

Mike Billington retires after three decades with Estates & Facilities



Mike Billington has retired from the University after 30 years' of service within Estates & Facilities, marking the end of a career that has helped shape the campus as we know it today.

Mike joined the University in January 1996, taking up a newly created role as Faculty Estates Officer. The position was part of an early initiative to bridge the gap between faculties and Estates, ensuring academic needs were properly understood and translated into practical estate solutions. Working closely with colleagues including Michelle Harper, Mike played a key role in developing what would later become a widely adopted partnering model across Professional Services.

Over the years, Mike's role evolved alongside the University itself. After time spent within Facilities, Maintenance and Compliance and the establishment of Client Services, he went on to become Head of Faculty Estates for Engineering and Physical Sciences, a role he held from 2004 onwards. Based primarily on North Campus, Mike and his team managed a complex and changing estate, supporting a wide range of academic activity across the area.

Mike was closely involved in some of the University's most significant milestones, including the merger of UMIST and the Victoria University of Manchester and the inauguration of the newly named University of Manchester in 2004. He also contributed to major elements of the University's estate strategy, from early new-build programmes through to the eventual decommissioning and closure of North Campus, where he was part of the final team to lock the doors and transition services back to the Oxford Road campus in 2024.

Throughout his career, Mike took pride not only in large-scale developments but also in the smaller details that shape the day-to-day campus experience. From reinstating historic railings along Coupland Street to standardising the distinctive blinds overlooking the Front Quad, his work leaves a visible legacy across the estate. More recently, Mike led the operational transition of the Nancy Rothwell Building, helping move it from construction site to a fully functioning environment supporting thousands of staff and students.

Beyond buildings, Mike also played a key role in preserving the University's heritage, including overseeing the re-hanging and interpretation of portraits across the Christie Building, Whitworth Hall and committee rooms. Working with colleagues from across the University, this work ensured the stories behind some of the University's most recognisable figures are accessible and properly documented.

Reflecting on his time here, Mike says the most important part of his career has always been the people: "I've had almost 30 years of learning something new every day from academics, colleagues and my team. I've worked with some fantastic people, and that's what I'll miss most. It's the teams you work with that make you successful, and I've been very lucky."

“As he looks ahead to retirement, Mike is looking forward to taking back some time; revisiting cycling and golf, continuing with paddle sports, learning Spanish, and spending more time with family after years of fitting everything into evenings and weekends.

Michelle Harper, Director of Estates Partnering, said: “We would like to thank Mike for his exceptional dedication, insight and quiet impact over three decades of service. His contribution has helped shape not just the physical campus, but how Estates & Facilities works in partnership with the wider University.”

We wish Mike a very happy and well-earned retirement!