



KENNEDY WOODS

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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.

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Innovative design isn't always about the new. Sometimes it's about making the most of existing assets and breathing fresh life in to the old. A design ethos Kennedy Woods, the UK's first accredited B-corporation architectural studio, fully subscribe to.

On a mission to support sustainable development, it specialises in taking buildings that have seen better days and reimagining them as vibrant spaces.

“People tend to turn to architects when they think a building is the solution, but working with an existing setup and finding ways to make it more fit for purpose is a lot less energy intensive than starting from scratch,” says architect Chris Kennedy who founded the company alongside designer Tom Woods.

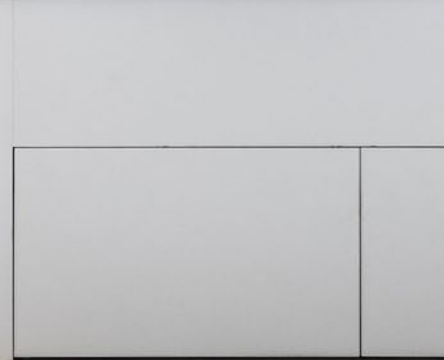
Its circular thinking means Kennedy Woods also always has an eye to future proofing buildings for easy adaptation further down the line.

“We try to ensure that the space we have designed is flexible enough to transform easily into a new kind of space for a different use, if and when the current use becomes redundant,” says Chris.

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Nowhere is its thoughtful approach more in evidence than during a recent flagship project – the development of a low-carbon nursery school in Hackney, East London. Set in a tightly bounded plot in a residential area with complicated site constraints, Kennedy Woods' user centred approach informed the design process from the get go.

It began with on the ground research, in the form of workshops with staff, parents, residents and early years experts. The team also embedded themselves in a nursery for a number of days in order to really get to grips with how the space needed to work.





RENDER OF NURSERY FROM ENGENUITI

“We believe design needs to be grounded in user-needs in order to be truly sustainable,” says Chris.

The highly sustainable building features a cross-laminated timber (CLT) structure, green roof, and integrated solar panels that will allow it to target a BREEAM “Excellent” rating.

Developed with specialist engineering firm Engenuiti, the building has 25 per cent of the embodied carbon (carbon dioxide emitted in producing the materials) of a ‘traditional’ steel and concrete build, when considering the cradle to grave life of the building components, and the carbon that is sequestered within the timber frame. This is the equivalent saving of a person flying from London to New York and back 170 times.

“A CLT structure arrives flat packed in panels that are craned into place,” explains Chris. “This can reduce the time on site by as much as half, meaning a lot less local disruption, and with very little mess and waste generated.”

The design features a series of bright and airy rooms each with direct access to a courtyard, and calm, minimal interior spaces, well suited to an early-years learning environment.

Yet while the building has been designed specifically for the nursery tenant, it has also been future proofed for the longer term. Joinery, finishes and internal layouts can be easily adapted without impacting on the shell of the building.

“As well as meeting all the nursery’s requirements, we illustrated to the developer how the building could be easily adapted for office use, should the current tenant decide to move on,” says Chris.

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Helping clients find a path through the often-complex world of sustainability, with its vast array of choices that can at first appear baffling and overwhelming, is all part of the job. “I think design can help people look at these complex situations and navigate making complicated decisions,” says Chirs.

He points out that often the most environmentally friendly choice isn’t always as clear cut as people would assume or like it to be. “Sustainable design in architecture doesn’t always use the most obvious materials.”

Kennedy Woods delve beyond the surface to understand factors such as where materials are sourced, how they are produced and assembled as well as their durability and maintenance requirements.

“We establish a sustainable construction strategy for each project, taking our clients on a journey and busting some myths along the way,” says Chris.

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Other projects to benefit from its ‘people planet profit’ perspective include the sensitive reimagining of a neuro rehabilitation facility for a brain injury charity to improve the user experience for patients and family visitors alike; blue prints for an affordable eco-friendly prefabricated home aimed at renters struggling to get on the property ladder and a pop-up exhibition using salvage materials.

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