



# CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY

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Design for Planet is Design Council’s ambitious new approach to galvanise and support the UK’s 1.69 million-strong design community to address the climate crisis.

This strategic shift recognises the fundamental need to redesign our lives to save our planet, and champions the power and responsibility of designers to shape a better world.

Our Design for Planet case studies will showcase ten leaders in sustainable design from a diverse range of disciplines. They will explore the role of design as a powerful agent of change through sustainability and climate-action. We want these case studies to inspire and motivate the design community to prioritise the welfare of the planet in their own work and practises.

# CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY

When it comes to solving a problem as omnipresent as climate change, everybody has to be part of the conversation. Which is why, after passing a law in 2019 committing the UK to reaching 'net zero' emissions by 2050, the the six select committees of the House of Commons commissioned a citizens' assembly to gain public input in on how the UK should meet this target.

Step forward Involve Foundation, whose raison d'être is putting people at the heart of decision making. The public participation charity believes that engaging people in the process is fundamental to shaping policy that works.

"You'll get much better policy if you treat people as partners in decision making," says Sarah Allan, director of capacity-building and standards at Involve.

A citizens' assembly is designed to do just that: bringing together a group of people from all walks of life, to learn about an issue, discuss it together and come to a conclusion about what they think should happen next.

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The UK's net zero target means that by 2050 we will have to drastically reduce the amount of greenhouse gases we produce and balance our remaining emissions by absorbing the same amount from the atmosphere.

The changes required to deliver on this have such a fundamental effect on so many aspects of our lives - from the way we get around, to what we buy, to how we heat our homes - that public engagement is crucial.

"You need to understand where public preferences are in terms of the different routes for how you get to net zero if you want them to go along with those changes and really be part of how we get there," says Sarah.

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**“You’ll get much better policy if you involve people in shaping it, if you treat them as partners in decision making. By partnering with the public, you gain not just their compliance, but their energy, their resources and their creativity too.”**

“You need solutions that really work for people, because you need them to buy into them. To know that it works for them involves being informed by their lived experience.”

The citizens’ assembly comprised 108 assembly members – made up of people chosen to reflect the demographics of the wider population in terms of age, gender, ethnicity, educational level, where they live, and their attitudes towards climate change.

People were recruited from across the UK, all with varying levels of how concerned they felt, if at all, about climate change. They met over six weekends last spring to listen to balanced evidence, discuss it and reach recommendations. Their final report, published in September 2020, offered Parliament and government insight in to the public’s appetite for action on climate change and their thoughts on how it should be delivered.

“By partnering with the public, you gain not just their buy-in, but their energy, their resources and their creativity too,” says Sarah.

Unlike a consultation or focus group, the citizens’ assembly is designed to be an interactive, collaborative process with members empowered to write their own recommendations and make their own decisions. It forged connections, encouraging people to think laterally about the problem and harnessing a broad range of hopes and ambitions for how we get there.

“Members heard from 48 different speakers and then they got to really question them in depth,” says Sarah.

In designing the assembly, Involve thought carefully about accessibility and creating a safe space to ensure everyone was given an equal voice, and that diverse voices from multiple marginalised perspectives were included.

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“You have to consider how you manage power dynamics in the room and making it an equal space for people to participate. It’s important that the same people don’t dominate and that everyone feels comfortable and respected so it’s an enjoyable experience for everybody.”

This influenced the assembly’s structure and design at an integral level - from the choice of a fully accessible venue, to the timings of the events and the provision of a range of access needs, to how the events were facilitated.

All participants were paid for their time to ensure that finance was not a barrier to participation and costs such as childcare and the attendance of carers were covered where needed.



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**“A huge amount of thought goes into how you meet everybody’s designing needs for them to take part.”**

