
Roundtable event 23 April 2020

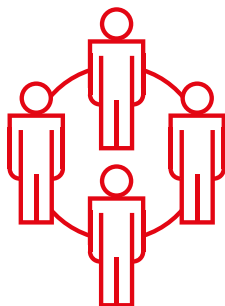
Supporting the transition to a more sustainable future.

Sustainable living roundtable

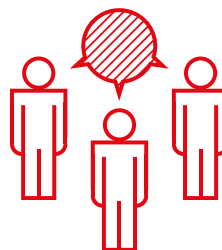
Design Council's delivery of evidence-based and design-led programmes helps build design skills and mindsets, connect designers with non-designers, produce and influence policy and inspire others. Prompted by our recently launched [Strategy 2020-24](#) and our [Design Perspectives: Sustainable Living](#) research paper, last month's Sustainable Living Roundtable did just that, bringing together a small but influential group of sector leaders and industry experts whose mission aligns to share and discuss best practices across disciplines and to begin a conversation on what we can do together to pioneer innovative approaches and discuss what role design can play to shape a brighter future.

As it took place in the arc of the Covid-19 crisis, a third aim emerged: to identify the behaviours and practices taking place during the current Covid-19 crisis that should be scaffolded for the future – importantly, considering how we can harness this action to respond to the other very real emergency of climate change, identified by Design Council as our primary focus for encouraging and supporting sustainable living.

The roundtable session had two aims:



To share designers inspirational stories of their work, from across design disciplines.



To explore collectively how design can help support a transition to a more sustainable future.

The virtual roundtable

>Welcome to the sustainable living roundtable

Today's agenda

To share designers' inspirational stories of their work, from across design disciplines

To explore collectively how design can help support a transition to a more sustainable future

Please use the top agenda indicator and right to subject to other design

Time	Topic
09:15	Virtual Coffee
09:30	Welcome & digital housekeeping
09:45	Introduction to Design Council
09:55	Panel discussion
10:05	Architecture - Louise Wynn
10:15	Product design - Neil Hunter
10:25	Circular design - Simon Willmet
10:35	Service design - Nina Wright
10:45	Material design - Sarah Searle
10:55	Q&A
11:05	Break
11:20	Roundtable discussion
11:45	Feedback
12:00	Close

Who is in the room

Strategy 2020-24

Today's panel

Moderator

Panelists

The workshop space

Theme: Sustainable communities

Theme: Resilient places and infrastructure

Theme: Circular economy

Theme: Shared natural resources

Panel discussion

During the session, we heard from five inspiring panellists, each bringing a different perspective to the conversation, from service design and circular economy to products, material innovation and the built environment. Each panellist showcased the impact of their work and presented their ideas on the shifts that need to be made to further support sustainable living in our society.

Louise Wyman, West Midlands Combined Authority

Louise Wyman, Design Lead at West Midlands Combined Authority explained how the West Midlands Design Charter is promoting, encouraging and interposing great place initiatives, bringing great design talent alongside great place-making. Louise talks through the Charter (co-designed with 18 local authorities, three LEPs and launched by the Mayor) which covers six themes, highlighting their added relevance during the COVID-19 crisis:

Character – reimagining the high street in the way that represents the individual character of different places in the West Midlands, and recognising the additional challenges that the crisis puts on high streets (with more people going online) but equally the opportunity it presents for neighbourhood shopping.

Mobility – transport connections between the West Midlands, London (with High Speed 2) and between its towns and villages (through Transport for West Midlands) but also digital connectivity and connections between people, each other and their heritage (for example, Lichfield sheltered housing which has large windows so that older residents with lower mobility can still see nature and local heritage nearby)

Future readiness – building resilience of places, for example Portloop where modern methods of construction have been used

Health and wellbeing – increased access to nature and spaces for physical activity

Stewardship – collaboration and engagement, including the creative community

Delivery – encouraging joy in place, especially for young people who are the future.

What is clearly evidenced in the Charter and in the response to the current emergency is that the creative sector and the built environment sector together will be critical to a post-crisis society. Collaboration, partnership and leadership are key.



You can watch Louise Wyman's presentation [here](#).

Nat Hunter, Other Today

Nat Hunter, Director at Other Today and one of our Design Associates discussed distributed design and manufacture and its relationship to sustainable living. Fab City uses a design led approach to totally disrupt and redesign how we want to live. Currently goods arrive to the UK, readymade, via shipping containers (as 90% of them already are) then used and disposed. **Fab City** proposes a completely circular system. Here, materials come into the city and are then distributed to a network of micro factories around the UK to make, re-cycle and re-use goods, massively reducing waste.

This idea is rooted in the makerspace movement which identifies how important it is for citizens to participate in the making of the objects they need. It benefits local economy, environment, mental health and creativity.

Other examples of where the traditional manufacturing process has been disrupted are **Open desk** and **Batchworks** in London and **Local Motors** in the USA. All these companies pair classic design thinking with the speed of open innovation to produce products that actually work better for customers, for society and the environment. Their products can be designed and prototyped and produced quickly; they co-create with their customers to give them exactly the product they want and there are huge reductions in pollution caused by transportation, manufacturing and waste.

You can watch Nat Hunter's presentation [here](#).



Simon Widmer, The Ellen McArthur Foundation

Simon Widmer from The Ellen McArthur Foundation discussed what role design can play in creating a brighter future and meeting the **UN's 17 Sustainable Development Goals**. Some 45% of omissions are from products, highlighting the important role the circular economy has in achieving climate goals. The circular economy covers three things:

Design out waste and pollution – going upstream to the design of a product, when material choices are being made and business models are being shaped

Keep products and materials in use – designing new ways of meeting user needs without selling more physical products, and decoupling economic activity with more material use

Regenerate natural systems – look into design principles that restore systems and do not extract materials.

Simon explains that we now need to start sharing these inspirations and providing tools and resources (for example, their **Circular Design Guide**) building a shared understanding and recognition.

You can watch Simon Widmer's presentation [here](#).

Ness Wright, Snook

Ness Wright from Snook started with a personal story of how she moved from airline design to an MSc. in sustainability at **Centre for Alternative Technology** and then to service design. She shared the idea that we often have the evidence and indeed the solutions, but service design can help turn these into things that people want to use in the real world. We need to collaborate more widely with other sectors and be more ambitious – not tinkering, adjusting bit by bit, but radically rethinking what we do.

With this, there are three main areas for change:

Sustainable offerings need good services – it is not enough just to be 'green', designers also need to consider how someone will come across a service or product, how they will use it and what needs it must meet.

All services need to be more sustainable – public services (such as the NHS, local government, etc.) are essential but they create a lot (3% of the total) of carbon emissions in the UK.

As designers, we need to develop our own practice – Snook has convened a network of designers from different agencies who are considering the environment at every stage of the design process and openly share and learn from each other's experiences.

You can watch Ness Wright's presentation [here](#).

Seetal Solanki, Ma-tt-er

Seetal Solanki from the relational practice Ma-tt-er focused on building and bridging kinships between ourselves, materials, the immaterial and the virtual. Seetal wonders how we can re-orient mindsets towards futures that are caring and respectful.

“We are often told we are materialistic. It seems to me that we are not materialistic enough. We have a disrespect for materials. We use them quickly and carelessly. If we’re genuinely materialistic people, we would understand where materials come from and where they go to.”

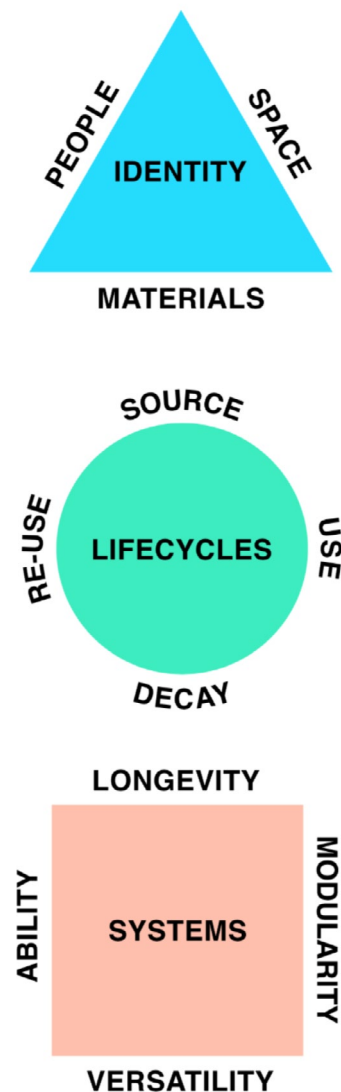
- George Monbiot (The Guardian)

Ma-tt-er’s methodology is centered on materials first with the methodology of:

Identity – currently materials are categorised by a typology (for example, wood, glass, paper), rather than by what they can do or how they make us feel. But when we design, we design by how something should function or feel

Lifecycle – thinking about how materials can be re-used and reshaped

Systems approach – how we apply these principles, for modularity, durability, versatility (and used for different functions and sectors) and ability (how humans can use it).



© Ma-tt-er Methodology

You can watch Seetal Solanki’s presentation [here](#).

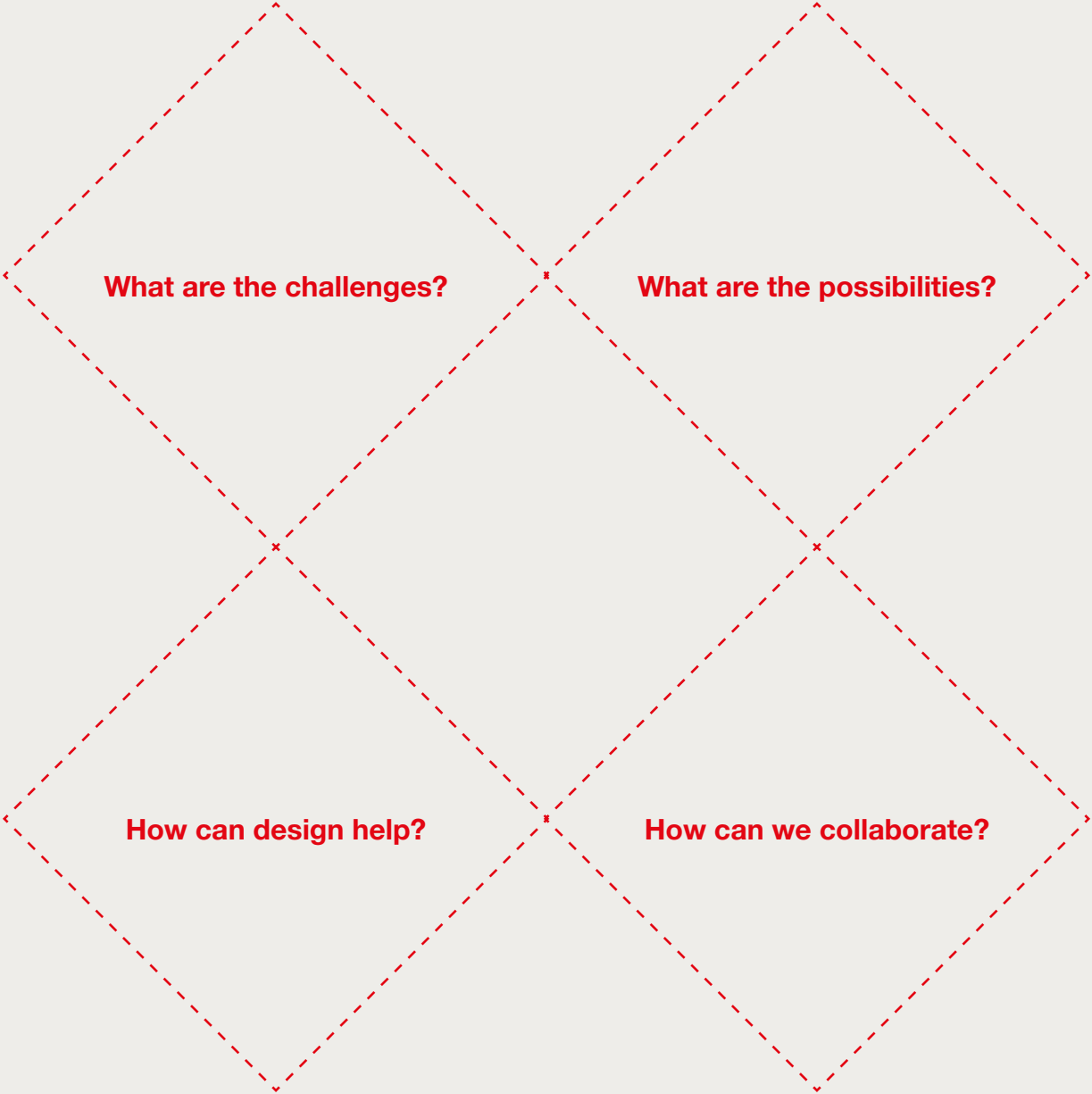
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George Monbiot (The Guardian)



Group workshop

To develop some of this thinking, we set ourselves four key questions based on four key themes identified in our Design Perspectives: Sustainable Living research paper. These are: sustainable communities, resilient places and infrastructure, the circular economy and shared, natural resources. Split up in virtual breakout rooms and armed with our electronic post-it notes we set out to explore:



What are the challenges?

What are the possibilities?

How can design help?

How can we collaborate?

Summary of discussions

Circular design is linked to social value (both improvements in employment and health and wellbeing) within the UK and globally.

We need to link circular principles to social value, thinking beyond products and production and into communities and skills. Products are part of the social system – they are produced by someone and used by someone. The **Potato Head Hotel** is a great example of using materials and crafts to create and fit a hotel which is not only environmentally friendly, but also promotes the local economy. Local production is not only good for the local economy (as seen in Preston with the **Preston Model**, where local public procurement favours local), it also makes use of empty spaces, as the move away from the high street picks up pace, generating new skills and community connections.

A circular mindset offers opportunities to link to the character and assets of local places and develop skills and training for left-behind UK communities. In service design we often talk about asset-based community development, i.e. looking at people's strengths and aspirations – rather than their needs, and how can they use these and pass them on. However, it is important to see the wider global context, and where manufacturing and production in countries in the global South is vital to lifting those societies out of poverty. Sometimes it is acceptable to produce in-country and transport the product. Fair Trade associations are important here; there needs to be a diversity of meaningful circles.

Distributed production

Like the examples given above (Batch, Fab City, Open Desk), **Community Clothing** is a great example of a fashion brand moving production into the UK. The move has strengthened local employment and income for the factory, allowing them to invest in better digital tools, which in turn enables them to produce clothes more efficiently in the UK, competing with unsustainable fast fashion brands.

The challenge for distributed manufacturing are the systems around it, in particular procurement. The policy, regulation, governance and procurement that sits around a product, place or service critically needs to be re-designed, rethinking the connections into the commissioning system.

Matching skills with need

It is important to support the transition away from jobs that are not aligned with the future we need (for example, oil and gas), and the consequences of shifting these business models. We also need to consider who might be impacted with a focus primarily on those at the lower end of the pay scale. Attaching green conditions to bailouts could be a good way of Government supporting polluting industries towards managed transition. This transition, however, needs to be locally appropriate to be a success. For example, with traditional steel industry areas, what do you replace it with and how do you retrain entire communities?

Place-based design – designing for local ecosystems

We need to look at re-organising local authorities and typical structures to reflect what will work for the good of that place, not in siloed service areas or using a ‘one size fits all’ approach. For example, we need to think about the future of the high street in that area – what is the demand for services and what are the skillsets needed for the future. To do this we need to re-engage people, which requires the need to understand supply chains, different eco-systems and the different services at play.

Challenges are around ‘invisible’ things like procurement, incentives, power and the way the Western world values time

We need to re-think the ‘invisible’ systems that sit around products, services, places (for example, the policy, governance, rules, regulations and mindsets, or the socio-political and knowledge infrastructure). This will require buy-in and investment from leaders and for them to agree to hand over power and agency.

If we are to make these changes, we need to think about where power/agency lies; importantly the power and influence of political leadership. We need to create new economic models that are fit for purpose, rethinking government finance and procurement processes, and recognising the impact of lobbying against these traditional power structures.

Another challenge is time and how we value this. So much of sustainable living (for example, cycling/walking, growing food, mending things) is dependent on having time, which is out of kilter with our lives and the notion of busyness. We need to design for slower but productive lifestyles. COVID-19 is showing us that – for some – this is possible.

Reframing resources (and the way we use them)

The language of resources needs to be changed. We need to shift from the current notion of resources as something that humans can use and extract. We need to instead humanise resources and think about Traditional Ecological Knowledge – understanding the nature of materials. There is at present a lack of accessible discourse on the substantive natural environment for people to understand their agency. Instead we should think about the ‘servicification’ of resources to shift how we value them, understanding that we are responsible for them but we do not own them. Design can play an important role here in shifting the message – sharing learning, story-telling and visualising ideas and solutions.

The use of place is a good way to layer this understanding. Planning and design can be used to enhance and add value to the local environment, for example, waterways transfer water nationally, they can be used for heating and cooling, for local travel, for recreation, creating long linear orchards/gardens and importantly are appreciated.

Circular design can expand from products to social value

The Ellen McArthur Foundation have done a fantastic job of making the circular economy a household name. We can now map the diversity of circular approaches, the scale of circles and the ‘spin out’ benefits of circularity (education, social cohesion, wellbeing, etc).

Services and service design are important to enable circularity and the uptake of sustainable products. Service design can often be invisible, just as ‘good services’ often are (you only notice a ‘bad’ service experience), but they are critical in the take up of more sustainable practices (for example, recycling or taking up a green pension). Service design is also important to improve engagement and therefore public permission for change (for example, around planning, conservation and parks).

Reverse logistics (waste back to manufacture) is a huge gap in the chain. A new publication recently launched from **Cities of Making** looked at why manufacturing in cities is key and how it can be supported including 'patterns' for supporting reverse logistics, visibility for manufacturing, the need for curation and network cultivation.

Designers need to think and act circularly and systemically

We need to think – and design – systemically. We are seeing how everything is connected, and how an intervention in the system here might have unintended consequences somewhere else. Designers need to be able to extend their skillset to assess the environmental and social impact of different options but also able to operate at different scales, having a clear understanding of who they are designing for – local, national or global citizens or communities.

Disruptive and 'extreme' design can unleash new possibilities

Sustainability 'constraints' can also unleash innovation. The Potato Head Hotel's 'no plastics' rule provoked new design potentials. COVID-19 has effectively stopped air travel and produced huge innovation within global conferences and festivals, and unprecedented construction timelines. Where would we end up if we started with no private cars? Designing for extremes, as we are seeing today can unleash new possibilities, making the seemingly impossible inevitable and producing real change.

Our attendees were:

Sarah Weir	Tom Perry	Sarah Mann	Sue Morgan
Jessie Johnson	Gyorgyi Galik	Sabina Dewfield	Hilary Cuddy
Nat Hunter	Max Tolley	Ambreen Shah	Ness Wright
Peter Oborn	Louise Wyman	Simon Widmer	Chris Waldon
James Stuart	Rachel Armstrong	Jo Rowan	Kate Langford
Emyr Poole	Simon Quin	Neha Tayal	Seetal Solanki
Sufina Ahmad	Hayley Trower	Ben Reason	Marcus Chaloner
Stephen Frost	Rob Maslim	Costanza Poggi	Tim James
Noel Hatch	Christine Murray	Josie Warden	Maria Kafel-Bentkowska
Mark Washer	Fiona Howie	Nick Gant	

Areas for action and collaboration

Sharing sustainable design methods, practices and case studies

We heard about the need for designers to work disruptively and systemically, to explore new approaches such as material first design and for the need to have off-the-shelf examples of sustainable design from across sectors to show what good looks like. Design Council is bringing together research into design methods for net zero, circular and systemic design.

What are these methods and approaches, who is using them well and who else do we need to talk to?

Impartial convening and policy advice

Design Council has a convening role, continuing to bring stakeholders from across sectors and communities together to develop solutions. From the discussion we heard the need to bring together conversations about the procurement and commissioning, regulation, economic models, skills and health.

Which groups were missing from our conversation and what would bring them to the table?

Strategic, place-based design support

Design Council provides strategic advice to local places and national infrastructure clients. From this discussion we heard about the potential for the development of local economic systems that draw on and build local skills, use resources and transport/logistics systems that are sustainable, and have positive effects on wider determinants of health.

Which places, particularly in post-crisis recovery, are keen to explore a place-based approach to sustainability and how can we work with, learn from them and share what they are doing?

What's next?

To answer some of these questions we need to continue this discussion. We need to develop tangible new strategic relationships and collaborative working partnerships. Doing this will ensure that actions are delivered and messages are amplified. With these strategic partnerships we want to convene and engage with politicians, private sector and funders to drive and influence policy and systemic sustainable change.

We need to design disruptively and it is easier if we can do that together. As a coalition we can come up with a bold alternative vision. With this, all of us, as organisations and as individuals, can take distributed action for change

Inspiration library

We asked the attendees to share their best practice examples of sustainability - one star go to example of sustainable living and one everyday object, service or process that helps them live more sustainably. Here are some examples.

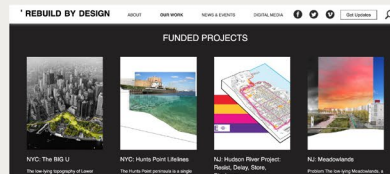
James Stuart
Loch Lomand & Trossachs Park



Great example:
Funky starfish.
They create new
bags and other
things from old
sails.

Great design and
another step in
the circular
economy.

Gyorgyi Galik
Design Council

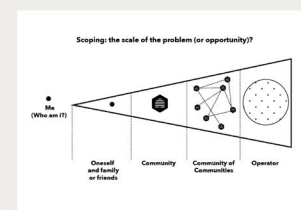


Everyday example: As part of my practice-led PhD, I designed an open-source AI assistant prototype (like Alexa and Google Home) that helps people transition to low-carbon lifestyles and enables networked collective action

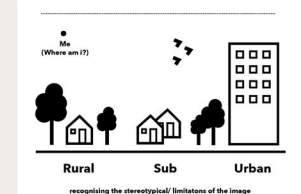
*Example: 'Rebuild by Design'-Hurricane Sandy Design Competition: President Obama's Hurricane Sandy Rebuilding Task Force launched an innovative design competition that coupled innovation and global expertise with community insight to develop implementable solutions to the region's most complex needs...



Nick Gant
University of Brighton

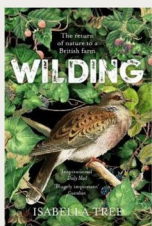


Grand: The
world eats
less meat

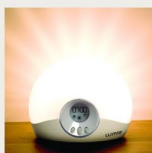


Everyday:
The world
eats less
meat

Sufina Ahmad
John Ellerman Foundation



Grand design - Rewilding as a methodology and movement through which you can reverse climate change, damage to habitats, conservation, flood defences etc. Also, it is inspiring when it is delivered cross-sectorally and involves (hyper) local communities working with central/local government, industries/sectors etc.



Everyday design - My lumie light to help me wake up in the mornings...thought it was a bit of a gimmick, but found it incredibly helpful this last winter

Jo Rowan
PriestmanGoode



Everyday Example: A plastic free and more minimalist lifestyle.

Buying less = less packaging and less products to ultimately reuse / recycle

Star Example: Material innovations as alternatives to plastic (such as the use of by-products) - showcased in PriestmanGoode's sustainable meal tray concept

Costanza Poggi
Seahorse



Grand design - Energiesprong: quick and efficient retrofit of homes for passivhaus standard of insulation. Paid for through energy savings.



Everyday - Tote bag: simple, durable, fashionable. Often made from recycled materials and it reduces waste

Hilary Cuddy
Design Council



The [Library of Things](#) Movement is taking a people centered approach to make borrowing better than buying.

My Condor bike - Commuting to work for 12 years I've apparently saved 2.5 tonnes of CO₂ - and apparently I'm more energy efficient than an actual condor in flight.

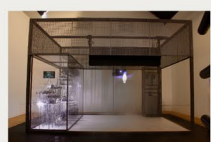
Fiona Howie
Town and Country Planning Association

Trees - so critical in both urban and rural landscapes in terms of design but also the ecosystem services they provide

Due to COVID - really interesting examples emerging across Europe of cities being re-designed/evolved to make them less car focused and more walking and cycling friendly. Eg. [Milan](#)

Star example - [Freiburg](#) as an example of a sustainable, green city (although I know it isn't perfect - but still lots to learn from it)

Rachel Armstrong
Newcastle University



Star go-to is "living buildings"



An everyday design is a domestic bioprocessor that turns household liquid waste into cleaned water, electricity and biomolecules



Ness Wright



Centre for Alternative Technology, Wales. Inspiring example of showing what is possible and how living sustainably can be normal/attractive. (early wind power experiments, timber frame hemp and lime building, online sustainability education)



Everyday example -
trains. Train
infrastructure has
helped me save many
tonnes of CO2 and still
have fun / see family
#trainsnotplanes



Nat Hunter
Other Today

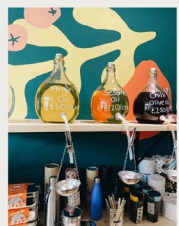


My wormery! All our food scraps go in here and create amazing plant food. Living in the middle of the city, this reminds me every day about where food comes from, and that in nature, there is NO SUCH THING AS WASTE - everything becomes food for something else.



Staying on the same theme - I have an allotment after being on the waiting list for 12.5 years. We need more allotments in our cities - wonderful creators of community, they get people fit and healthy, cross generational and cultural silos, and change relationships to food. So important and so undervalued in town planning.

Sarah Mann
Design Council



Star Example: My local zero waste grocery shop BYO has cut the amount of plastic we consume in our weekly shop - its part of a growing movement of independent zero waste shops

An aerating nozzle for your tap reduces water waste and saves money - you can get one for free from your local water company

Cat Drew
Design Council



Everyday example
is an egg timer on
the shower or a
plastic bottle in
the cistern

STAR EXAMPLE
Community Clothing - as it is about ethically supporting clothes to be produced in the UK, giving more £ to the factory so they can invest in digital machinery and be able to compete with unethical fast fashion, having a positive circular effect.

Tom Perry
Design Council

Hang it out to dry:
There are upward of 88 million
dryers in the U.S., each emitting
more than a ton of carbon
dioxide per year. Housing
developers/ associations putting
in basic washing lines has a
significant impact on people's
purchase and use of driers



Street Trees in Hackney have a simple plastic feeder to encourage local residents to water them, giving them a better chance of survival and ensuring the community take a sense of ownership and pride in their street

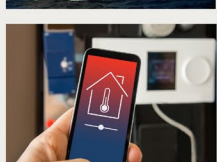
Ben Reason
Livework Studio



Abundance - invest in renewable projects as an ISA or Pension



EcoClipper - sail powered sea cargo



Baxi - Heat as a service



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