

WHITEPAPER

Understanding WELL v2 and the role of biophilia in earning points

VANTAGE SPACES®

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True Potential, Newcastle

What is WELL v2?

WELL v2 is a building certification system focused on the relationship between the built environment and human health and wellbeing. It provides a framework for designing, constructing and operating spaces in ways that support healthier, more comfortable and more engaging experiences for the people who use them.

WELL v2 brought together previous versions and pilot programmes into a single rating system designed to work across different building types and sectors. It's evidence-based and performance-focused, combining design and operational requirements with documentation and on-site verification.

WELL™

At its heart, WELL recognises that the **places in which we spend our time can influence a wide range of factors affecting health and wellbeing** – from air and water quality to daylight, movement, comfort, mental wellbeing and social connection.

For designers, WELL therefore provides more than a checklist of building requirements. It offers a framework for considering how the physical environment can actively support the people who occupy it.

Biophilia has an important role within that framework. The incorporation of plants, natural materials, water, daylight, views of nature and access to outdoor green space can contribute directly to WELL requirements and, in some cases, provide opportunities to earn additional points.

How WELL v2 is structured

WELL v2 is organised around ten Concepts, each addressing a different aspect of health and wellbeing:

Air
Indoor air quality and ventilation

Water
Water quality and management

Nourishment
Healthy eating and food access

Light
Daylight, lighting quality and visual comfort

Movement
Physical activity and active design

Thermal comfort
Thermal conditions and occupant control

Sound
Acoustic comfort and performance

Materials
Materials and their potential impact on health

Mind
Mental health, restoration and wellbeing

Community
Social, organisational and community wellbeing

Within each **Concept** are individual **Features**, each coded with an identifying letter for the **Concept** they sit under, and a number. A **Feature** addresses a specific health and wellbeing objective and sets out the requirements that a project must meet to address it. **Features** are then divided into one or more **Parts**, with each **Part** defining a particular set of requirements and, where applicable, a number of points.

Concept → **Features** → **Part(s)** → **Requirements** → **Points**

Features are divided into two types: **Preconditions and Optimisations.**

Preconditions

Preconditions establish the fundamental requirements for WELL certification. They are mandatory, and all parts of every applicable Precondition must be achieved.

The WELL v2 framework contains 24 Preconditions across the ten Concepts.

Optimisations

Optimisations provide additional ways for a project to improve its health and wellbeing performance. Unlike Preconditions, they are optional, allowing project teams to select the interventions that are most appropriate to their building, occupants and objectives.

WELL v2 contains 84 Optimisations across its ten main Concepts, with a further five Innovation Optimisations.

This distinction is particularly important when considering biophilia. Some aspects of biophilic design form part of a mandatory Precondition, while others provide opportunities to earn additional Optimisation points.

WELL Certification or WELL Core?

WELL v2 has two main certification pathways, depending on who controls and occupies the building.

WELL Certification

WELL Certification is primarily intended for owner-occupied buildings and interiors where the project team has control over the spaces and the experience of the people who occupy them.

This means the project can address a broad range of factors within the occupied environment, including design, facilities, policies and occupant experience.

WELL Core

WELL Core is designed principally for base buildings and multi-tenant properties, where the building owner or developer controls the common areas and building systems, but individual tenants control much of the interior space. The aim is to establish fundamental health and wellbeing features at building level for the benefit of tenants and their occupants.

Under WELL v2, a project is generally suitable for WELL Core where at least 75% of the project area is occupied by tenants and/or serves as common space accessible to tenants.

The distinction matters when considering biophilia because the same Feature can have a different point value and different requirements depending on the pathway. For example, M09 Enhanced Access to Nature is worth two points under WELL Certification, but four points under WELL Core. WELL Core also has specific rules about whether a requirement needs to be met throughout the whole building, in non-leased areas, or within tenant spaces.

How WELL v2 is scored



WELL v2 uses a points-based system, with 110 points available within the project scorecard.

All applicable **Preconditions** must be achieved before a project can achieve certification. The project then accumulates points through its chosen **Optimisations.**

For the certification levels set out in WELL v2, the following points structure applies:

WELL certification	Bronze	Silver	Gold	Platinum
Total points	40	50	60	80

For **WELL Certification**, projects must also achieve a minimum number of points within each Concept:

Points per concept	at least 1	at least 2	at least 3

A project can pursue no more than **12 points within any one Concept** and no more than **100 points across the ten Concepts,** with **additional points available through Innovation.**

The value of an individual **Optimisation** varies. Each **Feature** is divided into **Parts**, and the weighting given to each **Part** reflects its potential impact on health and wellbeing.

This means that **WELL** is not simply a matter of collecting as many individual measures as possible. The scorecard allows projects to build a combination of interventions that reflects their particular circumstances and priorities.



How compliance is demonstrated

WELL combines documentation with on-site verification. This is an important distinction: achieving WELL certification is not simply a matter of stating that a design or policy has been implemented.

Documentation is submitted through the WELL platform and assessed by Green Business Certification Inc. (GBCI).

Depending on the **Feature**, evidence can include:

- **Letters of Assurance** from relevant members of the project team
- **Technical Documents**, such as architectural or mechanical drawings, modelling reports, product specifications and maps
- **Professional Narratives** explaining how requirements have been met
- **Policies** and Operations Schedules
- **Ongoing Reports** where a requirement involves continuing monitoring or maintenance

Some requirements are also verified directly on site. These can include on-site measurements and photographic evidence.

WELL also requires Performance Verification. An authorised WELL Performance Testing Agent visits the project to undertake measurements, spot checks and other tests. These can cover areas such as air and water quality, sound and light levels. The resulting data is reviewed as part of the certification process.

This performance-based approach is designed to demonstrate that the building is actually performing as required, rather than relying solely on design intent or documentation.



Capital Group, Paddington Square

How biophilia can earn WELL points

Biophilic design is particularly relevant to WELL because the standard recognises a broad range of connections between people and the natural environment. These can be direct, such as plants within a workplace, or indirect, such as views through windows, natural materials, patterns, colours and representations of nature.

There are several ways in which these principles can contribute to WELL certification.

01

M02
Nature and Place

Make nature part of the overall environment

The most fundamental connection between WELL and biophilia is M02 – Nature and Place.

This is a Precondition, meaning that it is mandatory rather than an optional source of points.

The requirement is to integrate natural elements throughout the space, including common circulation routes, shared seating areas, rooms and workstations where applicable.

The design must incorporate:

+ Natural materials, patterns, shapes, colours, images or sounds

Plus, at least one of:

+ Plants, water, nature views

Plants can include potted plants, plant beds or plant walls. Nature views can include outdoor views or simulated views.



Pay.UK, Whitechapel, London

M02 also extends beyond simply adding plants. The Feature calls for a sense of place and identity, incorporating elements such as local culture, local architecture and materials, local flora, artists, art and other elements that create human delight.

For a biophilic design strategy, this provides an important foundation: nature should not be treated simply as decoration added at the end of a project. It can be integrated into the spatial experience, material palette, visual language and identity of the environment.



16 Old Bailey, Central London



Pay.UK, Whitechapel, London

02

M09
Enhanced Access to Nature

Increase direct access to nature

Where M02 establishes the baseline, M09 – Enhanced Access to Nature provides a direct opportunity to earn additional points.

It is worth:

+ 2 points for WELL Certification
+ 4 points for WELL Core

The Feature is divided into indoor and outdoor nature access.

Indoor nature – 1 point

Projects can earn the indoor point by providing a combination of:

+ Indoor plants
+ Water features
+ Views of natural areas, including green or blue spaces

These must meet a combination of two important spatial requirements:

+ They must be within the direct line of sight of at least 75% of workstations and seats in relevant spaces such as conference rooms, lecture halls and classrooms.
+ They must be within 10m (33ft) of all relevant workstations and seats.

This changes the design approach considerably. Simply having an attractive planted area somewhere in a building is not enough. Nature needs to be positioned where occupants can actually experience it.



Berkeley Partnership, Farringdon, London

Outdoor nature – 1 point

The outdoor element can be achieved through several routes.

One route is to provide outdoor space equivalent to at least 5% of the project's interior area, accessible to all regular occupants. At least 70% of this accessible outdoor space, when viewed from above, must incorporate plants or other natural elements, including tree canopies.

Alternatively, the project can make nearby nature accessible. A green or blue space must be within 200m (650ft) walking distance of the project boundary, be available to regular occupants during its opening hours and have a combined area of at least 0.5 hectare (1.25 acres).

A further route is to actively encourage occupants to access outdoor nature – for example through signage, maps or opportunities to take breaks and visit nearby natural spaces.


10X, 10 Brindley Place, Birmingham

03

M07
Restorative Spaces

Create restorative spaces using nature

Biophilia can also contribute to M07 – Restorative Spaces, which is worth:

+ 1 point for WELL Certification
+ 2 points for WELL Core

The requirement is to provide a designated space for relaxation and restoration, available to regular occupants and not used for work.

The space must provide at least 75ft² (7m²), plus 1ft² (0.1m²) per regular occupant, up to a maximum of 2,000ft² (186m²).

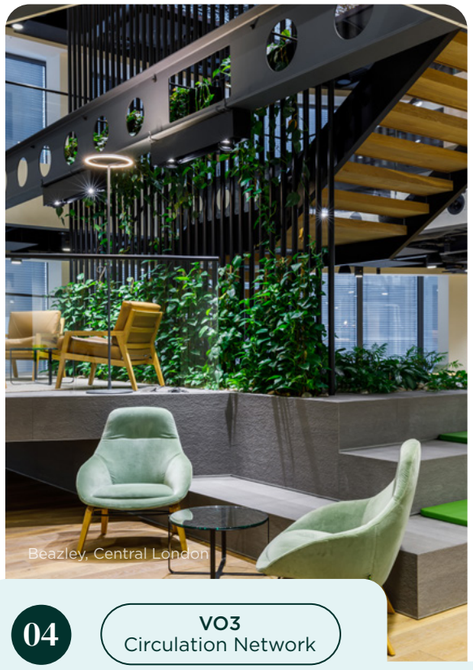
Crucially, the space must address at least five of seven characteristics:

1. Lighting
2. Sound
3. Thermal comfort
4. Seating arrangements
5. Nature incorporation
6. Calming colours, textures and forms
7. Visual privacy

Nature is therefore one of the seven recognised components of a restorative environment – but it cannot provide the entire requirement on its own.

A well-designed restorative space might therefore combine planting and natural views with soft lighting, appropriate acoustics, comfortable seating, natural materials, calming forms and visual separation from the main working environment.


Capital Group, Paddington Square


Beazley, Central London


22 Bishopsgate, London

04

VO3
Circulation Network

Use nature to make movement more attractive

Biophilia can also support WELL requirements concerned with physical activity.

V03 – Circulation Network is worth:

+ 3 points for WELL Certification
+ 6 points for WELL Core

One Part of the Feature is concerned with creating aesthetically appealing staircases. At least one staircase must serve all floors and incorporate at least two design elements on each floor.

The choices include:

+ Music
+ Artwork
+ Light levels of at least 215 lux
+ Windows or skylights providing daylight
+ Natural design elements such as plants, water features or images of nature
+ Gamification

Natural elements therefore provide one possible route towards satisfying the aesthetic staircase requirement. They are not a standalone three-point biophilia credit, but can form part of a broader strategy for making stairs more attractive and encouraging their use.


Oliver Wyman, 55 Baker Street


DS Smith, Caerphilly

05

L05
Daylight Design Strategies

Maximise daylight and connection to the outdoors

Daylight sits at an interesting intersection between biophilic design and WELL's Light Concept.

L05 – Daylight Design Strategies is worth up to:

+ 4 points for WELL Certification
+ 6 points for WELL Core

For occupied spaces, points can be achieved through the relationship between workstations and transparent glazing, or through the amount of appropriately specified façade glazing.

For example, one route provides points where 70% of workstations are within 7.5m of transparent glazing with a visible light transmittance greater than 40%. A higher level of daylight access can be achieved where 70% of workstations are within 5m of the glazing, or where the relevant façade glazing represents a greater proportion of the regularly occupied floor area.

For biophilic design, the significance goes beyond simply achieving a numerical daylight target. Windows can simultaneously provide daylight, views, visual connection to landscape and a greater awareness of changing outdoor conditions.


True Potential, Newcastle Upon Tyne

06

N12
Food Production

Bring nature into food production

Planting can also contribute to N12 – Food Production, particularly where a project incorporates productive landscapes or community growing.

The Feature is worth:

+ 2 points for WELL Certification
+ 1 point for WELL Core

A permanent and accessible food-production space must be located within 400m (0.25 mile) walking distance of the project boundary.

It can include:

+ A garden or greenhouse containing food-bearing plants
+ Edible landscaping, such as fruit trees and herbs
+ A hydroponic or aeroponic farming system

The space must be accessible to regular occupants during normal building hours and for the majority of days during the operating year, with food grown made available to occupants.

For non-residential projects, the required growing area is calculated according to the type of occupants served, with a minimum of 200 ft^2 (18.5 m^2) and a maximum of 1,500 ft^2 (140 m^2). For most projects this is based on 1 ft^2 (0.09 m^2) per regular occupant; educational projects use a separate calculation based on student numbers.

This creates an opportunity to combine biophilic design with food, education, participation and community – turning planting from something that is simply viewed into something occupants can actively engage with.

07

V05
Site Planning and Selection

Use biophilia as part of the wider site experience

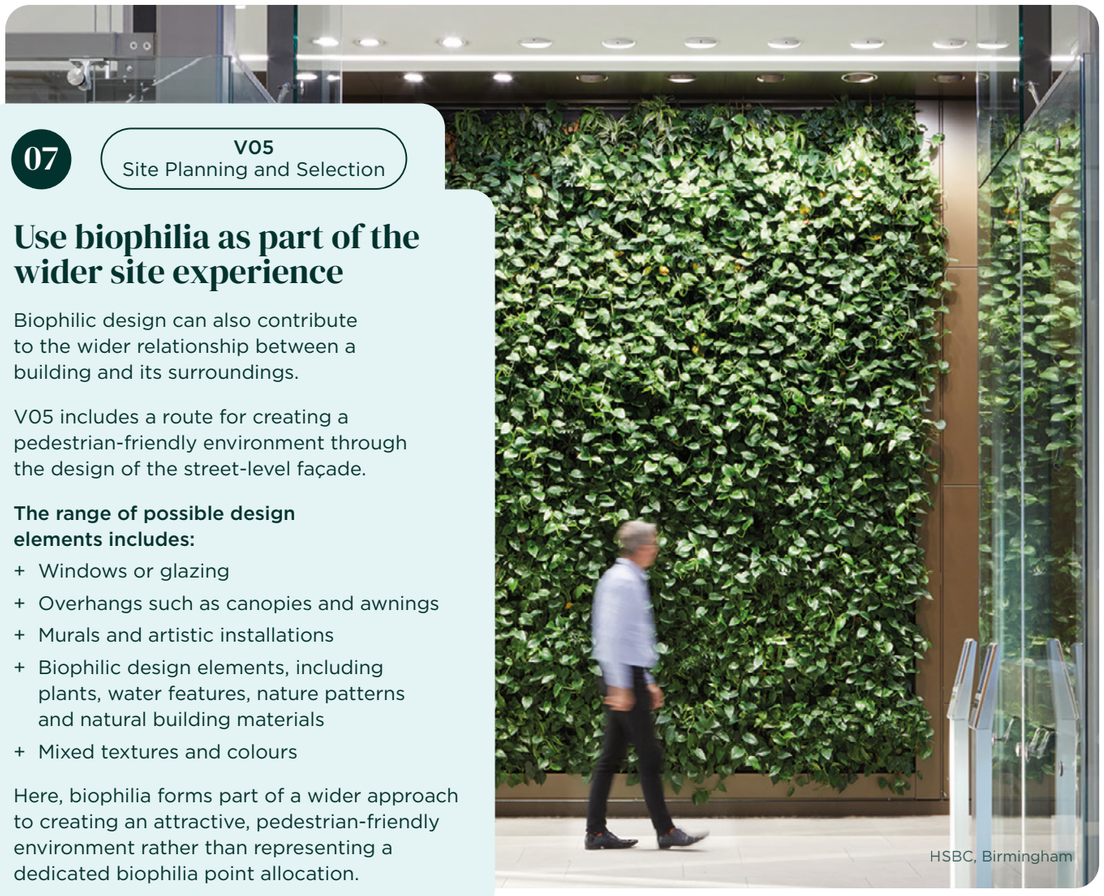
Biophilic design can also contribute to the wider relationship between a building and its surroundings.

V05 includes a route for creating a pedestrian-friendly environment through the design of the street-level façade.

The range of possible design elements includes:

+ Windows or glazing
+ Overhangs such as canopies and awnings
+ Murals and artistic installations
+ Biophilic design elements, including plants, water features, nature patterns and natural building materials
+ Mixed textures and colours

Here, biophilia forms part of a wider approach to creating an attractive, pedestrian-friendly environment rather than representing a dedicated biophilia point allocation.


HSBC, Birmingham

Bringing the opportunities together

The most useful way to think about biophilia within WELL is therefore not as a single feature or a single source of points. It is a design strategy that can contribute across several areas of the standard.

A single well-considered landscape or interior design intervention can potentially support multiple WELL objectives.

For example, a planted outdoor courtyard could:

- **M02** Provide the connection to nature required by M02
- **M09** Contribute to the outdoor nature requirements of M09
- **M07** Form part of a restorative space under M07
- **L05** Provide views of nature from workstations to support L05
- **V03** Support movement and social interaction in line with V03
- **N12** Potentially incorporate edible planting for N12


Fortrea, Leeds


True Potential, Newcastle Upon Tyne

Similarly, a staircase positioned beside a landscaped atrium could combine daylight, views of nature, planting and an attractive circulation route – contributing to several aspects of the WELL experience at once.


Northeastern University, Central London

The important principle is integration. WELL rewards specific outcomes and has precise requirements for achieving them, so biophilic features should be designed around the relevant WELL criteria from the outset rather than added as decorative elements once the building is otherwise complete.

Winckworth Sherwood, Blackfriars

The value of WELL and the role of biophilia

WELL provides a structured way to translate broad ambitions around health and wellbeing into specific characteristics of the built environment. Its combination of mandatory requirements, optional Optimisations, documentation and performance verification creates a framework that can be applied systematically rather than relying on subjective claims about whether a building feels healthy.

Biophilia fits naturally within this approach because the relationship between people and nature can be expressed through tangible aspects of the environment – plants, daylight, water, views, natural materials, outdoor spaces and opportunities to interact with nature.

The strongest biophilic strategies are therefore not simply about adding more greenery. They consider where nature is experienced, how often people encounter it, what form that connection takes and how it contributes to the wider experience of the building.

Used thoughtfully, biophilic design can help create environments that are more visually engaging, restorative and connected to their surroundings, while also contributing to specific WELL requirements and opportunities to earn certification points.

In that sense, WELL and biophilia share a fundamental principle: the built environment has the potential not simply to accommodate people, but to actively support their health, wellbeing and everyday experience.

VANTAGE SPACES®



Bring your WELL ambitions to life

Looking to create a healthier, more nature-connected workplace?

We'd love to help you explore how biophilic design can support your wellbeing goals and WELL certification.

Planting the places where great teams thrive •

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