

**DESIGN FOR  
PLANET**

**Design  
Council**



# **REBUILD BY DESIGN**

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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.

# REBUILD BY DESIGN

While we're led to believe that many of history's ground breaking inventions are down to one individual's light bulb revelation, the behind-the-scenes reality is often more complex than a single Eureka moment. In actual fact we tend to be at our most productive when we share ideas and know-how, working together towards a shared goal.

That's certainly true of Rebuild by Design, a game-changing US initiative set up in the wake of 2012's deadly Hurricane Sandy. It began as a design competition, launched after the Obama administration decided to try a new approach when it came to rebuilding the affected communities on America's devastated East Coast.

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“There is always a window of opportunity after a disaster happens where you can do things a little bit differently,” says Managing Director Amy Chester. “After a storm, governments are more open to experiment and we jumped on the moment.”

Rebuild by Design has turned on its head the conventional methods of administering disaster relief funding. It broke down creative and regulatory barriers between designers, researchers, residents, government officials and experts to rethink exactly what the affected communities needed and ensure the new infrastructure built would give them the resilience to deal with a changing climate.

It’s a striking example of just how much can be achieved when you connect disparate groups and set in motion a collaborative design process. “The government put a call out for teams of an interdisciplinary nature,” says Amy.

“They were not judged on their ideas, but their background and their approach. We really believed that after Hurricane Sandy nobody knew what the right answers were. Instead, we needed learning moments and collaboration in order to get to the right answers. Design is using a more thoughtful process to come up with a more thoughtful solution,” she adds.

Rebuild by Design believe the strongest solutions involve those who know their communities best: the residents. They harness that local knowledge to great effect.

“If you work with the community, you get better results,” says Amy. “The results come faster, they are deeper and the payoff is much larger. It’s embedded into our process to ensure that the collaboration happens up front.”

From 148 teams who applied, ten were chosen to be part of a nine month long collaborative research process. As part of a research stage, all ten visited the affected region, meeting different types of communities that had been affected by the storm in different ways, from social housing residents to local mayors to first responders.

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“At the end of the research effort, we then asked the teams to come up with three to five ideas and propose where they thought they could make the biggest impact,” says Amy.

A total of 41 ideas were taken to the public for feedback to inform which were ultimately given the green light to move to the next stage. Site visits, panel discussions and workshops helped communities and designers uncover and examine ideas and problems collectively.

“In the final stage, the designers would have to propose their idea through community events to get feedback, prove that they incorporated the feedback and go back for further iterations. The design teams got so much out of these community conversations that they ended up doing much more than the two events initially planned. It was an iterative feedback process where the community was integral to creating something that everyone could support.”

While the scale of Hurricane Sandy meant the competition was never intended to cover all the different places it affected, from the get go Rebuild by Design created projects that could be straightforwardly replicated in other communities both nearby and further afield. It has set a new standard for response to large scale natural disasters – sadly set to be increasingly common thanks to climate change.

Rebuild by Design has since worked on research based, collaborative design processes in other regions including San Francisco, Athens, Mexico and the Middle East, using the same winning formula of interdisciplinary collaboration.

Says Amy: “With our approach, you’re seeing a problem through many different eyes and then you’re creating a solution that will address many different vulnerabilities. Every dollar goes further because it has multiple benefits.”

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