LIFE SCIENCES:
BBP SECTOR INSIGHT

BBP | BETTER BUILDINGS PARTNERSHIP

In December 2025, the Better Buildings Partnership (BBP) hosted a member event exploring how our members' portfolios are changing to become more diversified, presenting new ESG challenges and opportunities. This two-pager – focused on the life sciences sector - forms part of a wider series of sector insights capturing reflections from the meeting.

"Life sciences is entering an innovative, fast-moving new phase. As we advance solutions that strengthen both human and planetary health, we're also creating compelling opportunities for resilient, future-focused investment. Sustainability is an increasingly central priority. Many occupiers are seeking energy-efficient, low-carbon lab space aligned with net zero and ESG commitments, while developers are raising the bar on performance and transparency. The Better Buildings Partnership (BBP) continues to drive best practice in sustainable real estate across the UK market, reinforcing this direction of travel."

Helen Newman
Executive Director, Group Sustainability, Bidwells

What do we mean by life sciences?

The life sciences sector refers to buildings that supports the scientific and health-focused sectors including biotechnology, pharmaceuticals, digital health and medical technology. These assets typically include specialised facilities such as laboratories, production spaces and innovation campuses designed to meet the unique needs of life science activities.

Which market trends are shaping the life sciences sector?

In recent years the UK life-sciences sector has shifted from a niche market to a more established asset class, underpinned by sustained growth in funding and occupier activity over the last decade. The key drivers our members identified were:

Increased scientific and technological innovation led by universities and amplified by advances in cell and gene therapy and AI, as well as lower interest rates, has driven private capital appetite for investment in the sector, creating demand for lab space.

Volatility in growth trajectories: driven by dependence on venture capital funding cycles, which creates uncertainty in demand timing and scale. Owners and developers are increasingly cautious about over-specifying space, prioritising flexibility to accommodate a wider range of life sciences or office-led uses as market conditions evolve.

Shifts in leasing dynamics, including increased demand for serviced labs, shorter lease terms, and shared infrastructure, to reduce upfront capital expenditure and preserve funding for R&D. Early-stage companies may prioritise availability and affordability in order to maintain research momentum.

Growing hybridisation of space, particularly in regional hubs, means that life sciences can occupy a significant proportion of office stock. There is an increased demand for future-proofed buildings, capable of accommodating office and lab uses while balancing flexibility against cost and sustainability specifications.

Evolving UK policy such as the Life Sciences Industrial Strategy Guide, which outlines the UK government's commitment to become Europe's leading life sciences economy by 2030 and is supported by £2 billion in government funding is driving investment and demand for life sciences buildings.

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CLIMATE RISK & RESILIENCE

Resilience planning is becoming a core consideration for life sciences real estate, reflecting exposure to physical risk such as flooding and extreme weather. In some locations, including parts of the 'Golden Triangle' of Oxford-Cambridge-London), are vulnerable to flooding and extreme weather. Given the presence of sensitive equipment and regulated materials, robust resilience planning is essential to protect assets and maintain operational continuity. At the same time, the life sciences sector has a broader strategic role in supporting climate mitigation and adaptation through scientific and technological innovation.

HEALTH & WELLBEING

Members found a growing occupier demand for designing life sciences' buildings factoring in the health and wellbeing of occupiers. Examples included greater investment in landscaping, biodiversity, and access to nature for promoting employee wellbeing. Expanding green spaces also enhances campus resilience to extreme weather and flooding, while supporting broader biodiversity research. Additionally, examples of designing labs for neurodiversity through adjustable lighting systems and reducing excessive noise can make laboratories more accessible for all.

PLACEMAKING

Building strong communities is essential to the long-term success of life sciences campuses within the local community. This can include collaborating with occupiers and local government to ensure accessible transport links for employees and supporting local infrastructure such as affordable housing. This is critical to attracting occupiers and sustaining key support staff, with many campuses provide events programmes to build community and create a USP.

OWNER-OCCUPIER ENGAGEMENT

The nature of laboratory work is highly energy-intensive which is also driven by the increase in AI-use. Additionally, laboratories and can be high in waste, with laboratory plastic waste accounting for roughly 2% of global plastic waste. Therefore, collaboration with occupiers on best practice is critical, with engagement strategies including consolidated campus-level waste contracts, knowledge-sharing initiatives, and owner-occupier forums such as Sustainability Special Interest Groups to innovate sustainable building use.

MEMBER CASE STUDY

Milton Park, Didcot Parkway

Federated Hermes

Milton Park, managed by Federated Hermes, is a science, technology and business park based in the 'Golden Triangle', covering nearly 3 million sq ft of office, laboratory and warehouse space and hosting over 250 innovative companies and around 9,000 people. Its sustainability strategy has emphasised responsible development by embedding high environmental standards into its 2040 Vision, repurposing existing buildings where possible and delivering new low-carbon projects such as Nebula that have saved significant carbon emissions during construction. It has actively fostered community engagement through initiatives such as the Greener Workplace Forum and occupier sustainability groups, as well as collaborating with local government to improve public transport links. The Park also prioritises biodiversity, protecting native species and habitats across extensive green spaces and urban gardens that enhance wildlife and connect occupiers with nature.

Industry Guidance and Tools for the Life Sciences sector

Constructing Science (founded in 2021): a UK-based industry initiative and set of guidance and building standards to help plan, design and assess whether existing or new buildings are fit-for-purpose for life sciences.

Innovation in Science Buildings: 'The Path to Net Zero' (2024): a research study that applies cross-sector industry experience to provide best-practice design solutions to reduce the carbon-intensive environmental impact of life science buildings.

LEAF - Laboratory Efficiency Assessment Framework (founded in 2020): a standard set by UCL to improve the sustainability and efficiency of laboratories.

My Green Lab (founded in 2013): UN-endorsed sustainability program creating resources for sustainable scientific research and offers trusted certifications to promote sustainability in laboratories.