

## Additional Reporting : Green Branch

### Pollution eating plants help create UK's greenest outlet

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Pollution eating plants and the latest green technologies have been introduced at a new look outlet in the centre of Manchester. The Co-operative Bank's newly refurbished Manchester branch - which also houses Travelcare and The Co-operative Insurance Society (CIS) - is now arguably the greenest office in the UK.

The bank has placed special pollution eating plants around the branch which, based on NASA research, have been shown to significantly improve indoor air quality. The plants' leaves and roots, and the bacteria that live in and around them, take in airborne pollutants and assimilate them, producing harmless by-products. Examples of pollution eating plants at The Co-operative Bank include:

- The Areca palm (*Chrysalidocarpus lutescens*), which has been shown to be particularly adept at removing toluene and xylene from the indoor environment. These chemicals are released from everyday products such as adhesives, computer screens, floor coverings and photocopiers. Toluene and Xylene can affect the nervous system, causing trouble concentrating and headaches.
- The Rubber plant (*Ficus robusta*), which is particularly adept at removing formaldehyde from the air. Indoor sources of formaldehyde include floor coverings, particleboards and upholstery. Formaldehyde is a probable human carcinogen, and high exposure may lead to skin allergies and asthma like allergies.
- Peace Lilies (*Spathiphyllum sp.*), which are a good all rounder, removing acetone, benzene, ammonia and bio effluents, amongst other things, from the air. Benzene has been shown to irritate the skin and eyes, and is a known carcinogen.

The electricity for the building is purchased from wind farms and so comes from a 100 per cent renewable source. The new look branch also uses high recycled content light reflecting ceiling tiles, designed to reduce lighting costs; energy efficient light bulbs and low energy flat panel

computer monitors.

The very latest air conditioning and fire control systems have also been installed, which utilise natural substances instead of the likes of HFCs and HCFCs, which can have global warming potentials more than a thousand times higher. Branch furniture and cash desks are sourced from sustainable managed forests, as certified by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC). Natural paints and plasterboards, made from recycled material, have also been used.

To complete the picture customers will be encouraged to recycle holiday brochures in a specially provided bin and Fair Trade tea and coffee will be provided while people wait to be served.

"Most people assume that office based businesses have little or no environmental impact, whilst this may be true individually, collectively the service industry consumes more electricity than the manufacturing sector."

Paul Monaghan, Head of Sustainable Development at the bank said "The Bank has stuck its head above the parapet in saying this is possibly the greenest refurbishment in the UK, but nothing would please us more than others rising to the challenge and stealing this mantle".

### **Additional Information**

The Environmental Protection Agency cites indoor air pollution as one of the top five public health threats in America, and the main culprit in the 60 percent rise in asthma over the last decade.

As well as absorbing pollutants, plants increase the humidity of their immediate surroundings. Low relative-humidity levels, exacerbated by heating systems and air conditioning, irritate sensitive membranes in the nose, increasing susceptibility to assaults by airborne chemicals, viruses and allergens. Frequent colds during winter are often caused by low relative humidity.

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