

Beyond the Box CIC – Written Evidence (YPB0001)

Beyond the Box CIC welcomes the opportunity to contribute evidence to this inquiry. Our work focuses on supporting children and young people to better understand, engage with, and shape the built environment through creative education, active participation, and pathways into industry. The responses below draw on our direct experience working with young people. Where relevant, after each section we have included links to resources and project examples.

How would you describe the current attitudes and interest of children and young people towards both the built environment sector, and issues surrounding the topic?

From our experience working in the sector over the past 12 years, young people have a strong interest in the built environment and the wider issues surrounding it.

There are two distinct groups that help clarify these interests and, in turn, shape the work we do at Beyond the Box CIC. One consists of those who wish to pursue careers in the built environment, while the other includes those who understand how the built environment affects their lives through regeneration and redevelopment, and want to influence decisions and shape outcomes in their local area.

We focus on working with both groups at Beyond the Box, and there is, of course, overlap between the two groups.

For the first group, those who wish to access careers in the built environment, we run projects such as the award-winning People's Pavilion, a 12-month programme that has seen three iterations to date, working with aspiring young architects and engineers aged 14 - 18. Unlike most other youth-focused initiatives, we work with young people through the entire RIBA design stages, from concept and design development, through to build, leading to a temporary structure in the public realm, which hosts a free community festival designed and produced by young people, evidencing what can be achieved when young people are given the opportunity to design and activate space.

The People's Pavilion is successful in bringing together industry partners via sponsorship and collaboration, including architecture studios like AHMM, HTA Design, David Chipperfield Architects, Zaha Hadid Architects and others. It provides paid opportunities for university students of the built environment to collaborate with us to run specialist workshops, helping develop the young people's design ideas. In addition, via direct commissions and awards, we work with new and emerging design studios. These professionals help take concept designs from RIBA Stage 4 onwards, working closely with the young people.

The project creates a mini model for a more equitable built environment, giving young people a holistic real-world experience. The programme creates an ecosystem of connections across the sector of architecture and engineering in

particular. We often pose the question: what if a model similar to this were implemented for every new public building, park, playground, youth club, music studio, sports centre or housing estate planned for development, how connected would young people feel to their communities and their built environment, having helped design them?

We also design and produce leading initiatives like the Festival of the Future, hosted at RIBA in 2025, and due to be hosted at the Royal College of Art for 2026, engaging 2,000+ young people over two days in coalition with many other organisations to support young people in accessing information, taking part in creative education workshops and knowledge sharing around routes into education, training and employment in the built environment. The festival takes a careers fair model and turns it into a fully immersive two-day event to inspire a new generation. The nationwide interest is evident for this first group, with young people travelling from across the UK to attend this London event.

For the second group, those who understand how the built environment affects their lives through regeneration and redevelopment, and who want to influence the process, our work sees us collaborate with developers, local authorities, design teams and cultural institutions to produce collaborative-design programmes that ensure young people are provided with the opportunity to influence how spaces are designed, whether they are for leisure, living, or play, often inter-connected to social value outcomes.

Our projects span from the Barbican Centre Renewal co-design programme, working with architects Allies and Morrison & Asif Khan Architects, the Crystal Palace National Sports Centre redevelopment, working with the Mayor of London and Morgan Sindall Construction and the new London Museum. Each involved us working with targeted groups of under-represented young people through collaborative design and engagement initiatives, gaining insight and knowledge from a generation often unheard, through workshops, helping shape the future of these iconic spaces.

We create paid employment opportunities for young people to participate in many of our programmes, providing a minimum London Living Wage, one of the few organisations to do so, removing barriers and helping ensure equitable participation.

Our work also involves working on estate regeneration schemes, where we seek to ensure young residents are integrated into the wider community engagement strategies and plans, often designing targeted programmes to ensure their involvement, creating local jobs and using creativity as a vehicle for engagement.

Young people's interests span from topics such as being passionate about affordable homes, gaining better access to open green spaces and wanting to see more accessible, inclusive and diverse youth spaces. A recurring interest from young people is environmental issues, sustainable design and the future of our planet. Young people want to be a part of place-making and we should want to understand how to better design child-friendly cities, towns and spaces.

Resources & Project Examples

- A. [People's Pavilion](#)
- B. [Festival of the Future](#)
- C. [Barbican Renewal Project](#)
- D. [Crystal Palace National Sports Centre](#)
- E. [Convent Way Estate](#)
- F. [Tustin Estate](#)
- G. [Broadwater Farm Estate](#)
- H. [Thamesmead](#)

Does the national curriculum include sufficient references to topics related to the built environment? If not, how could the built environment be better incorporated?

Currently, it does not. Recognising the current curriculum is unlikely to change, we have focused on three areas for how we could better incorporate the built environment into the existing curriculum:

1. **Integrated modules/topics connected to the built environment, woven into the existing curriculum subjects.** e.g. Business Studies, demonstrating the complex business models through which places are funded, planned, delivered, designed and managed. This could include real-world case studies exploring the roles of developers, landowners, investors, local authorities, architects, engineers, and quantity surveyors, helping students understand how multiple stakeholders shape towns and cities.

A key aim could be to equip children and young people with knowledge of land ownership, city and town planning processes, and how decisions about developments are currently made. Too often, young people only experience changes to their built environment after decisions have already been made and proposals appear in local newspapers or are announced publicly.

Circular economy models could be introduced in science and geography courses, sharing knowledge on material sourcing, life cycles and environmental impacts. Design & Technology courses could include the use of certain software models used in the built-environment, such as InDesign, SketchUp or AutoCAD, exposing young people to the technical skills needed in higher education.

By embedding this learning earlier, students can better understand how places evolve, who holds influence, and how they themselves can participate in shaping the future of their communities.

2. **Quality careers advice connected to tangible opportunities.** Reintroducing specialists into schools and colleges that young people can connect to for industry advice. *Connexions** were once in many towns across the country. From our experience we can no longer rely on schools alone to connect young people to opportunity, they are often underfunded and under-resourced. Academies are often results focused and less likely to share extra

curricular activities that might pique interest in careers in the built environment.

Better career advice to students on which subjects support future careers in the built environment, along with the ability for teachers to be upskilled in recognising transferable skills, such as art and design, advising students on how to apply their talents for hand drawings to architecture for example, or describing all the relevant career roles within the sector; Cost Analysts, Planners, Quantity Surveyors, Architects, Engineers, Environmentalists, Heritage Sector Specialists, Project Managers and Environmental Consultants, connecting them to young people's skills interests and talents.

3. **Apprenticeship evolution** - invest more in supporting employers/companies to onboard apprentices. E.g we know from our architecture network across London, that many architectural practices are not equipped to employ and work with 18 year olds straight out of school, because the system of architectural education has always seen degree graduates enter the workplace with a certain level of skills. This is in part why the Level 7 (Masters equivalent) in architectural apprenticeships achieve significantly higher uptake than the Level 6. We are inundated with interest from young people aged 17-18 who wish to access architectural apprenticeships, but with little to no placements on offer.

We see the emerging talent wanting to enter the sector and we know the interest is there, but the opportunities do not meet the level of demand. If we introduced an evolution to the apprenticeship model, one similar to NVQ's perhaps, that would see both the student and the company supported throughout the placement, it could lead to greater uptake. Social Value and Section 106 could also be used to help fund the salary aspect of the apprenticeship, taking the pressure off the company, and then accessing the levy funding for the educational element

Resources

- A. **The Connexions service, which provided careers advice to young people in England, was phased out following significant funding cuts and a major policy shift starting around 2011–2012. The government moved away from a centralized, council-funded model towards one where schools and colleges are responsible for securing independent careers guidance. [Guardian Article](#).*
- B. *In the UK, the Level 7 Architect Apprenticeship has seen significantly higher adoption and growth compared to the Level 6 Architectural Assistant Apprenticeship, serving as a "quiet revolution" in architectural training by aligning with the need for Part 2 and Part 3 qualifications. While Level 6 (equivalent to a Bachelor's) has struggled to gain traction, Level 7 (Master's equivalent) is favored by practices. [BD Article](#)*
- C. *Levy funding for architecture apprenticeships allows firms with a payroll over £3 million to fund training for Level 6 and Level 7 (architect) standards. Recent 2026 changes restrict Level 7 funding to specific age groups or*

circumstances, encouraging employers to use the new Growth and Skills Levy to train staff. Small firms can access 95% funding or transfer funds from larger companies. [RIBA](#)

How can children and young people learn about the broad range of careers in the built environment sector and be encouraged to pursue them?

Having worked to embed Social Value and EDI into public procurement within the GLA before it became mandatory in 2021 in collaboration with Karakusevic Carson Architects, we have spent over a decade creating opportunities for young residents to benefit from development in their area, leveraging the Social Value Act to fund this activity. This has led to young people creatively learning about careers in the built environment and partaking in decision making plans for their neighbourhoods.

The following proposition expands on this work in the hope to see it at a national level.

By leveraging the government's buying power via the Social Value Act, developing a clear strategy within public procurement to support a nationwide initiative for children and young people.

Every public tender has a requirement to deliver Social Value, we know from the consultancy work we do on regeneration projects working with developers, architects and local authorities, Social Value is often a very disjointed approach.

The requests and metrics for measuring impact are different from one tender to another, and there is no joined up strategy, even within a single borough resources are not being pooled as effectively as they could.

With an average requirement from procurement teams of anywhere between 10-25% of a tender (and budget) being earmarked for Social Value, there is huge potential to run a well funded, nationwide programme. If every Local Authority, County Council, Town or borough had a centralised programme for the built environment that saw a percentage of the Social Value commitments ring-fenced into a national built-environment programme, this would move away from piecemeal offering and provide both the resources needed and the industry expertise to develop emerging talent to support the new towns initiative and wider UK developments.

We know through our work and conversations with Local Authorities in London alone, developers are often required to create apprenticeships for local young people on any given development scheme, and we know that one large commercial building on a development could be required to offer between five to ten apprenticeships, but we also know anecdotally, that sometimes that these requirements are not met, so they pay a fine to the local authority, often up to tens of thousands of pounds for missed targets. Coupled with the fact we know the apprenticeship levy within some local authorities is not being accessed, leaving anywhere between £250,000 to £500,000 of unaccessed funding, the opportunity and resources are already there.

When viewed in isolation these might not seem like connected issues, but we work at the intersection of these areas and believe great opportunity lies in connecting these elements, building a foundation for a nationwide built-environment programme.

An initial pilot programme could be embedded in areas where new towns are being proposed, with an opportunity to connect children and young people to the design team, local authorities and the entire expertise of the supply chain, learning from prototypes, developing the programme and later rolling out across the country.

Resources & Project Examples

- A. The [Public Services \(Social Value\) Act 2012](#) requires UK public sector authorities to consider economic, social, and environmental well-being before purchasing services. It compels buyers to evaluate the "most advantageous tender" (MAT) rather than just lowest cost, often with a minimum 10% weighting for social value. Key themes include boosting local skills, ethical supply chains, and sustainability.
- B. The UK public sector spends roughly £350 billion to £400+ billion annually on total procurement (goods, works, and services) according to [gov.uk](#). Within this total, public sector procurement related to the built environment, including construction, infrastructure, repairs, and maintenance, is generally estimated at around £35 billion to £40 billion+ per year based on 2024/2025 analysis, representing roughly 10% of total procurement. [Link](#),
- C. Beyond the Box Project Example: [Thamesmead](#)
- D. Beyond the Box Project Example: [Crystal Palace National Sports Centre](#)

How can the perspectives of children and young people be better included in the planning process, and what is the value of doing so?

We need to come away from the notion that children and young people are the future users of space and remind ourselves that they are also the current users of space. There is often apprehension from Local Authorities and developers to fully engage communities at early stage feasibly and concept design stages, for fear of opposition to the development, but from our experience, communities often want regeneration, better places to live, work, and socialise, but they want to be included in the development of those plans, and not discover what the plans are retrospectively.

Ensuring children and young people's perspectives are better included in planning could be achieved by focusing on three key areas;

- 1) **Statutory Requirement** for children and young people's perspectives to be sought during community consultation and engagement on any planning application. It can be proportional to the youth population of any given area to ensure attainability. It is vital that it's made clear in the planning application where young people have had influence, not just engaged by

attending an event, but actively and creatively engaged in the decisions being made.

- 2) **Planning Review Panels to Include Young People.** Ensure those who sit on planning review panels include young people (aged 16-21) from the local area.
- 3) **Establish Youth Resident Associations** for housing development schemes of a certain size, or as a minimum, require all Resident Associations (RA's) to have young people represented (16-25 years of age) with a target of at least 25% of the board.

Ensuring Representation: I think it's key to ensure we recognise diversity within the demographic of children and young people. e.g. If young people's views are to be sought in the planning process, we must ensure EDI is clearly benchmarked as a target for engagement. Young people's lived experiences vary, whether a child is disabled, neuro-divergent, LGBTQ+ or from varying ethnically diverse backgrounds, they will all experience a place differently.

When we collaborate on projects and programmes that are funded by bodies such as Arts Council England or The National Lottery, we often see, and welcome, often more robust and stringent processes for ensuring representation and inclusivity with who we are required to engage with, reporting on the demographics to ensure equitable participation and representation, these are often more robust than those used by local authorities in specifying who they mean by 'community engagement' or creating a statement of community involvement for a planning application. This model could be applied here too.

The value of seeking young people's perspectives would ensure safer places, more connected communities, with young people having a sense of belonging. Ensuring a greater diversity of people feeding into any given design process can only lead to healthier and more successful towns and cities.

What are the barriers that enable children and young people to take an interest in the built environment outside of the classroom?

From our research on the initial People's Pavilion in 2020, we engaged over 100 young East Londoners to explore the question of barriers, you can read some of the insights in our impact report linked below and hear directly from young people as to the barriers they face.

Barriers include:

1. **Learning of the opportunity:** It all starts with young people knowing what is available and how to access it
2. **Gatekeeping:** Often, for those at secondary school, if a programme is not endorsed by a local authority many schools will not share opportunities with their students. Organisations like ours are often reliant on one engaged teacher who themselves have an interest in the subject.
3. **Concerns on Safeguarding:** In some areas where we work, schools are fearful of youth violence in the area, and they actively encourage students

not to take part in extra-curricular activity outside of school and to go straight home, meaning if the activity doesn't happen in schools, some young people cannot access the opportunity.

4. **Access to Opportunity:** Is it free, is it easy to travel to? Will travel costs be covered?
5. **Representation:** Who is running the project and can I see myself reflected in that organisation

Resources & Project Examples

[People's Pavilion 2021 & 2023 Impact Report](#)

28 April 2026