RSA

GREEN STREETS

BRIEF 3

Brief 3:
Green streets

How might we restore nature to urban spaces to ensure that people and the planet thrive together?

Background

Amidst mass biodiversity loss caused by human population growth and overconsumption, cities and towns around the world are finding new ways to protect and return nature to their communities.

Biodiversity is crucial for our planet's natural systems to flourish and human survival depends on it. Naturally functioning ecosystems provide us with clean air and water, prevent flooding, store carbon, and help us to adapt to the climate crisis.

Many of the attempts to restore biodiversity happen in large, rural, wild areas. But smaller-scale attempts can take place in urban areas too. Efforts to restore nature to cities and towns might include letting wildlife reclaim areas, or introducing new architectural or landscape design features, like growing greenery on buildings.

One of the main benefits of restoring nature to urban areas is the positive impact it can have on humans' physical and mental health, particularly for those with less access to outdoor space. Spending time in green space or bringing nature into everyday life, by doing things like community gardening, exercising outdoors or being around animals is associated with positive benefits for mood, a reduction in stress, and provide opportunities to be more active.

The design of urban environments such as our neighbourhoods also affects how communities interact, by supporting access to family and friends, health services, community centres, and spaces for people to build relationships and strengthen social ties.

What needs to change?

The things we produce (like the products, campaigns, or services you might design) must become a force for **restoring the environment instead of degrading it.** In turn, we can expect nature to restore our own health and happiness, and that of our communities. It's in this way that you might begin to understand how your proposals could focus on the **reciprocal** relationship we have with the natural world.

Key Statistics:

- The vast majority (83.9 per cent) of the UK's population live in towns and cities (Statista, 2020)
- There are 295 deprived neighbourhoods of 440,000 people in the UK, with no trees or accessible green space (National Trust, 2021)
- 15 per cent of species within the UK are threatened with extinction (National Biodiversity Network State of Nature Report, 2019)

How to approach the brief

- We encourage you to create design proposals that **consider them within wider systems.** Think about the **reciprocal** relationship between humans and the environment when you're designing your proposal. How is your proposal ensuring that people and the planet thrive together? Once you've spotted an opportunity you can then zoom in to learn more about the issue, then zoom out again to look at the wider impact it has on the rest of the system you've identified.
- Once you have identified a problem to focus on, **co-design through conversations with the potential audience** of your proposal, making sure you understand their needs and motivations. Try to talk to both professionals and people with lived experience.
- **Test and prototype your ideas early.** Real world problems require real world ideas that need to be tried and tested to see if they stand up and where they might be improved further.
- Think about the **long-term impact** of your proposal. How might your proposal ensure that we're acting as 'good ancestors' in creating a better future for generations to come?

Brief toolkits

We have collated a range of resources to inform and inspire your thinking. Take a look below for brief specfic toolkits:

Brief 1

How might we rethink our current food system to design out waste?

Some existing examples that might meet this brief include…

- ChipsBoard: a biomaterials company creating products from food waste, built on circular economy principles
- FoodCycle: a UK charity that combines surplus food, spare kitchen spaces and volunteers to create three-course meals for people at risk of food poverty and social isolation.
- Apeel: Apeel uses materials that exist in the peels, seeds, and pulp of fruits and vegetables to create a protective extra peel that seals moisture in and keeps oxygen out.

Further resources:

- What is a circular economy?
- The circular economy in action (see 'Food' section)
- Youth consultation for the National Food Strategy (see in particular 'closing youth statements' on p.31)

Brief 2

How might we ensure that schools become places of belonging for all pupils?.

Some existing examples that might meet this brief include…

- Peer Mentoring Toolkit (HeadStart Kent): Peer mentoring has been evidenced as having a positive impact on the emotional health and well-being of children and young people, and can be used to improve a sense of belonging in schools
- Smart School Councils: a whole-school approach to democracy, involving all children's voices in decision-making, enabling pupils to learn a broad range of key skills as a result.
- Diversity Role Models: an organisation that delivers interactive workshops to embed inclusion and empathy in schools, through education and storytelling from LGBT+ or ally role models.

Further resources:

- Place and belonging in school: why it matters today. Case studies (UCL & National Education Union)
- Young people failed by approach to mental health in secondary schools across England (Mind)
- Mentally Healthy Schools: Relationships and belonging (Anna Freud Centre for Children and Families)

Brief 3

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Some existing examples that might meet this brief include…

- Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust: a proposal for reimagining the empty Broadmarsh shopping centre into an urban oasis of wetlands, woodlands, and wildflowers.
- Parklets: small parts of residential streets reclaimed by the community for people to stop, rest and enjoy
- The Orchard Project: a national charity dedicated to the creation, restoration, and celebration of community orchards

Further resources:

- 8 cities rewilding their urban spaces
- New research shows the need for urban green space
- Biophilic design: What is it?

Judging criteria

Your proposals will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

1

Social and environmental impact:

- How does the proposal make a positive difference for people and/or the natural world?
- How does the final proposal consider diverse needs and equitable ways to meet those needs?
- How does the proposal engage with the local community in its chosen context?
- How does the proposal consider using materials, processes, and resources in a sustainable way?

2

Rigorous research and compelling insights:

- Has the pupil/team undertaken first-hand research by identifying the needs and motivations of people affected by the problem in your brief?
- Has the pupil/team conducted research into the wider context of the problem on the internet or through reading material?
- How does the proposal build on key insights grounded in people's needs and motivations, and gained through wider research?
- How does the proposal incorporate feedback and testing through prototyping and iteration?

3

Viability:

- Has the pupil/team considered how the proposal will work in practice?
- Has the pupil/team considered the cost of the proposal and how it might be funded and sustained?
- Has the pupil/team identified any potential barriers that might prevent the proposal working in practice? How might these be overcome?
- Has the pupil/team considered how they would measure the success of their proposal if it became a reality?

4

Creativity and innovation:

- How is the proposal different from existing solutions? How might it be better or more useful?
- What unexpected or surprising elements are included in the proposal? What value do these add to the idea?