Brief 2:

Flourishing places

How might we collectively reimagine a regenerative future of the built environment to enable all life to flourish?

RSA + **ARUP**

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Background

- As humans, we can often forget that we are a part of the living world. We are deeply connected to our Earth, as it provides all our life-supporting systems – the air we breathe, the food we eat, the water we drink – and yet, we are damaging it irreversibly. If we continue to degrade and separate ourselves from nature, we will push our planet beyond its boundaries, creating an uninhabitable world for all living species.

- In the built environment, the decisions we make today impact the lives of generations to come. The built environment relates to all human-made buildings and structures, including the infrastructure that supports human activity such as transport and energy. It's currently responsible for 40 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions and is set to double in the next 25 years if we don't take urgent action. · We're living in an increasingly urbanised world, and it's expected that 70 percent of people will live in cities by 2050. The way we design, construct and use our built environment affects the health of our planet, and in turn, our own health and wellbeing. We need to be able to meet the needs of our growing populations whilst living within our planetary boundaries.

- Every place is facing tough challenges, from the rising cost of living and demand for affordable housing, to tackling nature loss, collapsing ecosystems and racing to net zero. Reimagining our buildings, spaces and infrastructure, means radically rethinking how we live and our relationship with the natural world of which we are part.

- Places, at a bare minimum, need to support people to lead healthier lives whilst being resilient to future climate shocks and stresses. Our built environment needs to be able to adapt, respond and overcome the challenges of the climate crisis, with the ability to regenerate the economic, social and environmental health of places. To do this we must adopt new ways of thinking, embrace uncertainty and question, what about tomorrow's world?

- There is a great opportunity to embed regenerative design to create places that grow and flourish for the long term, supporting the health of all. This approach is focused on aligning human activity with our Earth's systems, thereby acting as part of nature. It's critical that we:

  - Understand place: every place and community are different, so we need to understand and celebrate these unique qualities. How might we learn from a place's history, culture, geography, ecology and more, to enable specific, place-based opportunities?

  - Create with nature: we often design from a human-centric perspective, rather than a life-centric one. How might we collaborate with, and enable, our living world to co-create a better future?

  - Consider lifecycles: our natural world flows through continuous cycles of growth, release and regrowth; there is deep consideration at every stage and no waste is produced. We need to ensure we maintain value, from materials, manufacture and building processes, through to how infrastructure is used and maintained for the long term. Moving away from linear cycles to adaptive cycles, how might we ensure the built environment is created to last, adapt and thrive as part of nature?

  - Share ownership and decision-making: certain voices, communities and species are often left out of key decisions or not enabled to share their lived experience. How might we work with people and place to create shared ownership and decision-making around the challenges we face and enhance our collective responses to them?

- This is not a new approach. Regenerative knowledge has been stewarded by traditional methods and Indigenous peoples around the world for generations. Regenerative design therefore is, in part, a rediscovery of knowledge that has existed for millennia.

- The challenge within this brief is to integrate different forms of knowledge, combining traditional practices and ecological thinking, with futures thinking and technological possibilities. Our aim is to support the shift from human-centric to life-centric within the built environment, working together to grow a flourishing future.

How to approach the brief

- Identify a place you have easy access to and clearly articulate the time horizon for your project between 10-30 years into the future. Your proposal should be grounded in a feasible story based on evidence. It might help to tell the story of how we got from now to this future; what happened, what decisions were made and by who?

- We are looking for future thinking proposals that recognise humans as part of nature and celebrate the need to exist in harmony. Ensure your vision for the built environment is embedding diverse human and more-than-human experiences and clearly communicating how your idea is contributing to societal and planetary health.

- You should start by gaining a greater understanding of regenerative design, the principles that underpin this approach and how they relate to the place you have chosen.

- The diverse perspectives of communities need to be at the centre of imagining and shaping their futures. Demonstrate close engagement with your specific place, along with a range of human and more-than-human stakeholders. Test, learn and evolve your ideas with the communities, organisations and decision-makers to collectively imagine the role of the built environment in the future of that place.

- We are looking for ambitious visions that challenge us to rethink the future of the built environment and question existing assumptions. Consider the unintended consequences of your proposal and the systemic barriers you could face. What trade-offs might we might need to make? How has everyday life changed? This is an opportunity to challenge the things we take for granted about the future.

- As this brief is looking 10-30 years ahead, we encourage you to embed foresight and futures thinking frameworks and techniques.

- You are required to bring your future built environment to life. Identify the audience you want to engage with (eg, built environment professionals, designers, policymakers, decision-makers, and the biodiversity of the place) and consider the most effective way to reach them through your proposal.

  For the purposes of illustration only, viable responses could include:

- **An immersive experience** illustrating a day in the life of a regenerative built environment, showcasing the different things that people do, how they live, what they eat.

- **A collection of fictional artefacts** such as newspapers, adverts, books and guides that share the experience of a regenerative future.

- **A blueprint of an end-to-end built environment** design and development process in the future, sharing human and more-than-human considerations and how it adds values to the natural systems it sits within.

  …and many more are possible.

Partner information:

Arup
Dedicated to sustainable development, Arup is a collective of designers, consultants and experts working globally. Founded to be humane and excellent, we collaborate with our clients and partners using imagination, technology, and rigour to shape a better world. Arup University is the firm's global excellence programme of directed learning, expert skills development, collaborative research, foresight, and knowledge and information management. Arup's Foresight team analyse the major trends shaping the future of the built environment.

Judging criteria

Your entry should demonstrate a design thinking approach to the brief and clearly communicate the following principles:

Social and environmental impact:
Social: How is your approach benefiting people and generations to come? How have you considered diversity and inclusion in your proposal? How have you brought in different voices and perspectives?
Environmental: How does your proposal make a positive difference for the natural world in your chosen context? How have you considered effective use of resources including materials and processes that can do more good short and long term for people and planet?

Rigorous research and compelling insights:
How have you combined your own first-hand research with a review of existing research and wider trends? How are your insights and proposal grounded in people's needs and desires? How have you considered the potential of your chosen place and the glocal context? How did you get feedback and incorporate new ideas through prototyping and iterating?

Systems thinking:
What's the bigger picture? How have you considered the root causes of the challenge you're exploring? How does your idea connect to a wider set of issues? What might be some unintended consequences of your proposal?

Viability:
Have you considered potential models for how your proposal could work in the real world? How could it be funded and sustained financially with the resources and skills needed? What are potential barriers? How would you measure success? How could your proposal be adaptive to changes over time?

Creativity and innovation:
How is your idea different from existing interventions? Are there unexpected or surprising elements in your proposal? How is it an imaginative and hopeful alternative for the future?

Entry requirements (Briefs 1-5)

Open briefs

The competition will open for entries via sda.thersa.org on 31 January 2024, and the final deadline for entries is 16 March 2024 at 4.00pm GMT.

If you are unable to submit online, please contact us by email at sdaenquiries@rsa.org.uk. As you prepare your submission, please ensure that:

- You do NOT include your name, university/college or other identifying marks anywhere on your submission.
- None of your PDF submission files exceed 10MB – this is the maximum size for each individual file/ board when you submit online.

We are open to submissions in alternative formats - such as audio or video. Please contact us for more information if this would help you participate.

Submission requirements

For all briefs EXCEPT the Centenary celebrations brief, the submission requirements are:

1 x A3 PDF hero image with a one sentence description – a single 'poster image' that conveys the essence of your project and includes your project title plus a one sentence description. For example: 'Bare technology: a product and service design proposal to convert old computers (e-waste) into simpler, more straightforward, accessible computers for older people'. Your hero image should aim to bring your concept to life – make sure it is vibrant and engaging. Your one sentence description is very important, make sure you take some time to craft an impactful message.

1 x A3 written summary – a single A3 PDF page that summarises your big idea using the following format:

- **Problem (50 words max)**. What is the specific problem you identified within the brief topic? Who experiences this problem, and how does it impact them?

- **Process (75 words max)**. How did you investigate this issue and what were your key insights? What journey did you go through to get to your final proposal?

- **Proposal (50 words max)**. What is your proposed intervention? How will it address the problem?

4 x A3 PDF boards outlining your proposal – 4 pages describing your proposal and responding to the 5 sections of the judging criteria. Number each board in the top right-hand corner in the order they should be viewed by the judges. You may include relevant hyperlinks in your boards, however we cannot guarantee this will be viewed by the panel.

For details on the submission requirements for the Centenary celebrations brief, please see the Centenary celebrations entry requirements and guidelines. Please note that late submissions will not be accepted, and all entrants are encouraged to submit their work in good time before the deadline.

Competition timeline

07/09/23
Briefs soft launch
The 2023–24 RSA Student Design Awards competition briefs go live on sda.thersa.org.

Sept–Oct
Online launch events
Sign up to our newsletter to learn about our in-depth brief launch sessions held by our partners and the SDA Team.

Nov–Dec
Workshops and events
Free learning workshops and events based on all brief themes.

31/01/24
Submissions open
Go to sda.thersa.org to submit your proposal.

14/02/24
Early bird deadline
Submit by 4.00pm GMT on 14 February 2024 for a reduced entry rate of £25.

28/02/24
Needs-based bursary deadline
Submit your application for a needs-based bursary to cover the cost of your submission by 11.59pm GMT on 28 February 2024.

16/03/24
Final deadline
Submit by 4.00pm GMT on 16 March 2024.

March–May
Judging
Entries will be evaluated in a two-stage process: shortlisting and interviews.

Early June
Winners announced
Stay tuned for the big announcement.

Late June
Awards ceremony
Join us to celebrate the 2023–24 RSA SDA Winners.