



DESIGN COMMENTARY

PLP / ARCHITECTURE



# SKY

## WHO THEY ARE AND WHAT THEY WANTED

Sky is one of Europe's leading telecommunications and media companies and is the UK's largest pay-TV broadcaster.

Following an invited competition, PLP Architecture was commissioned to design the interior and develop the exterior for Sky Central - the main building of their West London campus. The design brief required a building that would galvanise 3500 employees into a single community whose identity would reflect the fast-paced and ever-evolving nature of broadcasting and telecommunications.

PLP worked together with Sky to develop the content and programmatic distribution of the building.

How could the building allow for the huge variety of work styles and the ever-changing shape of teams while maintaining a single cohesive workplace?

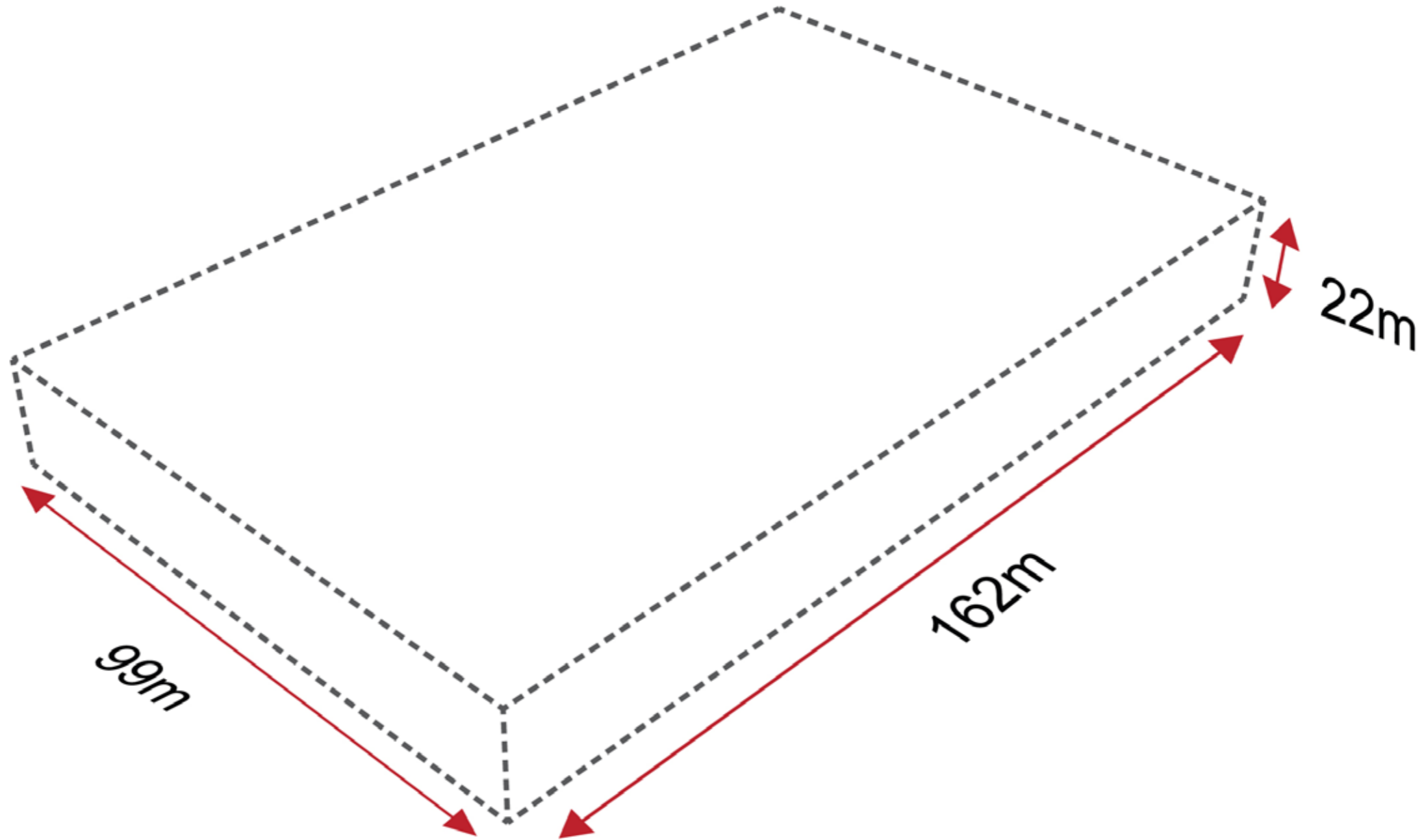
We wanted the building to encourage ad hoc encounters between people while simultaneously engendering a sense of health and wellbeing among all employees.

We proposed a design that promotes flexible, collaborative, task-based working. This flexibility was achieved through the creation of distinct neighbourhoods, linked together by a central hub. This established a range of different work areas lined together by a stacked central mezzanine space, accessed via stairs and ramps. This connective tissue encourages employees to take different routes around the office, allowing for unexpected and surprising interactions to occur naturally. These various journeys also shape the central experience of the building: an open space where both ideas and people flow and interweave continually.

A vast 100m long street runs east to west through the building, connecting the main entrances. The street is lined with a series of non-standard workspaces, a cinema, dining spaces, informal meeting areas and support facilities. Taking centre stage is a transparent, elevated live broadcast studio, located such that visitors can encounter Sky's daily operations as soon as they enter the building. Around it, a large atrium includes a series of floating mezzanines linked by exposed stairs and ramps. These elements promote staff wellbeing by encouraging movement and facilitating ad-hoc meetings between colleagues.

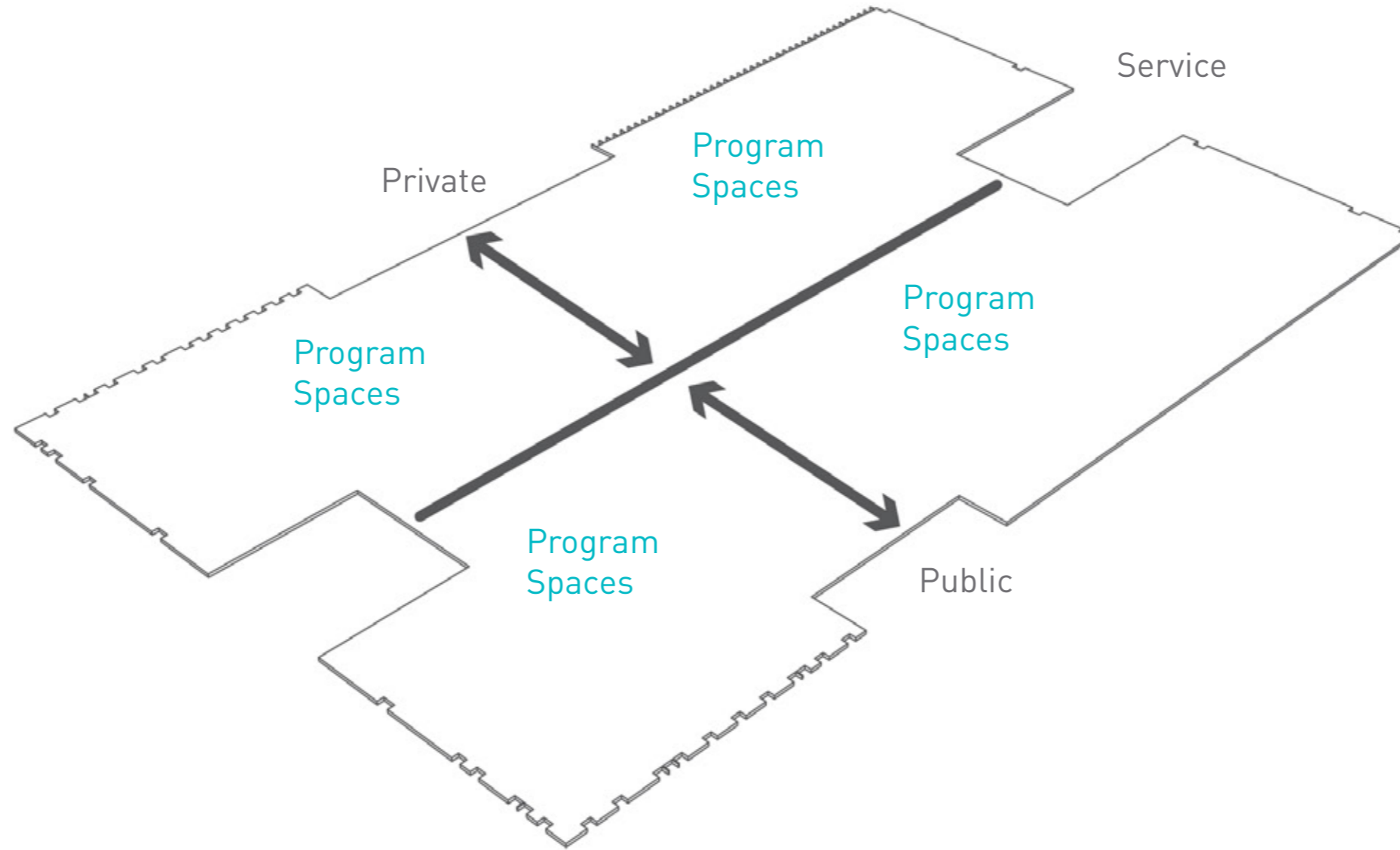


**CONCEPT**  
THE BUILDING



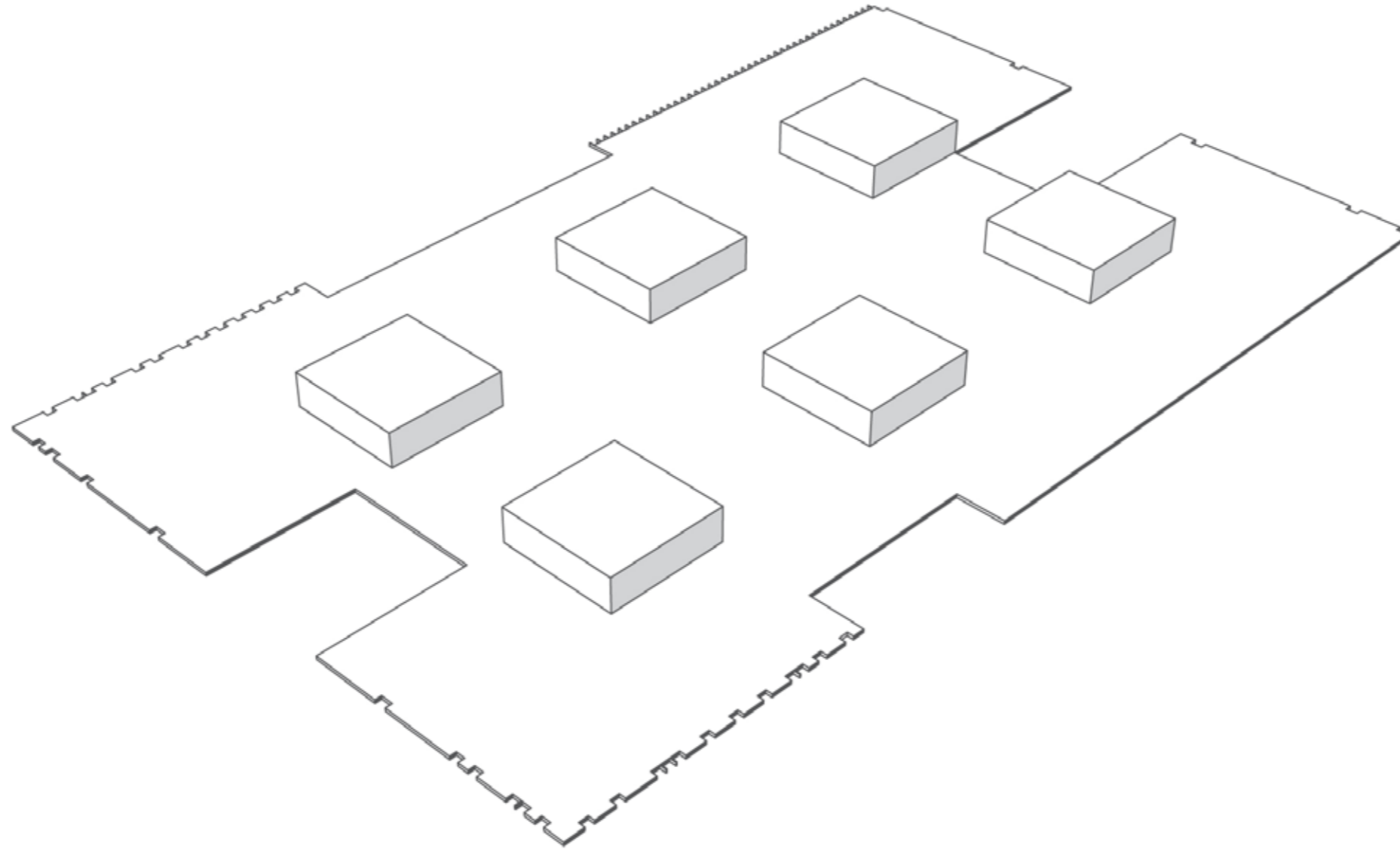
The building is conceived as a large warehouse box

**CONCEPT**  
THE BUILDING



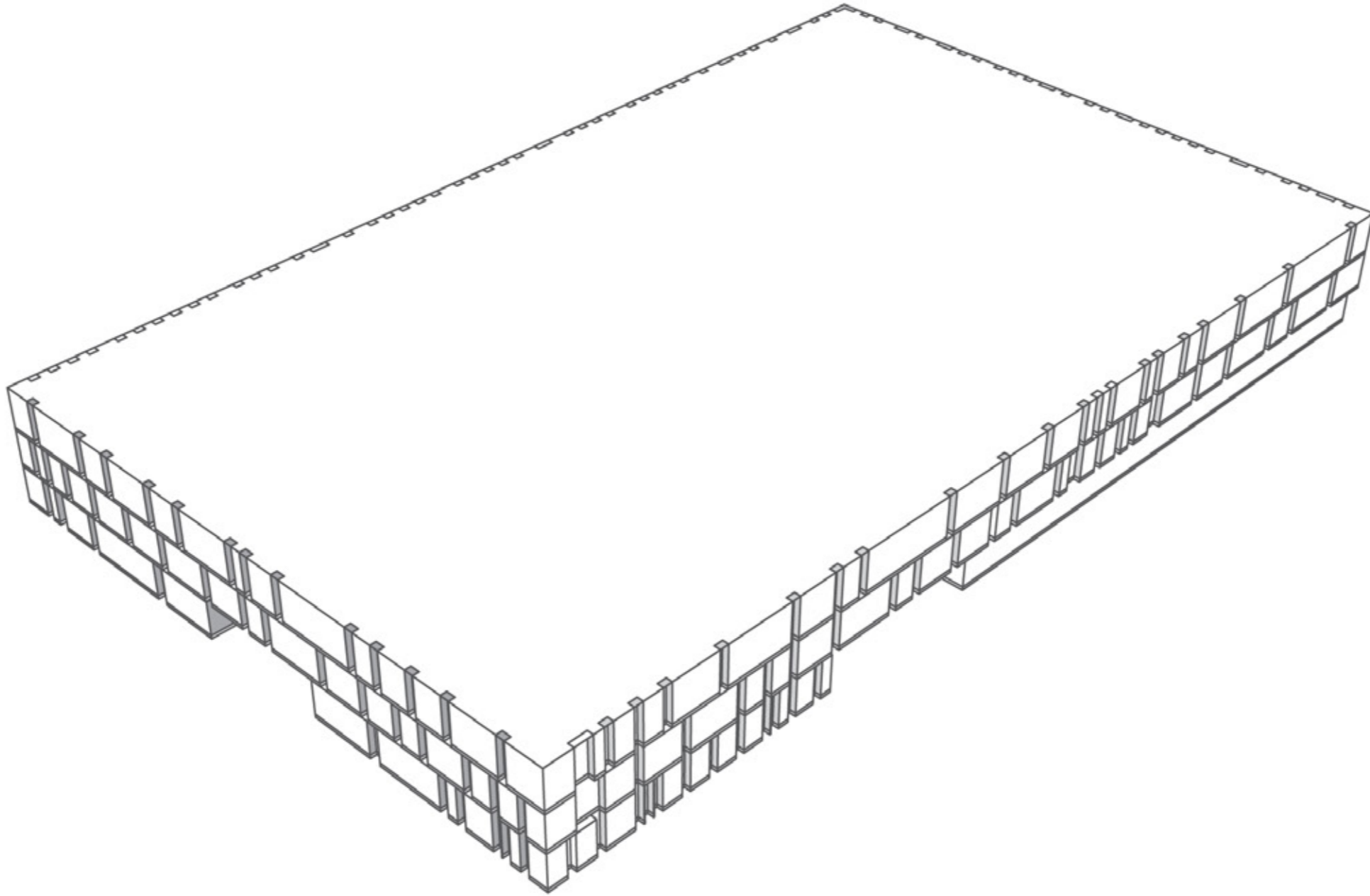
Program spaces are placed along a large central street

**CONCEPT**  
THE BUILDING



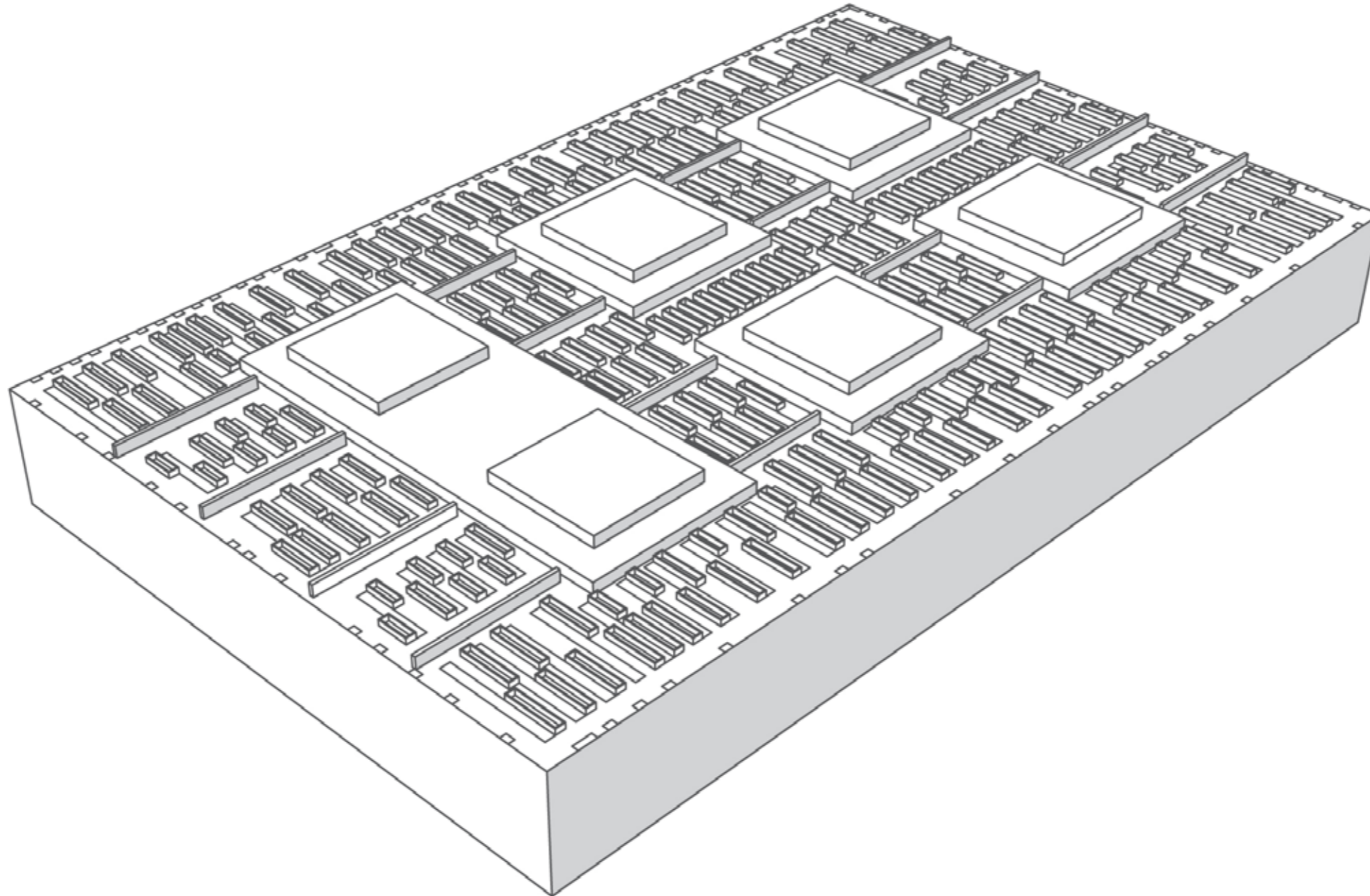
The building is served by 6 cores with open stairs

**CONCEPT**  
THE BUILDING



The custom cladding system has been designed for minimal solar gain and controlled daylight

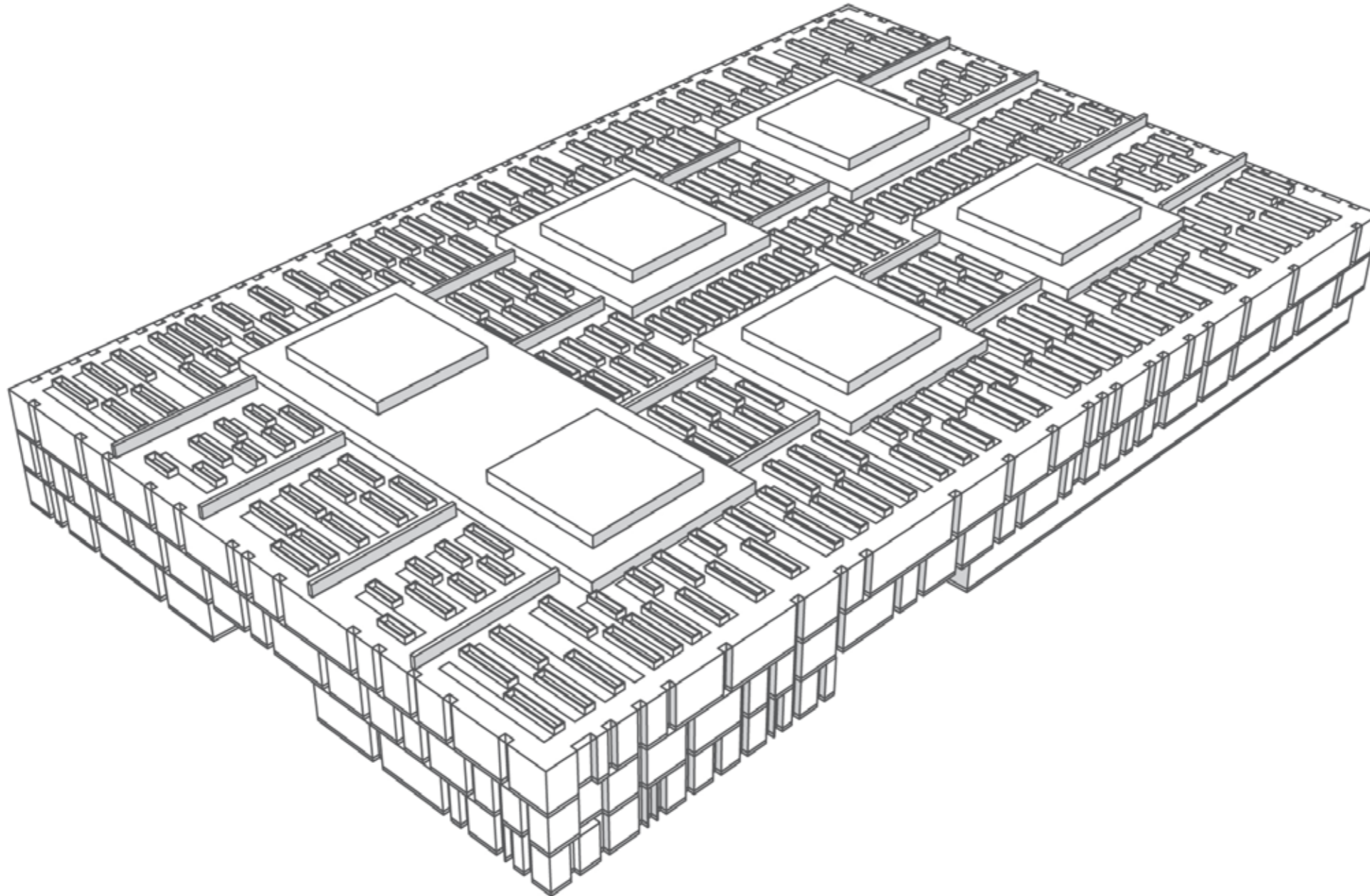
**CONCEPT**  
THE BUILDING



Skylights are arranged to allow light penetration to the floors below



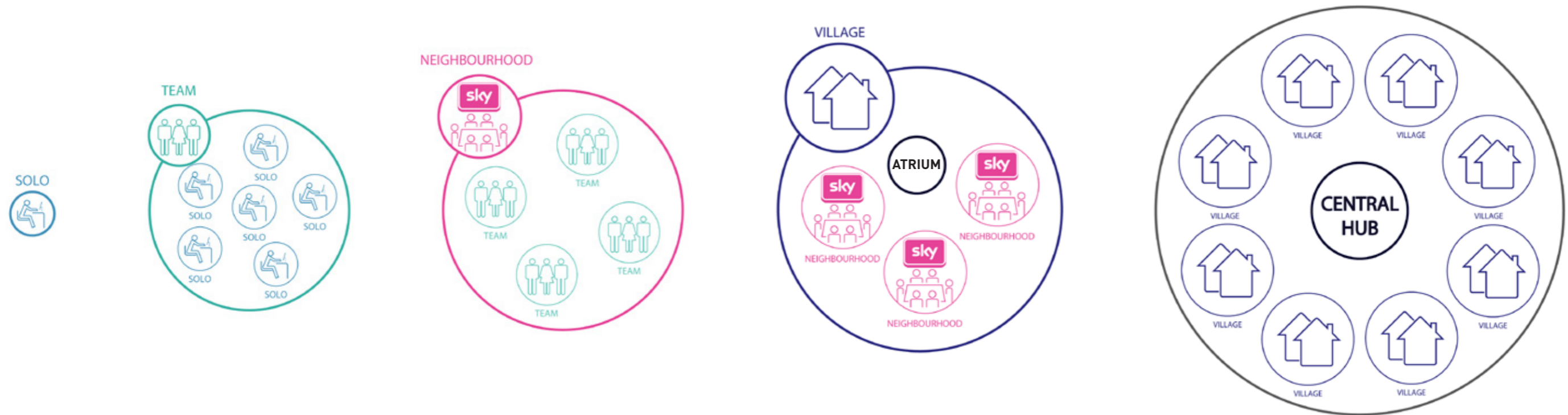
**CONCEPT**  
THE BUILDING



The resultant envelope allows the building to perform 40% better than currently mandated sustainability standards

# CONCEPT

## THE PEOPLE



The organization of the entire building starts from the individual user

Users are clustered within distinct teams...

...which, in turn, are arranged together around eating facilities to form neighbourhoods

Several neighbourhoods are arrayed around an internal atrium to form a village

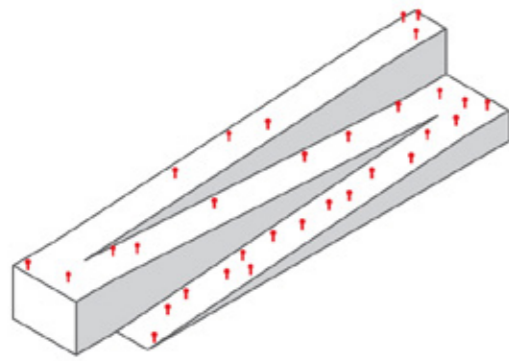
And all villages gather around a central hub

# CONCEPT

## THE HUB

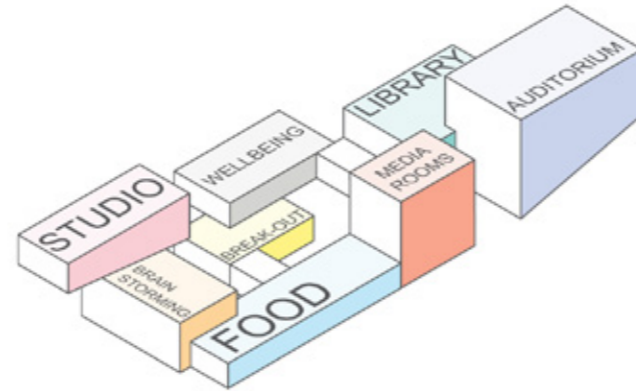
Everyone in the building is clustered around a central hub, a social destination. The hub is the result of synergies between three key components:

- Circulation
- Content
- Non-standard space



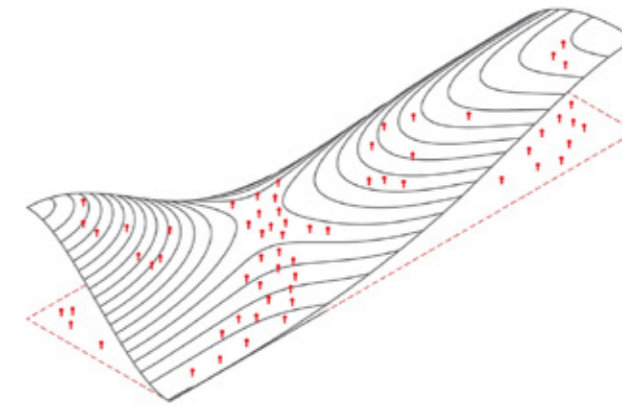
**Circulation** - Promoting openness, chance encounters, informal interactions

+



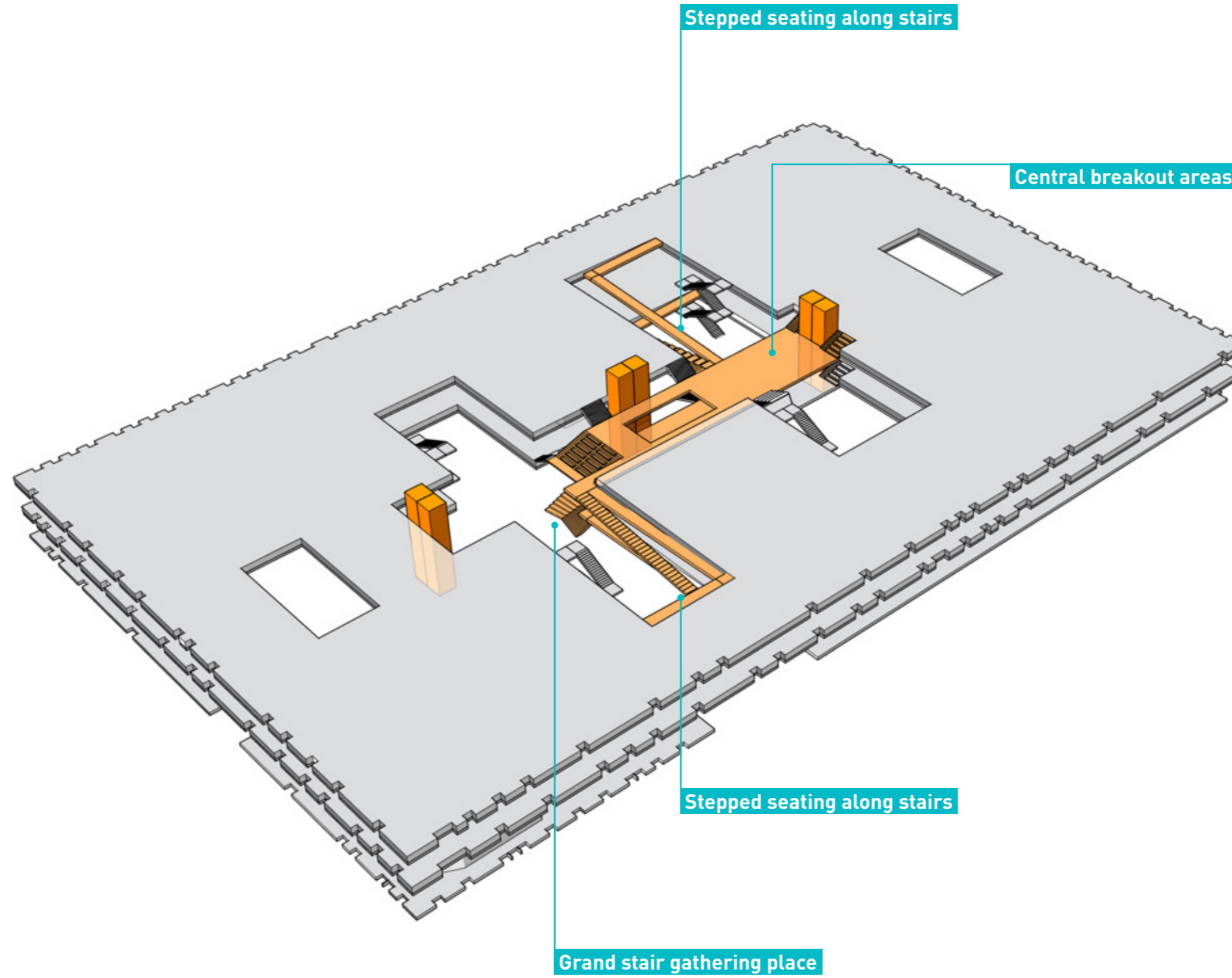
**Content** - Accommodating communal amenities as well as special functions and events that can evolve during time

+

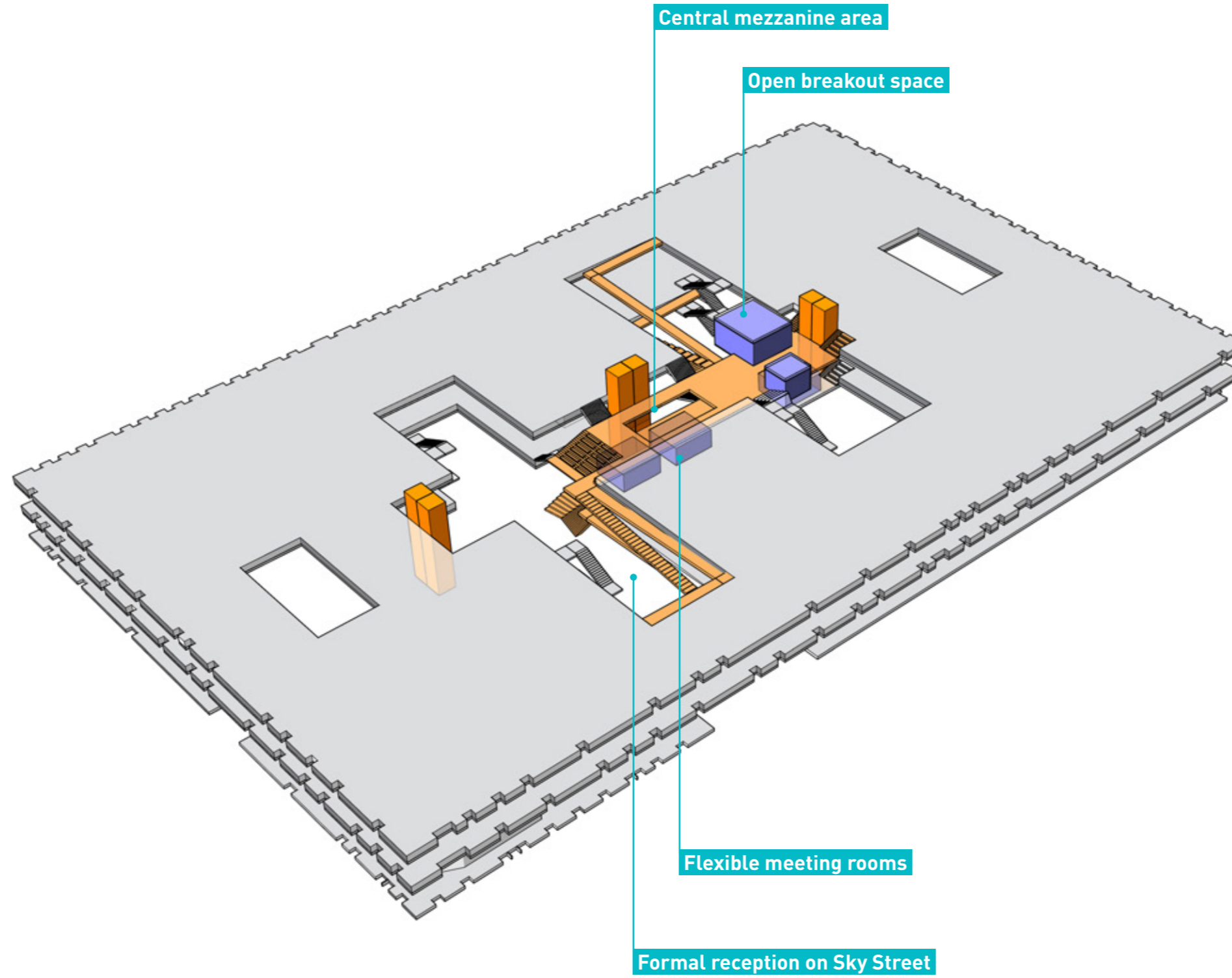


**Non-standard space** - That acts as counterpart to the rational office floor plate and brings an element of the unexpected

**CONCEPT**  
THE HUB - CIRCULATION

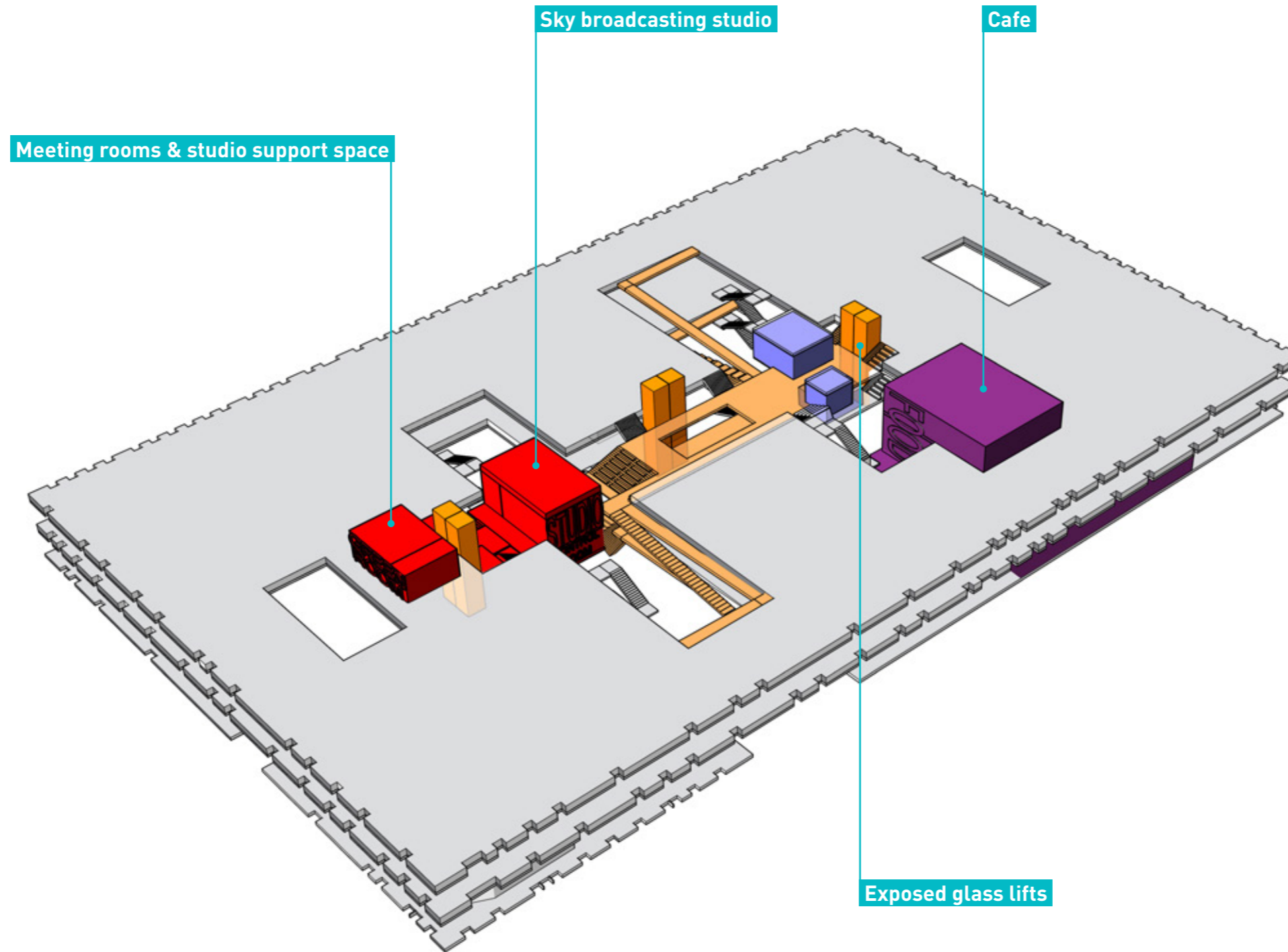


**CONCEPT**  
THE HUB - CONTENT

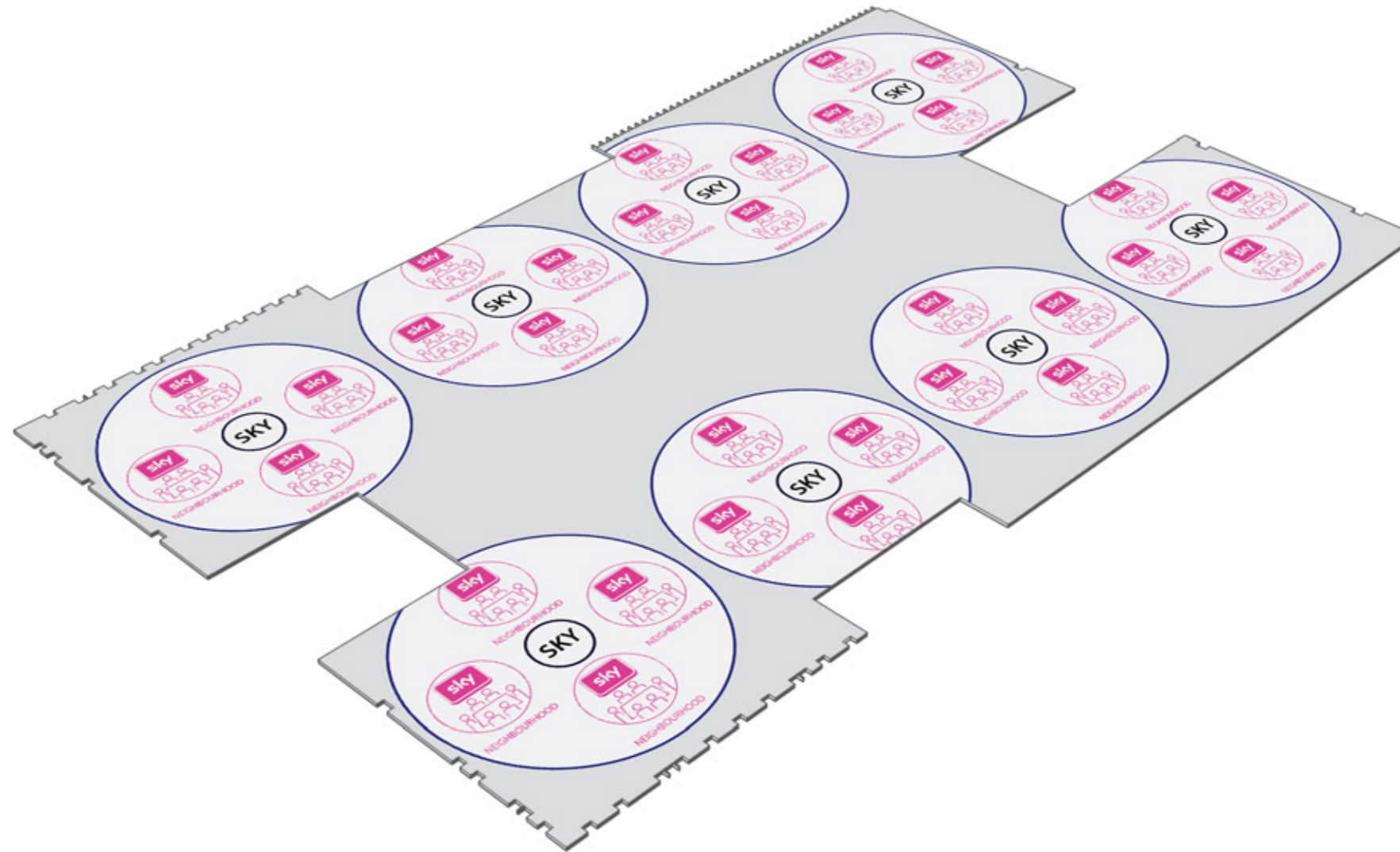


**CONCEPT**

THE HUB - NON STANDARD SPACE



**CONCEPT**  
THE FLOORPLATE



Each floorplate contains district neighbourhoods

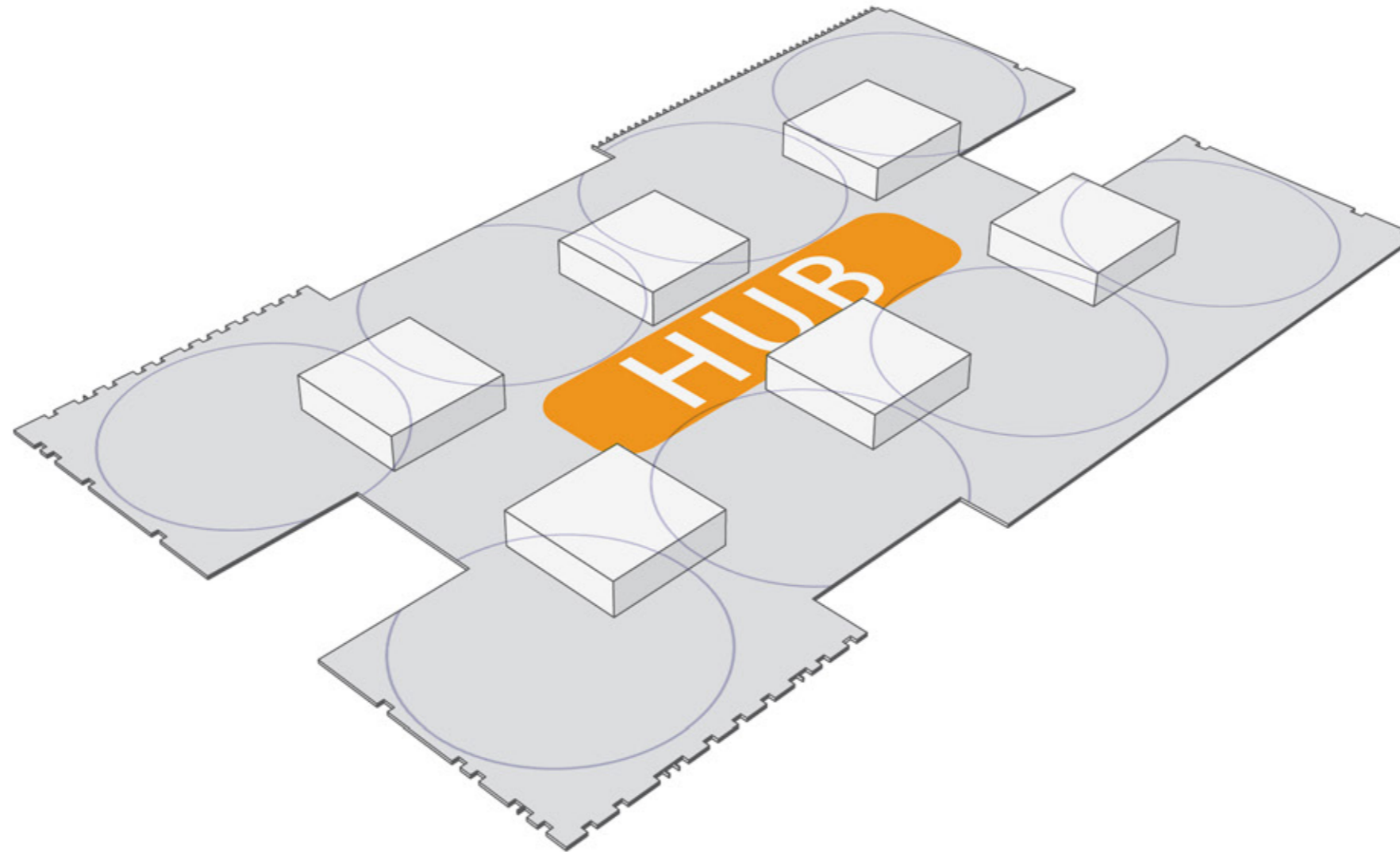
**CONCEPT**  
THE FLOORPLATE



...Interspersed around the building's cores

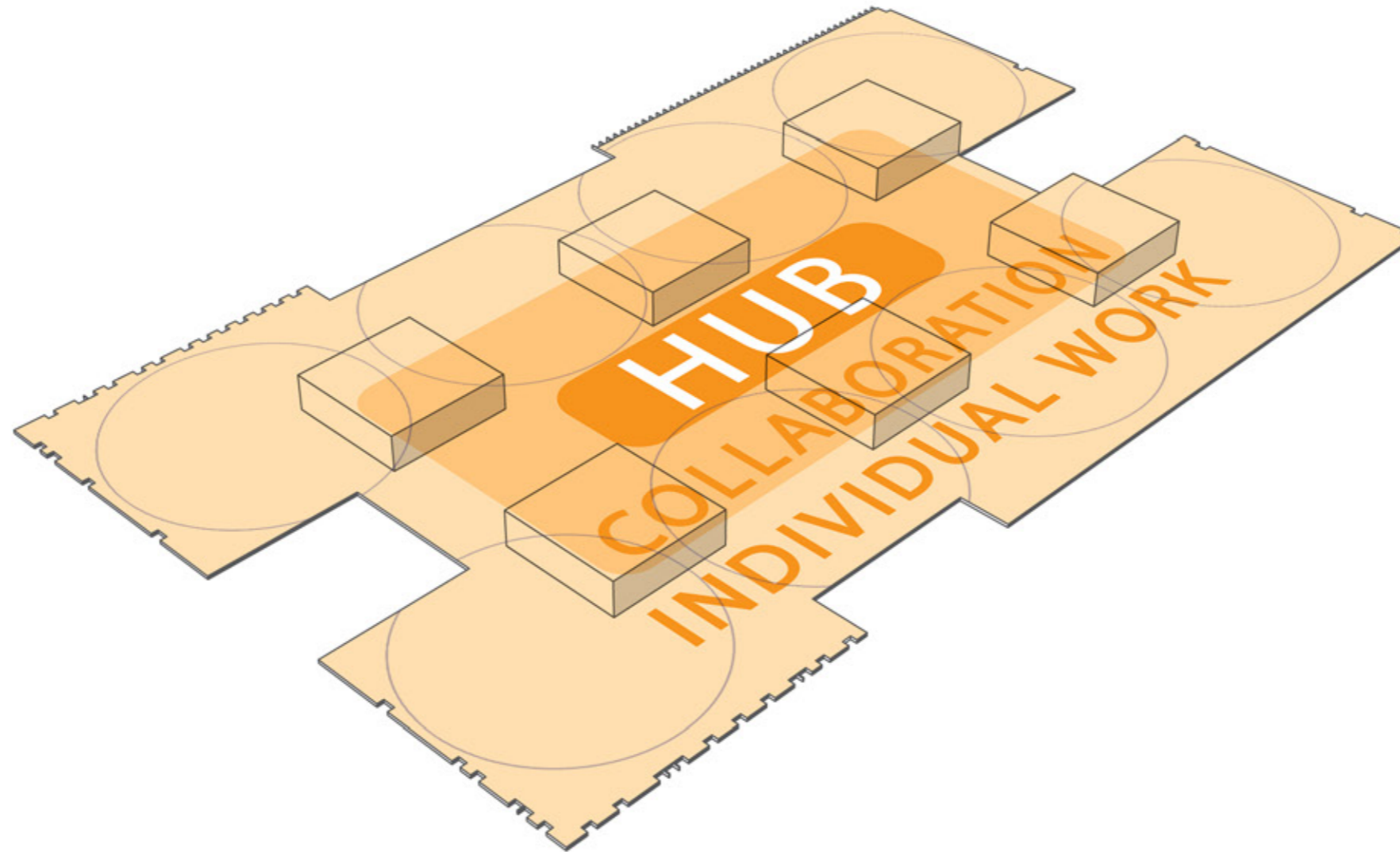


**CONCEPT**  
THE FLOORPLATE



A centre hub creates a sense of community throughout the building

**CONCEPT**  
THE FLOORPLATE



Closest to the hub, is a zone for collaborative work with individual workspaces to the outside

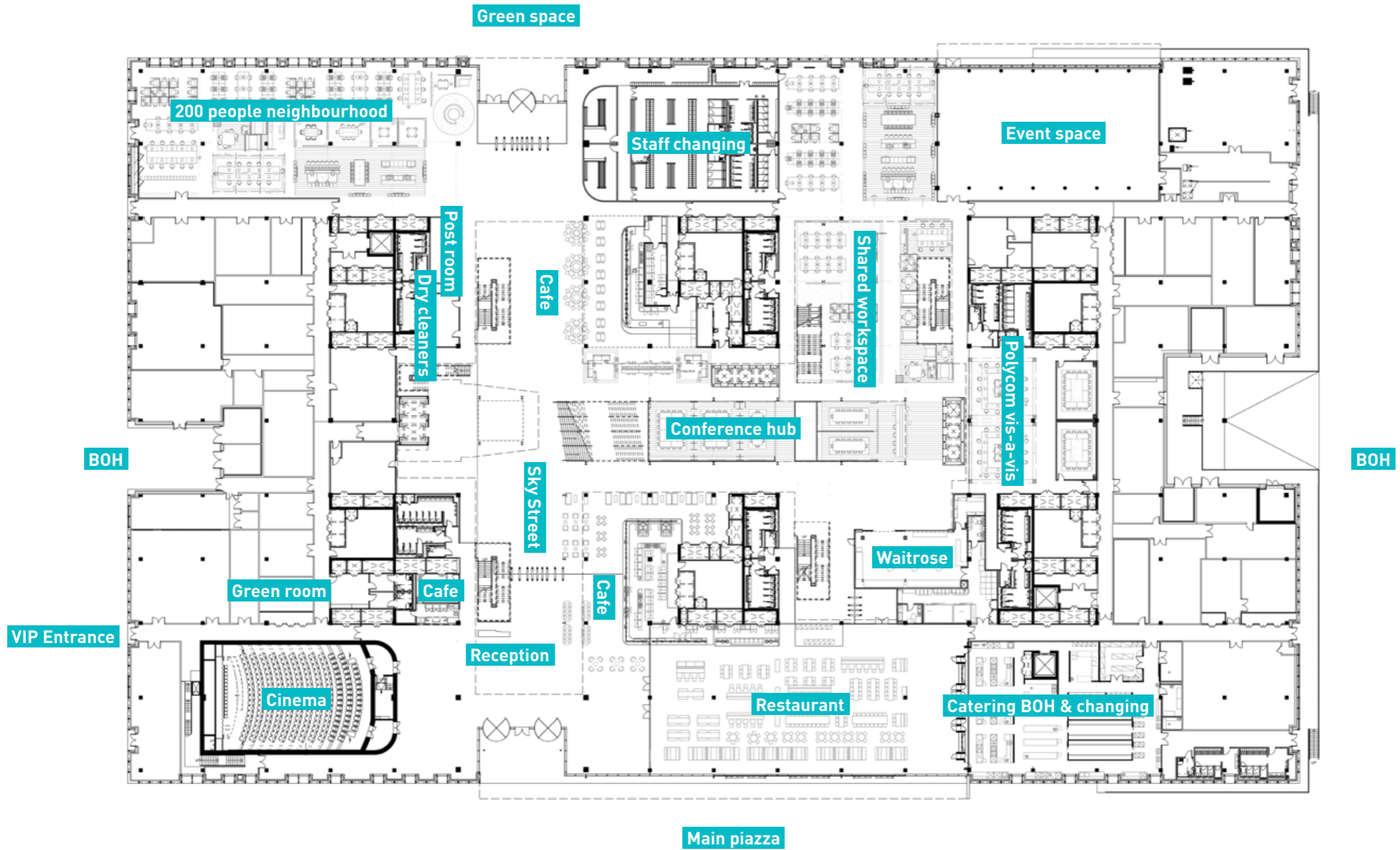
**CONCEPT**  
THE FLOORPLATE



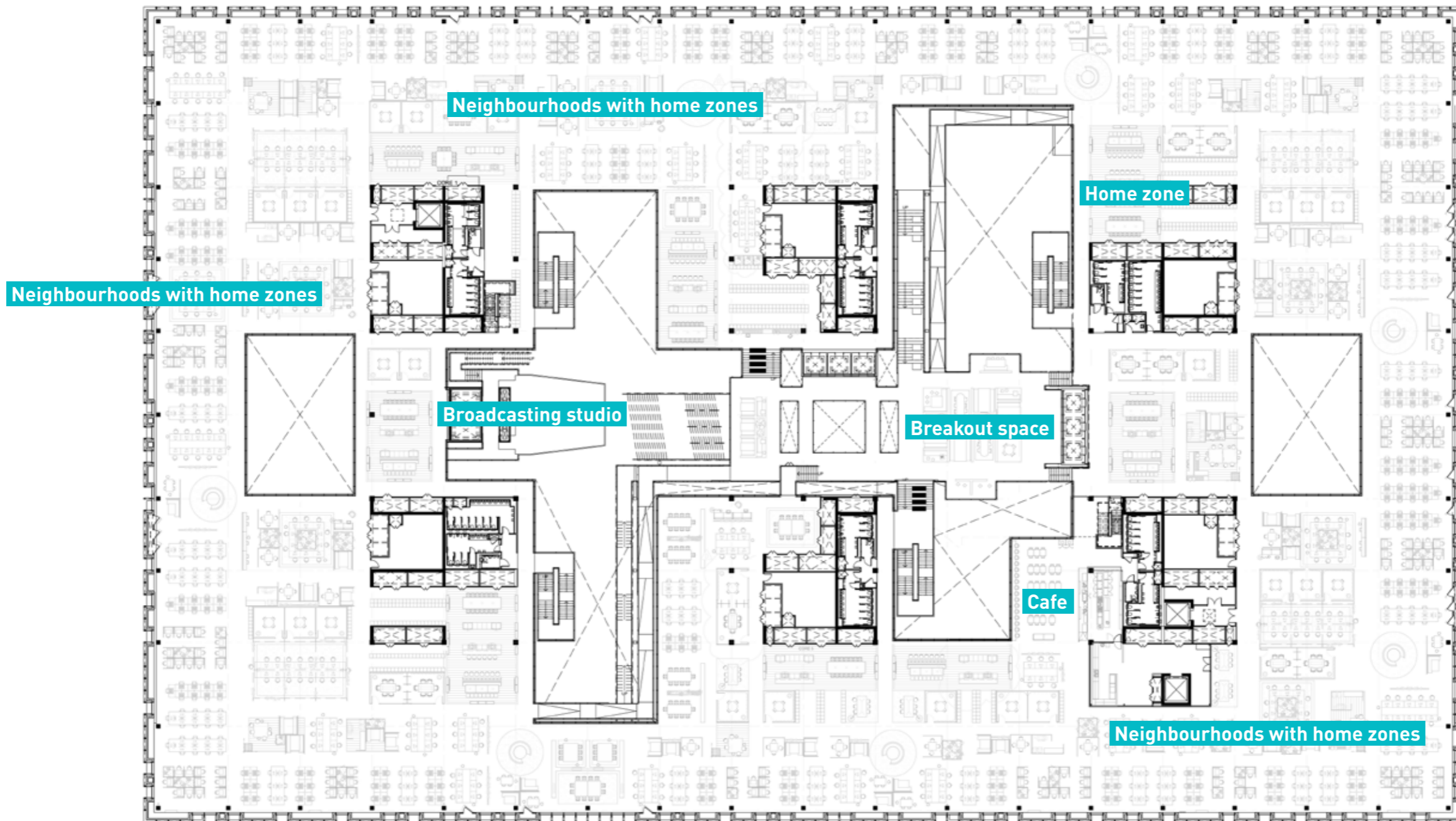
The building's architecture and internal organisation  
act as an actuator for interactions, communality  
and creativity

# BUILDING ORGANISATION

## GROUND FLOOR




**BUILDING ORGANISATION**  
SECOND FLOOR





The use of wood for the roof structure and interior finishes was a deliberate decision to create a coherent and understated palette filled with natural warmth. Stairs with informal seating encourage chance encounters and spontaneous interaction.



The roof, one of the largest timber structures in Europe, comprises over 400 triple-glazed skylights encased within timber cassettes forming a composite enclosure that saves more than 2,000 ft<sup>3</sup> of CO<sub>2</sub>.



The 20 metre high atrium is awash with natural light. A central East-West street, running through the building, is lined with cafes, restaurants and amenities, such as a post office, dry cleaning and concierge services for staff and visitors.





The building's intricate design carefully combines large open-plan spaces with more intimate, task-focused areas.

The exposed ceilings and services, offering glimpses of the building's inner workings, establish an informal and transparent character to the workspaces below.

Acoustically-treated elements are integral to the architectural language, helping to maintain a comfortable sense of calm within the large open-plan spaces.



Inspired by the Spanish Steps, the central staircase creates a sense of arrival, belonging and identity and acts as a performance space in its own right. It is a place to see and be seen.





Continuing upwards, this stair often serves as an informal broadcasting setting.

An intricate array of thoroughfares, stairs and ramps combined with amenity and meeting spaces combine to create the central hub bathed in natural light, linking all levels together.



Sky Central has its own 200-seat cinema which can also function as a live broadcast venue and conference facility. PLP's immersive red interior reflects Sky's brand identity for its entire cinema broadcast service.





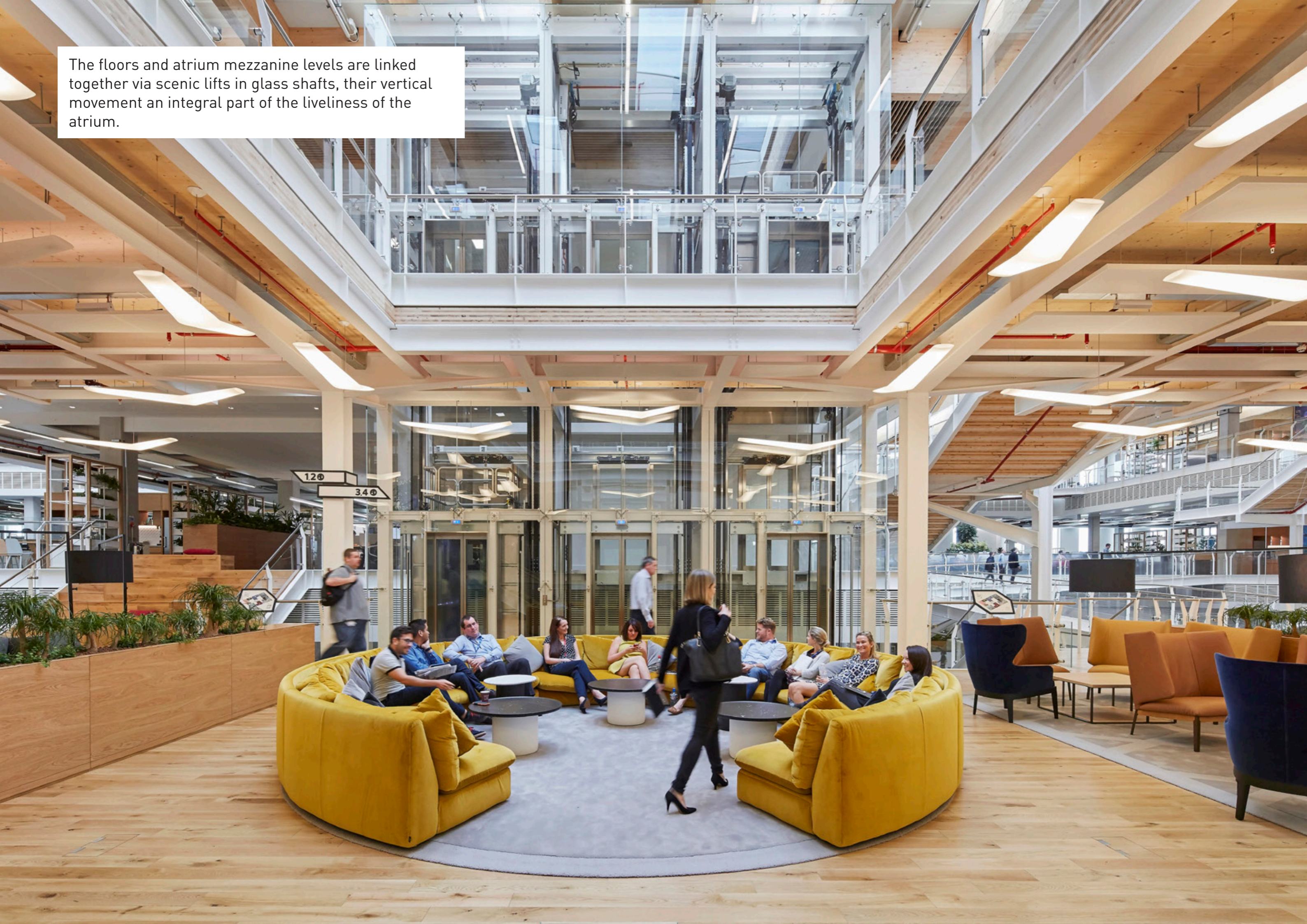
Various vertical connections in conjunction with a variety of non-standard work spaces and amenities encourage staff to use the stairs more frequently throughout their working day.

The intricacy of the exposed architectural steel work and cross-laminated timber draws the attention to the atria spaces where most breakout areas and amenities are located.





The floors and atrium mezzanine levels are linked together via scenic lifts in glass shafts, their vertical movement an integral part of the liveliness of the atrium.



The distribution of amenity spaces and mezzanines encourages the use of stairs. The stairs and ramps thus become the heart of the building's social life.



The atrium itself is a workspace providing ample light on all sides and visual permeability.





The building's envelope is punctuated by windows deeply recessed within an aluminium outer plane. This strategy helps to minimize solar heat gain and enables Sky Central to perform over 40% better than currently mandated sustainability requirements.

The 400 seat public restaurant offers a continually evolving menu, conceived to promote staff wellbeing.



PLP collaborated closely with Arup engineers in the design of the custom cross-laminated timber and steel structure.



## KEY FACTS

- Located in Osterley, West London
- Connected to nine other buildings on campus by a landscape featuring 264 mature trees
- Accommodates 3,500 employees
- 2500 desks and over 5000 places to sit, work and meet: mixes desk with a spectrum of alternative settings
- Three floors, 165m x 102m/45,000sqm of work and amenity spaces
- Floor to ceiling height of 5.5m
- Primary structure is a concrete frame on a 9m x 10.5m and 9mx9m grid, stabilised by six evenly-spaced concrete cores
- 400 triple glazed skylights between 6km of glulam beams making up timber roof which saves more than 2000ft<sup>3</sup> of CO<sub>2</sub>
- One of Europe's largest timber roofs, consisting of 1.3m deep timber beams at 3m centres spanning up to 21m which support a lightweight prefabricated timber cassette roof deck and skylights
- Two internal mezzanine levels formed from steel and Cross Laminated Timber (CLT)
- CLT and steel stairways and ramps weaving through a H-shaped central void – promoting movement
- 18 'neighbourhoods' for around 200 people each which create organisation in large space and a 'human', intimate scale
- Burolandschaft- inspired 20 metre rule where sight-lines are broken by an installation or planting
- 24,776 internal plants

## FEATURES

- Central Sky street from which amenities and workspaces can be accessed and which provides a space for events
- Space awash with natural light
- Central circulation mezzanines with ramps and shallow stairs to promote movement across the floor plate
- Simple and comfortable space comprising widest variety of space-types possible: from most focussed to most interactive
- 'Grown-up' space free of 'quirky features' yet surprising, inspiring and inclusive
- Two main entrances at each end of Sky Street, main reception at East Entrance
- Large immersive AV screens showcasing Sky content throughout the building
- Visual permeability throughout the whole length of the building incorporating the glass walled Sky News studio

## AMENITIES

- Six places to eat and drink as well as a pop-up bar at Sky Cinema
- Little Waitrose – UK's first completely cashless supermarket
- Sky News 'glass box' studio above the main street
- 200-seat, Dolby Atmos sound, 4K Sky Cinema
- 200-capacity event centre
- Tech Central 'genius lounge'
- 18 home zones with kitchen and food preparation facilities
- Postal service, shoe repair, dry cleaning, cash machine, Amazon lockers and collection point in the building

## DEVELOPMENT TEAM

PLP Architecture was commissioned by Sky to design the interior architecture and develop the exterior for Sky Central - the main building of their 7,000 - person West London campus, with engineering delivered by Arup. Mace has been working with Sky as main contractor. The original concept design and wider campus masterplan were by AL\_A. HASSELL was commissioned by Sky to design the building's Category B workplace, which is agile and progressive, tailored to the collaborative way Sky colleagues work.







Ibex House  
42-47 Minories  
London EC3N 1DY

T +44 (0)20 3006 3900  
F +44 (0)20 3006 3901

[www.plparchitecture.com](http://www.plparchitecture.com)