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# Housing for Good: Catalysing Ecological Citizen(s) a Method of Designing 'Sustainable Conditions'.

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**ABSTRACT |** The UK is tackling crises in climate change, living costs, social inequalities, rocketing housing prices and a disengagement from our natural world. These factors impact human health, wellbeing, societal cohesion, and also accessible and equitable opportunities. Sustainable design interventions are: interconnected, complex, place-based and culturally contextual. Sustainable proposals should be embedded into our lives, equitably and accessible to all citizens. In contemporary times, it is also sadly notable that humans are not formally given the knowledge, or resources, to look after ecosystems *Homo sapiens* relies on for life. This often leaves sustainable practices polarised, seemingly draconian or seen as a luxury.

Society needs new ways to navigate socially equitable, accessible and designed models that are financially stable, catalysing sustainable action(s). Relationships with nature must be built into our communities, lives and homes. Authors believe social constructs live alongside pro-active rejuvenation of the natural world, with overlapping co-benefits to humans and more-than-humans. Buckton *et al*, *The Regenerative Lens* states societies must "transform their dynamics to support the flourishing of life. [As] there is increasing interest in regeneration but also limited cohered understanding of what constitutes regenerative systems at social-ecological scales" (2023).

Authors introduce Ecological Citizenship (EC): activities establishing and catalysing sustainable practice(s) addressing ecological inequalities (Phillips *et al*, 2024). The Ecological Citizen(s) Network is intent on catalysing transitions with communities by

providing autonomy, accessibility to design, initiating sustainable conditions and open pro-social possibilities. The Housing for Good (HFG) concept perceives preferable futures where thousands of people can catalyse communities inclusively empowered by; affordable housing, time, accessible space and security. HFG is an ambitious initiative providing highly affordable housing to citizens in exchange for their contributions in making communities healthier, greener, stronger and more joyful.

The design-led HFG connects design practice(s), social constructs and philanthropic finances, requiring lived experience and expertise to navigate. HFG explores social inequalities, while exploring contemporary and future designers' roles in city transformation, through tangible examples. The article's main argument unpacks an accessible housing opportunity, benefiting nature, citizens and communities, engaging 30+ citizens in two UK locations, with transferable lessons and insights. The work trialled more inclusive and accessible strategic design methods.

Our intention supports climate-positive post-participatory design, with citizens, providing a repeatable internationally applicable framework, for place-based application contexts. The Ecological Citizen(s) Network is UKRI funded and mandated to prioritise the UK. Authors are against imposing colonialist activities; hence the work's focus is UK-centric in practice, whilst unpacking a scalable international concept. Other parties can build on HFG, as place-based contextual nuances and cultural understanding is paramount. Resilience signifies moving beyond governmental systems and establishing citizen legacies. Authors are intent on designing beyond generations and believe co-designing to benefit people and nature concerns nurturing community autonomy with the means to become Ecological Citizen(s). The UK has recently emerged from 14 years of self-interested political rule, stripping public services (Knight, 2024 & Elledge, 2024) ... Citizens deserve more resilient, nature-aligned approaches.

**Research Objective |** Unpacking a housing opportunity, benefiting nature, citizens and communities, engaging over 30 citizens in two UK locations. Trialling more inclusive and accessible strategic design methods, unpacking wider pitfalls, benefits and opportunities of The Housing for Good Concept.

**KEYWORDS | Ecological Citizenship, Regenerative Design, Inclusive Design, Nature-inspired Design, Resilient Design.**

## 1. Introduction

In this article we are designing, operating within a contemporary time and unpacking new design-led opportunities, through collaborative post-participatory design. The links between: climate change, biodiversity loss, and social inequalities are complex and hard to unpack. They are all bound by: where we live, the communities we are part of, and what those infrastructures can provide. Where we live is not always accessible and (as we see within the UK), local communities get priced out (Smith, 2023), leaving little time for voluntary actions or socially-led developments (Kear-Davies, 2024). The power of accessible living, community and nature require realigning so that the developments of co-designing can be embedded into contextual situations. *The Ecological Citizen(s) Network* has a UK perspective, bound by our funding remit and working reach. This work is UK-centric as we explore: legislation, probate, social design and charity statuses. The challenge however is international, with evidence in: Australia (Dumas, 2024), Europe (Carbonell, 2024 & EU Commission, 2024), USA (Callaci, 2024) and more. We do not want to colonise (Kobayashi, 2019) but seek to open the discourse for a working typology, bound by our lived experience and context, hence our UK-centred frame.

The article unpacks the intent of equitable means for cities and citizens to have autonomy, for nature's benefit. The insights are beneficial to; social design constructs, preferable futures and enabling the development of citizen-led infrastructures. The role of *The Ecological Citizen(s) Network* was design-led, convening and uniting the initiative

strategically, with originator Daniel Raven-Ellison: Slow-Ways (slowways.org) & National Park Cities (nationalparkcity.org) founder. Design as a practice is a "powerful agent for change, and a tool for progress in all fields – social, political, and environmental", and design "is fundamental to shaping our climate futures" (Johnson, 2024, p.106 & Johnson, 2024, p.104).

Authors aligned themselves with "designers tak[ing] on new roles and mediators and conveners between research, politics and society" (Groß, & Mandir, 2024, p.18). The intention was to inform the *Sustainable Digital Society*, defined by the UKRI as the "social and economic sustainability are interconnected with environmental sustainability" (UKRI, 2020). Technologies can connect people, creating a more sustainable resilient society, providing benefits for people, nature and more-than-humans. Authors introduce topics of: Ecological Citizenship, One Health, Contemporary Design Examples, and UK Housing. We foresee the links between climate change, biodiversity loss, and social inequalities building on Wilkinson's view that "sustainability is inseparable from the campaign for greater equality" (2020). The work informs: current and future roles of designers in city transformation around places, we call home.

## 1.1 Ecological Citizenship

Ecological Citizenship (EC) is "an activity or a skill that anyone can do, which helps establish sustainable practice(s) and address ecological inequalities. This includes community-led sustainability approaches leading to scalable, transferable 'design values' for wider application(s)" (Phillips, *et al.*, 2022, p.2). Our EC position is intent on enabling: sustainable purpose, autonomy and equality in citizens as cross-disciplinary creatives through Public-Interest Technologies (PITs). PITs are "technologies used to serve the public good" (Ford Foundation, 2024). PITs should be appropriate to their application and context with different lenses, not solely conventional or traditional views of 'high technologies' (Hooton, 2018). For example, Indigenous Technology demonstrated in naturally drying Cod (for preservation) in the *Lofoten Islands, Norway* (Hung, 2023). The air temperature is cool, and the fish does not spoil, requiring; local knowledge, skill, and environmental expertise. Contextual Technology is site-specific and place-based, an example is an Ice Stupa: an "artificial glacier, designed to refreeze glacier meltwater and facilitate water storage, a techno-scientific intervention" (Kleinman Center for Energy Policy, 2023). Participatory Technology e.g. Park(ing) Day a global, public, participatory project where people internationally 'temporarily repurpose' curbside parking spaces, converting them into public parks and social spaces advocating for safer, greener, and more equitable streets for citizens (Park(ing) Day, 2024). The work builds on Mead's, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has" (Institute for Intercultural Studies, 2001). We frame EC touchpoints as 'design proposals' that are appropriate to their contexts, accessible and equitable to their communities.

## 1.2 One Health |

Our "human-nature relationship is an important one, to understand, enhance, and protect" (Brymer, *et al.*, 2019). The need to transform the human-nature relationship has never been more important. People "who feel closer to nature are happier and more satisfied with life and are more likely to take actions that help wildlife and the environment" (Miles, 2022). The One Health approach deals with "the health-related interactions that occur between these systems at differing levels of complexity" (Rabinowitz, *et al.*, 2018). Having the One Health approach in place "makes it easier for people to better understand the co-benefits, risks, trade-offs and opportunities to advance equitable and holistic solutions" (WHO, 2022). Parallel organisations refer to the human-nature relationship as the *Natural Health Service* (NHS) "part of a holistic approach to health and social care reducing pressure on NHS and local authority resources in the medium term" (Oliver, 2022). Recent reporting on the NHS states "a social return of £8.50 for every £1 invested in Wildlife Trust volunteering

programmes strengthens the argument for a community-based approach to health" (The Wildlife Trusts, 2023). The UK Government's inaction in recent years requires contemplation. The Government has only protected 5% of England, against its own target of 30% by 2030 (RSPB England, 2021), ignoring the advice of Natural England to meet COP commitments (Greenfield, *et al.*, 2023). The UK failed to reach 17 out of 20 UN biodiversity targets agreed on 10 years ago, in six areas the UK has gone backwards (RSPB, 2024). In summary, interacting and cultivating engagements with the natural world result in: positive personal health, community cohesion and biodiversity benefitting all – whilst current UK government initiatives are not adequate.

### 1.3 Designed Examples

There is an inherent link between: cultures, people, place(s) with an agenda toward pro-social behaviour (Witteck, *et al.*, 2015). Recently designers and sustainability leaders advocated for designing the 'conditions to enable change', in the provision of equitable access (Manzini, 2020). A historical example of this is positively linking people to communities and places, for example: tenant farming (TFA, n.d.), lock keepers' cottages, on-site caretakers (TrustedHousesitters.com, 2024), live-in childcare (Hampstead Nannies, 2024), armed forces family housing (Army Families Federation, 2024), amongst others. However, these examples are all solely transactional, not social innovations or featuring a component that regenerates the area surrounding its deployment. Social Innovations consist of new products and "services, processes, markets, collaborative platforms, organisation forms (social movements or institutions), and business models" (Caulier-Grice, *et al.*, 2012). The following examples are more complex, intervening at specific touchpoints in social-design spaces. They are contemporary (at time of writing) and empower citizens in new typologies toward a sustainable digital society:

1. *Fat Macy's* (2024), a social enterprise supporting people to accrue a housing deposit, navigating the 'benefits trap' where people are incentivised not to work. After 200 hours, *Fat Macy's* trainees can access a 'Housing Deposit Grant' as a deposit on rented accommodation – with ongoing transition support into independent living. *Fat Macy's* provides accessible, practical means enabling people to progress through dysfunctional legislation.
2. *Casserole Club* (2014), helps people share home-cooked extra food portions with neighbours who are unable to cook for themselves. Club members serve meals to neighbours strengthening neighbourhood relationships. On average (at time of writing) it costs councils £4.90 to provide one meal, if 100 diners get on average two meals a week from a neighbour, "Casserole Club would save councils £50,960 a year" (Casserole Club, 2014). A design-led intervention supporting accessible support and overtime results in pro-social behaviour with members undertaking different tasks for Club members.
3. *Team Dominica* (2024), a cafe enabling neurodiverse individuals to gain work, through innovative employment programmes. It supports young candidates to emphasise their role, ready for paid work. *Team Dominica's* holistic approach is personalised to candidates, developing their independence, confidence, communication, and skills ready for employment. This accessible catalyst nurtures and develops people holistically.
4. *Nature Neighbourhoods* (RSPB, 2024b), follows in the footsteps of *The People's Plan for Nature* (Cdunn, 2023): a vision to protect and renew nature in the UK. All around the UK, amazing people have been flocking together to bring nature back to their communities through the Nature Neighbourhoods project.
5. *The Community Power Act* (Bell, *et al.*, 2020), created by *The Young Foundation*. Away from Westminster, thousands of community leaders have been working tirelessly to tackle these very challenges as they find them in their neighbourhoods: challenges like inequality, local decline, loneliness and mistrust. The Community Power Act, is a major

piece of legislation (in progress) which would fundamentally change where power lies in this country. It is made up of three parts: Establishing new community rights: 1) A Community Right to Buy 2) A Community Right to Shape Public Services, and 3) A Community Right to Control Investment.

6. *Play Streets* (2024) enable children to play freely, without organised activities. This means children: cycle, scoot, chalk, skip, kick a ball, etc. These neighbour-led short road closures, create safe spaces for children to play on their doorstep. With council permission and consensus from neighbours, residents legally close the road, using signs or other barriers. Volunteer stewards are guardians of the street restricting vehicles, keeping it safe. The model (developed by parents) has now scaled to street communities throughout the UK supported by councils and organisations.
7. *Oosterwold, Netherlands* (Knikker, 2024), *Oosterwold* is an (non-UK) experiment that takes 'citizens' seriously and leads to an abundance of innovation and sustainable lifestyle options, in which self-organisation prevails over market thinking. Industrial-scale farmland has been turned into a small-scale food-producing landscape. *Oosterwold* (about 1,000 residential units) is a sprawl of gardens, from greenhouses to pastures. It is bound together with a social contract "if you want to live in *Oosterwold*, you have to produce food on at least 50% of your property" and is operating successfully (Docter-Loeb, 2024).

These examples present alternative social and community design space(s) building-off: broken government infrastructures, local responses, and place-based employment – and enable communities to navigate some scenarios that impact them. They build on *Visions of Climate Futures*, providing metrics of "what brings you joy, what are you good at, what work needs doing?", however not all of them build accessible opportunities to enable those dreams (Johnson, 2024, p. 424). They build on existing failing governmental systems, but point toward 'better' where citizens have some autonomy informing their circumstances, they are also 'place-based' providing new opportunities.

## 1.4 UK Housing

The current status of UK housing is "failing", with demand outstripping supply and construction costs increasing. Factors, coupled with rising living costs, mean that homelessness is set to accelerate unless addressed. The amount of people "experiencing homelessness could double, reaching 620,000 by 2045", without action (National Housing Federation, 2024). This will be exacerbated as "social housing waiting lists will grow to 1.8 million households by 2045 – an increase of more than 50%" (National Housing Federation, 2024). *The Joseph Rowntree Foundation* reports on the rising cost of living (in parallel to the housing crisis) with families: reducing food portions, impacting their health (2024). In recent social housing studies "86% of tenants reported the cost-of-living crisis was affecting their ability to 'get-by', financially" (Thomas, 2024).

With phenomena such as 'boomerang children' moving back in with parents on the increase, housing is in freefall (Seiter, *et al.*, 2024). Finally, communities suffer the 'Airbnb effect' (Gant, 2016) similar to gentrification, slowly increasing an area's value to the detriment of indigenous residents, "many of whom are pushed out due to financial constraints" (Barker, 2021). This situation is only exacerbated by recent reports that housing developers are failing to deliver on their ecological "mitigations and enhancements" across England (Chapman *et al.*, 2024 p.29). The combination of: costs of living, rising house prices, gentrification, developers not delivering on ecological promises, and time-poor residents, is impacting 'accessible housing' and our ability to interact with the natural world.

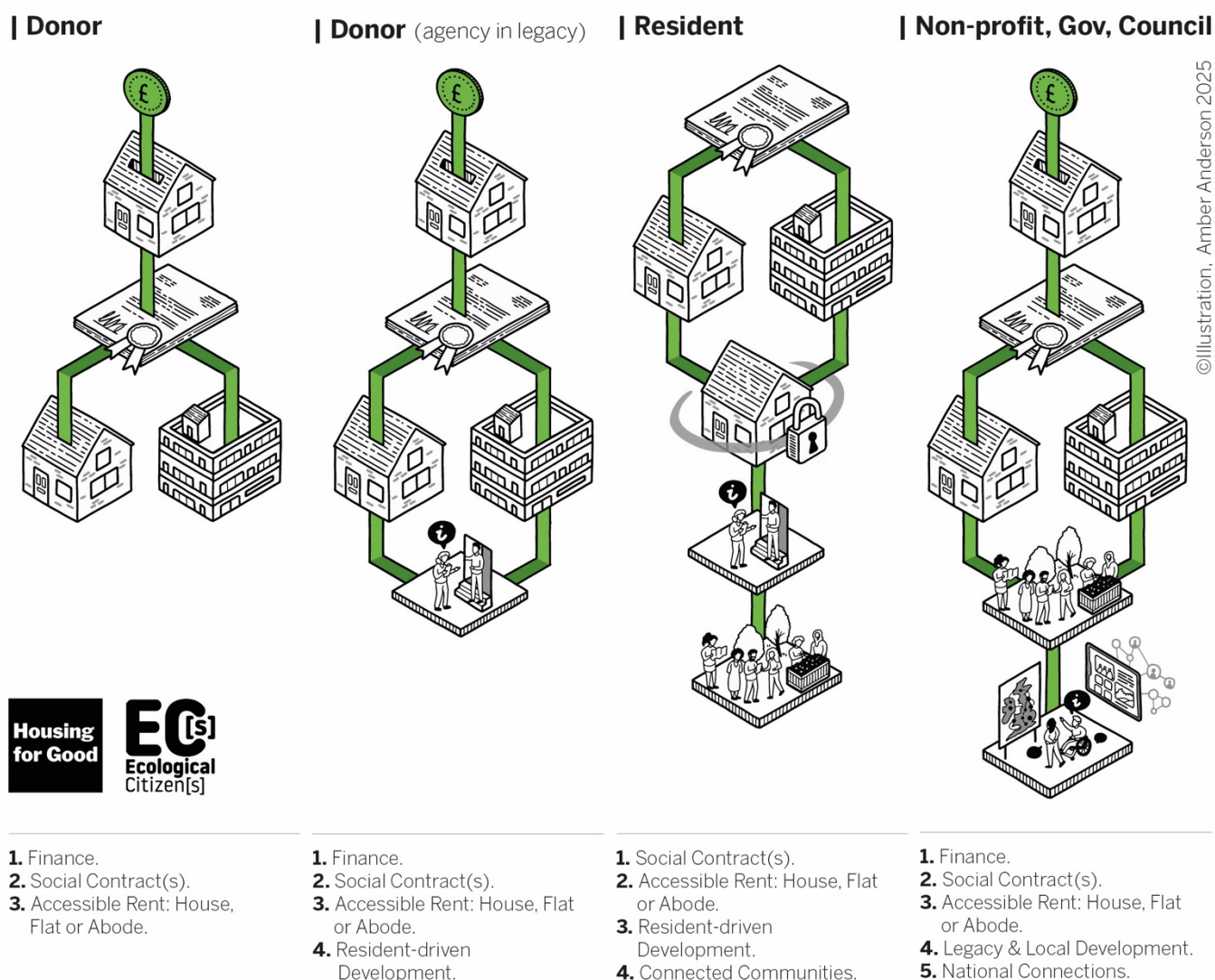
## 1.5 The Housing for Good Proposition

Housing for Good (HFG) is an ambitious initiative aimed at providing highly affordable housing to residents in exchange for their contributions in making communities healthier,



greener, stronger and more joyful. The concept unpacks multiple elements. 1) Recruit residents who contribute to the wellbeing of people, places and communities – through projects that boost health, nature, joy, art, play, fairness, and more – offering the opportunity to rent a home for as little as £100 a week. 2) The properties and community organisers will be managed by non-profit organisations, with clusters of housing enabling greater impact, professional networks, and economies of scale. 3) The moonshot goal is to establish a House for Good (HFG) in every neighbourhood across the country, counteracting shortages of:

- Professional community organisers in communities, that result in less community activity/fewer pro-social benefits (Guerrilla Foundation, 2024).
- Financial models to give residents security to work and stay in neighbourhoods (Reporter, 2022).
- Charitable gifts provided to secure neighbourhood assets, that can be used to benefit communities in perpetuity (GOV.UK, 2024).
- Affordable Houses and intergenerational inequalities (Shelter England, 2024).



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Figure 1; introducing the key partners within Housing for Good. **Donors** (with or without influence on potential legacies), **Residents** (people who would live there) and **Non-Profits / Governments and Councils**. The illustrations break down the overview with steps-in progress.

## 1.6 Key Partners within Housing for Good

**Donors:** Have the knowledge that they are creating a lasting and meaningful legacy.

Donors may also benefit from tax advantages. **Communities:** Benefit from having dedicated individuals focused on helping communities and places to flourish – facilitating events, organising activities, connecting people, sharing skills, supporting projects and more. **Residents:** Gain affordable housing and support, giving them the confidence, time, and space to invest deeply in their communities. They get access to a professional community and professional development. **Non-Profits:** Strengthen their impact and expand their reach within communities. They might make affordable housing available to employees and use properties as a form of income. **Governments and Councils:** Support community activities aligned with public agendas while increasing affordable housing and fostering citizen collaboration. Housing for Good will also become a charity in its own right that works to make the initiative a success – the nature of its objectives and services are yet to be determined.

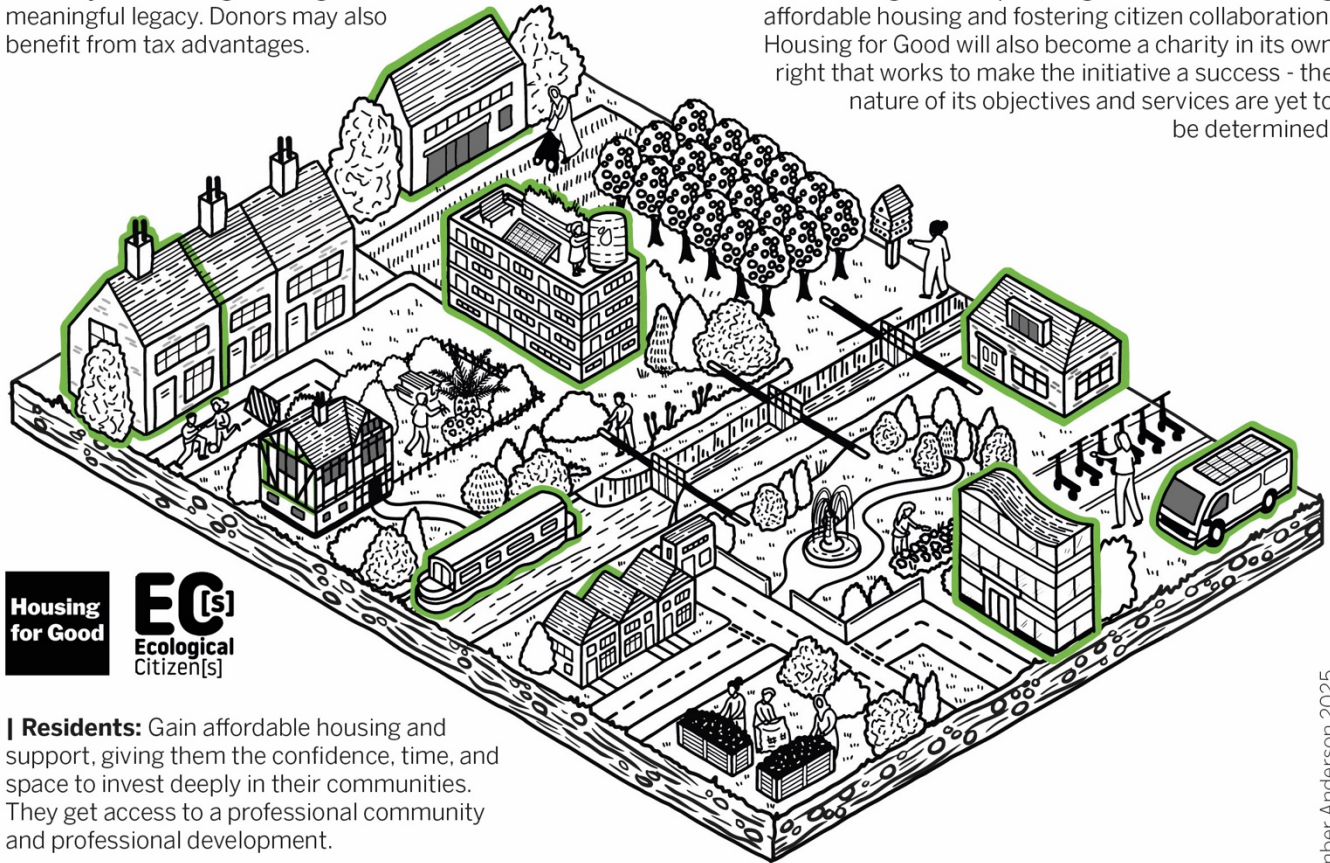
The government could catalyse the HFG initiative with income from *Bona Vacantia* (ownerless) properties where profits go to the 'Crown' (GOV.UK, 2024b). In the 2022–2023 fiscal year, the Crown Nominee Account reported £76 million in revenue from unclaimed estates and assets. That income could be used to support the initiative and to match-fund gifts (GOV.UK, 2024b). This work navigates a reduction in either rental or short-term lease (akin to tenant farming) where residents become 'Ecological Citizen(s) in Residence' using respite from full rent to cultivate their expertise within the local community. This could include: regreening (WeForest, 2023), rewilding (Rewilding Britain, 2024), reducing CO<sub>2</sub> impacts (European Environment Agency, 2024), helping people to insulate houses (Woodward, 2021), sustainable pro-social behaviours (Frey, *et.al*, 2004), supporting ecological pedagogy (British Ecological Society, 2024), providing accessible health walks and many other place-based activities (National Lottery Community Fund, 2024). Many might see a correlation with a "citizens advice bureau" but this concerns 'citizen action' for local, societal and ecological benefit (Citizens Advice, 2024). The HFG's financing model leverages gifts in wills, equity release gifts from downsizing homeowners or legalese (*bona vacantia*) that is often 'soaked-up' by the Crown when people pass away (GOV.UK, 2024b).

## 1.7 Introduction Summary

The introduced design space is interconnected and requires navigating within existing UK systems. The HFG complexity unites; design, legislation, citizens, legalise, charities, 'one health', natural-world stewardship, urban contexts, cities and finance. This article focuses on unpacking the systems within design and the methodological approach, contextually grounding the audience with insights into the challenge. The unification of these approaches, explores new socially-led models of design. *The Ecological Citizen(s) Network* is funded by the UKRI and thus activities must benefit the UK. Authors do not believe in imposing colonialist activities; hence the work is UK-centric, and we call it out. If other parties can build on these concepts, that is fantastic, as place-based contextual nuances and cultural understanding is paramount. The authors' collaborative concept comes from the notion that: being secure in your housing is a core that enables you to innovate with your local community. Authors believe in co-designing benefits for people and nature, that people need time capacity, and for potential benefits to be equitable.

**| Donors:** Have the knowledge that they are creating a lasting and meaningful legacy. Donors may also benefit from tax advantages.

**| Governments & Councils:** Support community activities aligned with public agendas while increasing affordable housing and fostering citizen collaboration. Housing for Good will also become a charity in its own right that works to make the initiative a success - the nature of its objectives and services are yet to be determined.



**| Residents:** Gain affordable housing and support, giving them the confidence, time, and space to invest deeply in their communities. They get access to a professional community and professional development.

**| Non-Profits:** Strengthen their impact and expand their reach within communities. They might make affordable housing available to employees and use properties as a form of income.

**| Communities:** Benefit from having dedicated individuals focused on helping communities and places to flourish - facilitating events, organising activities, connecting people, sharing skills, supporting projects and more.

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Figure 2; The vision of Housing for Good (within this remit) is to create 'Ecological Citizen(s) in Residence' cultivating their expertise within the community or communities, but it has broad reaching applications. EC in residence Includes (but not exclusive to): regreening, rewilding, reducing CO<sub>2</sub> impacts, helping people to insulate houses, sustainable pro-social behaviours, supporting ecological pedagogy.

## 2. Methodology

Within this design frame there is a unique combination of typologies and theories, including: participatory action research (Baum, 2006), participatory design (Muller, *et al.*, 1993), systems design (Mumford, 2000) and Engaging Design (Phillips, *et.al*, 2022). Firstly, the balance between expert/citizen(s) needs navigation, it is often polarised, rather than contextually nurtured but expertise can also unveil 'strategic intervention points' (Chen, *et al.*, 2022 & Lawrence, *et al.*, 2021). We rebalance our accounts of experts, as the epistemology of expertise requires "recentering onto one's current geo-cultural location" i.e. it should not be colonial by approach (Farina, *et al.*, 2024, p.254). We are not advocating for either/or, but more strategic inputs that simply benefit and empower 'people'. Technically we are all 'citizens' with areas of expertise and lived experiences, the difference is the power relationships, dynamics and accessibility. We believe that 'expertise' can build on knowledge and provide empowerment.

Participatory Action Research (PAR) a design approach, "involves collaboration between a community with lived experience of a social issue and professional researchers, often based in universities, who contribute relevant knowledge, skills, resources and networks" (Cornish, *et al.*, 2023, p.1). PAR can be a "problematic tool for facilitators and communities to apply due to power relations within the research process" (De Oliveira, 2023).



Participatory Research (PR) differs, and the main failing is the "trust is a core feature of PR (and all research involving relationships and/or partnerships" (Armstrong, *et al.*, 2022). Here we also scaffold off systems thinking "recognizing tipping points and transformative change rather than assuming linear changes" (Grewatsch, *et al.*, 2021). Our approach is closer to Engaging Design:

(noun) "as another that borrows from design traditions and emergent design disciplines; to 'Engage Design' (verb) as a tool (for change), to design in ways that engage (adjective). Moreover, ED is a process that recognises its own capacity as a form of material, cultural language that has value in supporting interactions with critical issues of our time" (Phillips, *et al.*, 2021, p.26).

The methodological approach is more unique, designing for "collective autonomy", considering systems and how to unlock their potential to be Ecological Citizen(s) (Phillips, *et al.*, 2024b, p.6). Finally, we know imagination is needed to drive societal-scale decision-making, its governance and processes is a "wicked problem because of the complexity of the issues and the diversity of their conceptualizations; uncertainty about possible outcomes of decisions; and the difficulty of getting people together, at appropriate scales, to achieve a shared understanding" (Cork, *et al.*, 2023). Imagination "is central to empathy, to creating better lives, to envisioning and then enacting a positive future. Yet imagination is also demonstrably in decline at precisely the moment when we need it most" (Hopkins, 2019). The main difference between our approach is working strategically on all fronts, in parallel. On *The Ecological Citizen(s) Network* we work within the complexity of interdependencies and collective multi-domain knowledge, to seek collective autonomy. The role of *The Ecological Citizen(s) Network* was design-led convening and uniting the initiative strategically, i.e. 'creating the conditions' (Manzini, 2020) for critique and development. We borrowed our workshop structure and principles from co-design (Örnekoğlu-Selçuk, *et al.*, 2023), more importantly by inviting a participatory agreement (Groß, & Mandir, 2024, p.142) with a clear agenda and understanding of co-created knowledge.

## 1.1 Locations

Two workshops were organised: 1) London and 2) Exeter (2024), based on the required knowledge and audience(s).

**Location 1)** *Toynbee Hall* (TH) was created in 1884 with a radical vision as a place for future leaders to live and work as volunteers in London's East End, bringing them face-to-face with poverty, and giving them the "opportunity to develop practical solutions that they could take with them into national life" (Toynbee Hall, 2024). TH is a community organisation that pioneers ways to reduce structural disadvantage. Based in the East End of London, they work alongside people who live there, to tackle unfairness and make it a place where everyone has an equal chance to thrive, and they believe everyone has something valuable to offer in the fight for a fairer London. They constantly learn from their work in London we use to influence change across the UK. They also have an advice hub that proactively helps community members navigate: debt, benefits, housing, employment. Finally, TH houses *The Young Foundation*, the UK's home for community research and social innovation bringing communities, organisations and policymakers together to shape a fairer future (Toynbee Hall, 2024).

**Location 2)** *Positive Light Projects*, is a not-for-profit organisation in Exeter utilising visual arts to engage/inspire a diverse range of audiences and communities, focusing on socially engaged creative practices. They support local community groups and independent creative practitioners, especially those committed to socially engaged participatory practice (Positive Light Projects, 2024). The locations embodied deep connections with established communities, offering diverse perspectives and contexts.

## 1.2 Structure

The work's objective deployed co-designing benefits for people and nature: trialling more inclusive and accessible strategic design methods. The workshop structure built on: systems thinking (Cabrerá, 2023), designing for wicked problems (Buchanan, 1992), service design (Stickdorn, *et al.*, 2018), imagination futures (Groß, & Mandir, 2024), and building 'What if' questions (Hopkins, 2019), to answer the objective. Authors broke the challenge into separate layers, making it easier to digest, explore and collaborate on. Invitees were strategically aligned based on their lived experience in: finance, end of life, probate, property, design, housing, land ownership, ecology, business, policy, communities, housing specialists and landlords. Citizens were pre-organised into groups, due to their expertise and how they could catalyse each other. We followed an Equity Diversity and Inclusion plan and ensured a gender balance, and sought to onboard people who would benefit from the network and could contribute through their lived experience(s).

The workshop format was initiated with an introduction to the HFG concept, a sharing session (designed to facilitate a culture of learning and collaboration) and an open discussion contextualising the work. Teams were then facilitated in dialogue around a collective 'design canvas' (Figure.1). The worksheet drew on existing research (Nagle, *et al.*, 2016), prototyping (Lauff, *et al.*, 2019) and applying principles (Hoda, 2024): identifying the domain/actors, phenomenon/topic to investigate, carefully assessing research ethics and considering the research values, the guiding research questions, the team's philosophy, deciding on the initial research protocols techniques, and tools, and desirable impacts.

Authors took the definition of a social contract to be a grant or guarantee of rights, franchises, or privileges. The social contract is an important set of rights that protect all parties, with clear expectations. We designed the format to capture what the Housing for Good social contract should contain and how this would work in unison with the 'perceived' tangible events enabling this design intervention to work. The Housing for Good research objective explores a housing opportunity, benefiting nature, citizens and communities. We engaged 30+ citizens in two UK locations, trialling more inclusive and accessible strategic design methods.

# Ecological Citizen(s) & Housing For Good

A Transformative Opportunity **With** Communities.

*Imagines a country where thousands of community organisers were empowered by affordable houses, giving them time, space and security to help improve communities.*

**The Vision |** Housing For Good is an ambitious initiative aimed at providing high affordable housing to community organisers in exchange for their contributions towards communities healthier, greener, stronger and more joyful.

**The Concept |** The Concept (1) Recruited community organisers who contribute to the wellbeing of their place and communities. The organisers that build health, culture, life, art, play, parks, and music will have the opportunity to rent a home for as little as £200 a week. (2) Inspire the houses to become channels for charitable gifts and happenings, including people giving whole houses to the initiative. (3) The properties and community organisers will be managed by non-profits, with a culture of housing enabling a wider impact: professional networks and economies of scale. (4) Our immediate goal is to establish a House for Good in every neighbourhood in the country.

Workshop date: \_\_\_\_\_

Participant names: \_\_\_\_\_

## Governing Charter |

**Why important:** What rules, rights, structures, processes or responsibilities should Housing For Good act?

## Social Contract |

**Define:** Secure mutual objectives to work together, the relations among its members. **Why important:** Strong agreements are needed to build a model which is a 'contract' in its words to agree and to fulfil.

## Ingredients |

**Define:** Centralised elements comprising part or possibly all of the system. **Why important:** The things, elements, services, systems or skills are needed to make it achieve.

## Potential Pitfalls |

**Define:** Often an undesirable condition, an issue or challenge that can emerge from intended action or an outcome. **Why important:** What are the risks that might go wrong?

## EC Qualities |

## Notes |

## Start >

A space to move post-its and edit the order of the chain.

Chain step 00 >

Chain step 01 >

Chain step 02 >

Chain step 03 >

Chain step 04 >

Chain step 05 >

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Chain step 16 >

Chain step 17 >

Chain step 18 >

Chain step 19 >

### 1.3 Elements

## 1.4 Toynbee Hall, Workshop

Common themes raised included: placemaking and creating autonomy to local communities, charities or organisations with a governance structure that protects all parties. The invited citizens included: artists, charities, philanthropic donors, housing officers, strategic advisors and community groups.





Figure 4; Mapping work from the Toynbee Hall session.

## 1.5 Positive Light Projects (PLP), Workshop

PLP, Exeter is a not-for-profit organisation utilising the visual arts to engage and inspire a diverse range of audiences and communities, as well as developing emerging practitioners and aiding them to move their practise forward in exciting and innovative ways. They focus on community based, socially engaged creative practice. They enhance people's wellbeing and skills by offering engaging, collaborative, participatory, immersive and high-quality practical creative opportunities, enabling people to take part and have a go at exciting activities. We used the pop-shop space to host invited citizens: Artists, Planning Policy Advisors, Homes England (GOV.UK, 2024c), Devon Wildlife Trust, Dartmoor National Park, Labour MP (Exeter Labour Party, 2024) and City Councillors. They were grounded by the place. As with Toynbee Hall, we used the same process inviting them to catalyse their interest and introduce themselves, then the EC team guided them through the work (Figure 2). The salient points from gathered material have been thematically analysed through affinity mapping (Gupta, *et al.*, 2016).

## 3. Results & Discussion

The authors have combined the results and discussion sections as they are more integral and high level within this type of work. The authors foresee an overarching charity (or similar) that is established to ensure that e.g. a financial issue within a particular location or location doesn't jeopardise the system. It would encourage local and contextual scenarios of use, giving parties protection, but enabling appropriation by local elements aligning with the autonomy expected in Ecological Citizenship (Phillips, *et al.*, 2024b).

Core strengths, "the proposition is truly accessible, as normally people simply value what they can get rather than being included, there is a lot of value in the choice that



anyone can make" **Participant 03.**

Governance, "it can have core values but then be appropriated by the local citizens"

**Participant 08.** *Author Reflection:* if it does not have a detrimental affect on legalities then the social contract can be evolved based on place-based needs. Governance, is highlighted as future work.

Being the sole overseeing organisation, "there is a challenge of being the charitable supporter and evictor, if it all goes wrong which can really cause ethical turmoil to those involved" **Participant 13.** *Author Reflection:* even though there are vulnerabilities, this initiative can accessibly build on initiatives as long as the vulnerabilities are transparent.

"What happens in the dystopian future, housing is the foundation of people's lives"

**Participant 26.** *Author Reflection:* the notion of future proofing was heavily discussed.

The resulting HFG insights have then been translated into: pitfalls, benefits and opportunities (pertinent to the research objective), as the granular challenges are too finite to describe.

## 2.1 Pitfalls |

**Accountability:** The power structure and governance need careful consideration, being contextually agreed as a social contract, that is accessible and clear to all parties. This opens the processes to transition Housing for Good to bounded activities, so parties are safeguarded. We suggest stages and approval processes akin to a school's board of governors. Processes should remove 'unsaid' liability with a clear remit from each party.

**Motivations and Values:** These will be different for all parties; their alignment is critical, as if people are not aligned in their values, then the Housing for Good concept would have fundamental challenges in its collective aim. The motivational factors for donors also need consideration, as finances are very different to donating property.

**Safeguarding:** The biggest question is; how do we protect all parties, and what happens during potential Housing for Good conflict(s)? This framework needs attention with open reflection on colonialism/higher powers, perhaps within the framework of Citizen(s) assemblies or similar. It also draws attention to the structures of how charities can be run, owned or operated. The Housing for Good initiative might have an application process or 'external peer review', as systems of trust need transparency enabling: responsibility and accountability.

**Decision making:** Who decides if the tenant has done 'enough good' or if their actions are appropriate for the 'good'. This in turn opens the need for provincial 'terms' bounded by those citizens... almost like a Hippocratic Oath. An example of this is *Detroit SOUP*, a micro granting dinner supporting creative projects, originated in the USA, (Build Institute, 2024). For a \$10 donation, attendees receive dinner and a vote, hearing from four presentations. Presenters have four minutes to share concepts and answer audience questions. At the event, attendees eat, talk, enjoy art and vote on the project they think benefits the city the most. At the night's end, organisers count votes, and the winner gets all the money raised to execute the project.

**Boundaries:** There must be mutual trust from all parties involved, the donor, the resident, the organisation and any suggested governance process. This is not just to protect the organisation, but also residents. Employment laws provide clarity of expectations and deliveries, voluntary systems are more opaque. For example, if everyone in your community knows where you live (in your role promoting place-based good) and your role is for the local community, how do you defend your personal boundaries? Finally, there might be processes of; resident selection, onboarding and exiting that requires careful handling.

## 2.2 Benefits

**Placemaking:** There is substantial benefit to the concept of place-making (Wyckoff, 2014) as it builds on 'who' people are a good citizen to, i.e. the place? More than humans? etc. Separating the 'good' (i.e. people subsidised for cultivating good) and 'housing' (the residential construct) was raised; there is complexity, but the importance is the place-making. The concept was seen as the 'modern blacksmith', i.e. placed to build within communities, with insights into materials and processes.

**Legacy:** Housing for Good offers the opportunity to create embedded contextual legacies with citizens (of that place) that extend past one generation. *The Ecological Citizen(s) Network's* intention is to create an exciting opportunity that can be handed down, built on and become embedded within communities and the places they reside. A strategic suggestion is aligned with the international co-op model of governance. The co-operative model of enterprise is versatile and flexible. It can be "adapted to any sector of economic activity and takes the form of small and locally restrained businesses, as well as multinational conglomerates" (ICA, 2024). The key element to this typology of endeavour is the motivation for all parties, for example the 'donors' could be eligible for inheritance tax relief. The potential for adding 'Ecological Citizen(s) in residence' into planning legislation(s) could also provide accessible means to citizen(s). The authors foresee an overarching charity (or similar) that is established so that each 'chapter' or location cannot financially ruin the system. It would encourage local and contextual scenarios of use, giving parties protection, but enables appropriation by local elements aligning the autonomy expected in Ecological Citizenship.

## 2.3 Opportunities

**Re-appropriation:** The important challenge is how communities can 're-appropriate' the concept, so it is elastic in terms of how it can be used 'with communities' but has a clear structure, safeguarding and means. This is paramount, as the intention is to unpack 'existing systems' that could enable the time-poor (Sullivan, 2008), providing accessible opportunities for contextual scenarios. Those scenarios need to be selected by those in the setting, i.e. the citizens. A process that is being considering is a franchise charity that has many local elements within an umbrella concept, and this would protect each organisation, independently. There are multiple opportunities to address loneliness or create more community cohesion, based on increased communication. There is great potential for places to embed locals who might not be able to otherwise afford to stay in the area.

**Models:** The main element are the models for how this would operate; for example: a commission, an organisation owns all the assets (the houses and the leases) or a more locally adaptive role where charities are matched with homeowners. The opportunity here also needs to build off existing laws, legislation and restrictions.

**Reform:** A recurrent point was finding ways in which any system(s) can 'fail to safe', i.e. whatever happens all parties are safe and not compromised. The opportunity to have ecologists, rewilding experts or ecologists within the place you call home opens new normal(s).

**Governance:** This is the largest challenge; the terms, conditions and who dictates those elements. This includes the terms and conditions of how we 'design for exit', before we have even started. It also has the conditions of trust and social contracts that need clarity. *Re-Permissioning the City* (2025) is an interesting parallel, its portfolio of tools introduces a citizen-centered approach to managing spaces, enabling adaptive and evolving rules based on real-world feedback. It opens the city for all kinds of civic activities by granting citizens convenient access to one of the city's most vital assets — space. The Housing for Good initiative requires a default governance process that protects the place-based

interests and the people. A hard challenge, as at some point there will be an abuse of power, even if unintentional, and this initiative operates outside of government legislation, as it is about hyper-local concerns. The practices of how it protects all parties and does not invite abuse need: navigation, creation and debunking for transparent opportunities as a piece of further work.

## 2.4 Conclusion

The article unpacks a specific instance of co-designing benefits for people and nature: trialling more inclusive and accessible strategic design methods, through housing provision. We build on *Visions of Climate Futures* providing metrics for climate action to include: "what brings you joy, what are you good at, what work needs doing", with a fourth value 'What should supported communities have access to' and supporting people in stable housing is step one (Johnson, 2024, p. 424). Embedding these opportunities for true support within our local ecosystems is vital and a core step to enabling these types of opportunities to be accessible. Within design practices there is often pressure to create material goods, rather than shift systems.

"We don't need more [economic] growth to improve people's lives. We can accomplish our social goals right now, without any growth at all, simply by sharing what we have more fairly and by investing in generous public goods" (Johnson, 2024, p.179).

Housing and the 'places we call home' are complex, but they can be used to create capacity for people to deploy Ecological Citizenship. The bigger question is how we can continually build skills with citizens, to be strategic without eternal unproductive, unfunded dialogue. The workshops demonstrated the potential of concepts that should be locally appropriated, as the power relationships must be with citizens. The difference over other examples is the agenda for creating a place that is accessible to all, rather than just the financially or time rich. The Housing for Good concept is a design-led charitable entity with enormous potential for co-designing benefits for people and nature: trialling more inclusive and accessible strategic design methods. Like any material or process, the organisation and designer(s) need to define the boundaries of their remit. The following are the next steps in the Housing for Goods Development.

*Scenario 1:* Authors share the idea and case studies, without supporting its development.

*Scenario 2:* Create the Housing for Good concept and legal language available for charities to adopt.

*Scenario 3:* Develop a match-making service, to sign-post people to selected charities. Including registration and delivery standards that need to be upheld.

*Scenario 4:* Launch a charity that owns Housing for Good residencies that can house people working for good through charities or their own projects. Purpose built or renovated, the residence could house individuals, groups and families, with shared spaces and tools for collaboration.

## 2.5 Future Work

The Housing for Good concept demonstrates countless benefits to societies and overall should be truly accessible. The design space sits beyond the realm of volunteering as it is only viable for the time rich and opens new means for charitable organisations. Finally exploring place-based governance models in more depth is required. The role of the designer—as mediator, convener, or system-builder and ethical boundaries, needs unpacking in further work.

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