAL LONDON OFFICES

“City take-up rebounded in Q4, although there was almost certainly some catch up from an understandably quiet Q3. The tech districts are trading much as they were pre-referendum and rents on the best space have remained firm. There has however been downwards pressure on rents where the offices are not genuinely ‘prime’, whilst incentives have moved out.”

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HEAD OF WEST END CAPITAL MARKETS

“The final quarter of 2016 confirmed that buyers continue to return to the West End, with a 24% rise in sales. At a time of global economic volatility, the West End is still viewed as an island of stability. Prices for prime assets have on the whole returned to, and in a few instances surpassed, pre-referendum levels.”

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“For occupiers, the Brexit process will complicate decision making. It is difficult to plan your occupation needs for the next decade or more when there is so much uncertainty on business conditions in just two years’ time. On the other hand, that same uncertainty could be useful when negotiating a deal with a landlord.”

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The outlook for 2017 appears positive, with active requirements focused on the West End market totalling 2.7 m sq ft – the highest since 2007 and 44% above average.

Take-up
In the West End, take-up fell after the strong third quarter, which had been driven by Apple’s pre-let at Battersea Power Station. Demand in Q4 2016 totalled 1.02 m sq ft, 26% below the level recorded in Q3. There was just one deal over 50,000 sq ft that transacted during the quarter; Westminster City Council acquired circa 57,000 sq ft at 5 Strand, WC2.

Take-up for 2016 totalled 4.3 m sq ft, nearly 10% below the level recorded in 2015 and 7% below the long-term average of 4.6 m sq ft. The TMT sector was the most active submarket in the West End during 2016, accounting for 36% of all known deals followed by financials with 17%.

Active requirements
The outlook for 2017 appears positive; at the year-end Knight Frank was tracking 2.7 m sq ft of active requirements focused on the West End market, the highest since 2007 and 44% above average.

The demand profile was dominated by both TMT and Corporates accounting for 29% and 27% of demand respectively. At the quarter-end there were six requirements over 50,000 sq ft and a further eight of 50,000 sq ft or over.

Supply and development
In the West End, availability rose for the fifth consecutive quarter to end the year at 7.0 m sq ft. This is the highest level for more than six years, 31% above the long-term average and an increase of 123% from the same period last year.

Much of the increase can be attributed to the relatively low levels of take-up, more than 1.3 m sq ft of untenanted development space reaching practical completion, and the release of second-hand space through tenant movement. Importantly, there is no evidence of tenant release through distress. Looking forward, supply levels are likely to be kept in check by the severely restricted speculative development pipeline in 2017, when just 927,020 sq ft is being built speculatively.

Prime rents and incentives
In the West End, the prime rent at year-end was £105.00 per sq ft, representing a 9% fall over the last six months. Rent free periods remained at 18-21 months on a 10-year lease.

Investment
West End investment turnover in Q4 2016 totalled £1.5 bn, 20% above the long-term quarterly average of £1.2 bn. A total of 29 transactions took place with an average lot size of £57 m, down from £68 m in the previous quarter.

The prime yield remained at 3.50% for the eighth consecutive quarter. The continued strong levels of equity targeting West End assets, means that we expect yields for prime stock to hold at this level.

Overseas purchasers continue to show their appetite for West End investments, dominating Q4 2016 turnover by around 60% of total transactions. The focus of overseas investors has been large lot sizes; four of the five largest transactions of the quarter involved foreign purchasers. JPMorgan purchased two of the three largest assets traded; the bank purchased 73-89 Oxford Street, W1 for £276.5 m reflecting a net initial yield of 3.32%, and 10 Piccadilly, W1 for £160.0 m, reflecting an initial yield of 3.90%.

Take-up
Take-up for the final quarter of 2016 totalled 2.0 m sq ft, the highest level since Q3 2015 and a 62% increase on the previous quarter’s level. Activity was well above the long-term quarterly average of 1.7 m sq ft, and was driven by strong activity across the majority of submarkets. There were three transactions in excess of 100,000 sq ft, the largest being the FT’s pre-letting of 186,000 sq ft at Bracken House, EC4. Despite the strong final quarter, annual take-up totalled 6.3 m sq ft, significantly lower than the previous year and 12% below the long-term average level.

The TMT sector once again dominated the City letting profile; the sector accounted for 32% of take-up. Over the course of 2016, TMT occupiers have acquired in excess of 1.4 m sq ft, more than any other business sector. The take-up of co-working and serviced office space continued in the City. The City in the final quarter; WeWork acquired 186,000 sq ft during the quarter, while a further 160,000 sq ft was acquired by a selection of other operators. At the quarter-end, WeWork was under offer on a further 52,000 sq ft at 15 Bishopsgate, EC2.

Active requirements
Total active requirements fell by 11% to 3.7 m sq ft; largely due to the volume of space transacted during the last three months of the year. While this is also around 11% below the long-term average, it is broadly in line with the same quarter last year.

Supply and development
City availability remained relatively stable in the final quarter at 7.7 m sq ft, reflecting a vacancy rate of 6.4%. Supply remains well below the long-term average of 9.3 m sq ft, although it ought to be noted that it is 30% above its level at this point last year.

Options for occupiers seeking larger units in the markets surrounding the Core are particularly thin; there is only one building in SE1 and one building in Shoreditch / Clerkenwell that could satisfy a 100,000 sq ft requirement. There is no space currently available in Aldgate / Whitechapel in excess of 100,000 sq ft.

Primes rents and incentives
The prime rent remained stable at £70.00 per sq ft for the fifth consecutive quarter. Rent free periods remained unchanged from the previous quarter’s level at 21-24 months on a typical 10-year term certain.

Investment turnover in the City was up 128% on the previous quarter at £2.7 bn, although still 23% down on Q4 2015. Transaction levels totalled over 44% above the long-term average of £1.8 bn. Overseas purchasers accounted for 92% of all transactions during Q4 by price. Of the seven deals over £100 m, all were acquired by overseas investors with nearly 40% by Chinese and Hong Kong buyers. UK buyers were less active during the quarter, accounting for only 15 of the 44 transactions which took place during Q4. The average lot size was up from £45 m in Q3 to £82 m in Q4 as the market witnessed a number of larger deals transacting. The most active buyers of the quarter were quoted and private property companies, accounting for 54% of all deals by price.

The Prime City yield remained unchanged at 4.25%.

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The last 12 months witnessed three key trends gather strength in the Central London commercial property market:

1. The creative sector’s expansion continued apace; there was an intensification of demand from co-working and serviced office providers; and product & pricing once again appeared to be higher up tenants’ priority lists than proximity to competitors.

Headlines in 2016 were dominated by Apple’s pre-let of 500,000 sq ft at Battersea Power Station, which was the largest office letting in London’s West End and Southbank for the last 20 years. However, total take-up from the TMT sector in 2016 was more than 3.0 m sq ft; this suggests growth across the sector and not dominance by a few major players. The recent news that Snapchat is to make the UK its main hub outside the US will help fuel demand in the coming year.

2. Flexible workspace continuing to grow in importance

Although take-up by flexible workspace providers failed to match the heights reached in 2015, this sector continues to grow in importance across the market.

In excess of 3.0 m sq ft of London’s office space has been absorbed into the sector over the last three years and demand remains strong. As companies seek workspace that can match their dynamic requirements and attract talent, we anticipate strong activity in this sector next year.

In 2015, we identified a significant increase in the number of tenants relocating to different submarkets, and this trend has continued through 2016. Over the last 12 months 66% of occupiers acquiring more than 20,000 sq ft have moved across a submarket boundary; this is very different to ten years ago when we were used to seeing 30%-40% of firms make such a move. This trend underlines that many occupiers now see identifying accommodation that complements their brand identity and can attract & retain workers is more important than maintaining their traditional industry clusters. As a bonus, they are finding that they can find also find value in the areas surrounding the core markets. This trend is certainly here to stay.

3. Significant increase in number of tenants relocating to different submarkets

These three trends will continue to dominate the Central London occupier market as we move into 2017.
“Docklands witnessed above average annual take-up levels in 2016, buoyed by two of the three largest transactions in Central London totalling a combined 851,000 sq ft.”

Take-up
Take-up for 2016 totalled 1.25 m sq ft, up 9% on the previous year, and 27% above the long-term average of 984,000 sq ft. This will be the second highest annual take-up recorded in Docklands since 2010. The majority of take-up came in the final quarter of the year, totalling 617,000 sq ft, more than double the same quarter last year. This was the highest quarterly take-up figure recorded in last six years, albeit 87% of this figure was attributable to one deal. The Government Property Unit (GPU) took an assignment from Barclays of circa 540,000 sq ft at 20 Cabot Square. There has only been one other deal over 500,000 sq ft in the last 10 years. Demand for smaller units remained high with 85% of the deals during the quarter below 10,000 sq ft.

Active requirements
Total active requirements in Docklands remained significantly higher than the long-term average during Q4 2016, despite the deal transacting at 20 Cabot Square. Active searches totalled 559,000 sq ft at year-end with HMRC focusing their search on Canary Wharf and Stratford for 300,000 sq ft. Furthermore, there is already nearly 100,000 sq ft under offer in Docklands, which will continue to boost take-up levels in the coming months. Demand from the financial sector has been steadily increasing for the last five quarters across Central London which will most likely have a positive impact on take-up levels.

Supply and development
Supply levels continued to fall quarter-on-quarter from 906,000 sq ft to 811,000 sq ft, 43% below the long-term average of 1.4 m sq ft. The vacancy rate fell from 4.6% in Q3 to 4.1% in Q4, well below the average of 6.8%. Availability continues to be made up of second-hand stock, with no new or refurbished supply on the market since Q3 2015. There is just one building in Canary Wharf that is currently under construction: 1 Bank Street totalling 700,000 sq ft is due for completion in 2019, and as mentioned in previous reports, over 280,000 sq ft has already been pre-let.

Rental profile
The prime headline rent remained stable at £39.00 per sq ft for the sixth consecutive quarter.

Investment
There was no material investment stock openly marketed in Docklands during Q4, but one off-market transaction took place. A Chinese corporate purchased 3 Harbour Exchange for £37 m. The lack of stock in this market will continue to influence the investment figures for the foreseeable future.

Investment sales constrained by lack of stock
Despite the result of the EU Referendum, the final quarter of 2016 saw take-up rise to 15% above average.
### KEY STATISTICS

**Central London office market**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Q4 15</th>
<th>Q1 16</th>
<th>Q2 16</th>
<th>Q3 16</th>
<th>Q4 16</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>3 mths</strong> (%)</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>123%</td>
<td>130%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>933%</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>12 mths</strong> (%)</td>
<td>5.39%</td>
<td>3.93%</td>
<td>9.33%</td>
<td>16.14%</td>
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**Construction Requirements**

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<th>West End</th>
<th>City</th>
<th>Docklands</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Availability (sq ft)</td>
<td>6.72 m</td>
<td>7.62 m</td>
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<td>15.05 m</td>
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<tr>
<td>Take-Up (sq ft)</td>
<td>1.01 m</td>
<td>1.02 m</td>
<td>0.62 m</td>
<td>3.65 m</td>
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<tr>
<td>Active Under Rate</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>14%</td>
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<td>1%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Long-term quarterly average</td>
<td>1.15 m</td>
<td>4.05 m</td>
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**Vacancy Rate**

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Source: Knight Frank Research

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### THE CENTRAL LONDON OFFICE MARKET

**West End**

- **West End Core** - West End Core refers to Mayfair and St James’s, the area bounded by Oxford Street, Regent Street and Park Lane in W1 and by Green Park, St James’s Park and The Mall in SW1.

- **North of Mayfair** - North of Mayfair refers to the area north of Oxford Street, west of Portland Place.

- **Fitzrovia** - Fitzrovia also known as Noho, refers to the area north of Oxford Street, east of Portland Place.

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**City**

- **City Core** refers to EC2 (excluding EC2A), EC3, EC4 (excluding EC4A and EC4Y), and EC1A.

- **Midtown** - Midtown refers to EC1N, EC4A, EC4Y, WC1 (excluding Bloomsbury), and WC2 (excluding Strand/Covent Garden).

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**Docklands**

- **Canary Wharf** - Canary Wharf refers to the area comprising Canary Riverside, Westferry Circus, Columbus Courtyard, Cabot Square, Canada Square, Blackwall Place and Heron Quays (East).

- **Rest of Docklands** - Rest of Docklands refers to E14 and E16 including The Royal Business Park (excluding Canary Wharf).

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**Rest of London**

- **Stratford** - Stratford refers to E20.

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General Note

This report has been prepared by Knight Frank Research, the research and consultancy division of Knight Frank. Knight Frank Research gratefully acknowledges the assistance given by the West End, City and Docklands Offices in the compilation and presentation of this material. Certain data sourced from LOD. All graph data sourced by Knight Frank.

Technical Note

The following criteria have been adopted in the preparation of this report.

i. All floorspace figures quoted in this report refer to sq ft net.

ii. Take-up figures refer to space let, pre-let, or acquired for occupation during the quarter.

iii. Availability refers to all space available for immediate occupation, plus space still under construction which will be completed within six months and which has not been let.

iv. Availability and take-up are classified into three grades:
   - New/refurbished: Space under construction which is due for completion within six months or space which is currently on the market and is either new or completely refurbished.
   - Second-hand A Grade: Previously occupied space with air-conditioning.
   - Second-hand B Grade: Previously occupied space without air-conditioning.

v. Demand figures quoted in this report refer to named requirements for over 10,000 sq ft.

vi. Under construction figures quoted in this report refer to developments of over 20,000 sq ft which are currently underway. They do not include properties undergoing demolition.

vii. Investment figures quoted in this report refer to accommodation where the majority of income/potential income is from office usage and comprises transactions of £1 m and above.

viii. This report is produced to standard quarters.
   - Quarter 1: January 1 – March 31
   - Quarter 2: April 1 – June 30
   - Quarter 3: July 1 – September 30
   - Quarter 4: October 1 – December 31

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