Flexible Spaces: Working *for* and *with* Communities

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Photograph by Tony Ray-Jones of housing constructed using the YDG (Yorkshire Development Group) system. (RIBApix ref no: RIBA2760-20)

Introduction

This resource invites you to explore how architects increasingly work *with* local people to build affordable spaces that engage and inspire communities. You will work to a brief that asks you to carry out research, develop your own aims and ideas for your space before you draw the plans and finally, if you choose, build a model to present your ideas for a flexible space for your local community.

The resource takes its inspiration from our 2019 exhibition *Making it Happen: New Community Architecture*. (RIBA Architectural Gallery, 2019). It includes examples from RIBA's extensive collection of photographs and drawings as well as links to a number of existing architectural practices that already works with communities in the development and build of shared and sustainable spaces. However, you are encouraged to expand the search and develop your own ideas that specifically reflect what you, and your community, needs and want.

The Brief

Imagine you have an unused space in your neighbourhood measuring 18 x 12 meters. Your task is to use this space to create a place for your entire community to use. To do this, you need to consider:

– What do you want in your space and why?

– Who are you designing for and with, and how can you involve them in the process from design to build?

– How will you ensure that your space is accessible and can be used by people with different physical needs and sensory requirements?

– How can you design your space so that it is flexible enough to cater for many different interests and activities? Can you combine basketball with gardening or a play structure with a workshop area for communal making and skill-sharing?

– How can you use recycled materials and structures to make the project affordable? What skills do you need? Can the project be built by using people's existing skills and/ or give them the opportunity to learn new skills?
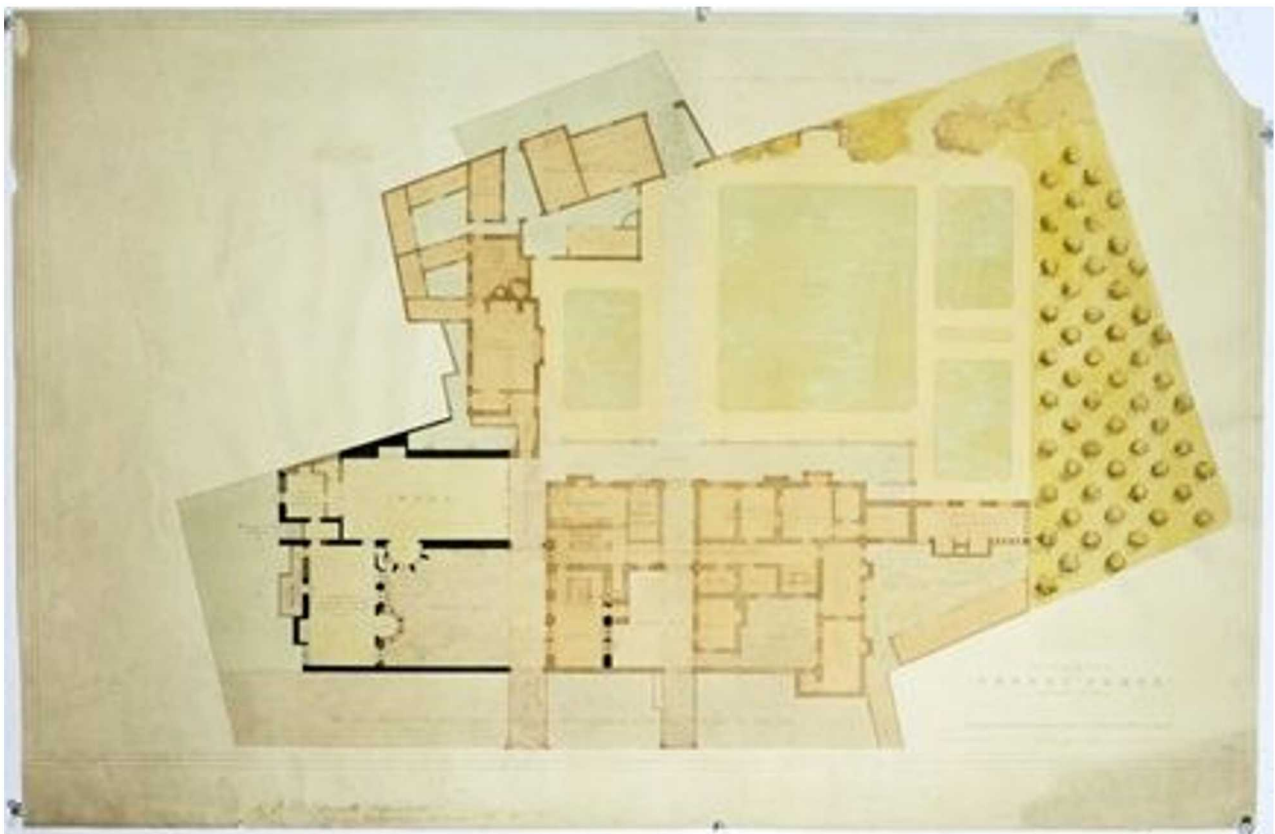
Ground plan for the restoration of Crosby Place, Bishopsgate, London.
John Woody Papworth, 1841 (RIBApix ref no: RIBA12261)

Research and Development

Architects have a long tradition of designing shared spaces. Increasingly however, they choose to do it together with the people that will actually use them. Why do you think that is? How do you design and build a space that encourages individuals and groups to come together as a community and what are the benefits of doing it together?

Think about what you and your community may want in a shared space and why. Ask family or friends for their ideas. Make a list of your **aims and objectives** for the space – for example: why do you need it (what will it do); who will it be for; what will it include and how will it be used?

Now, research examples of community architecture to develop your knowledge and initial ideas. Think about spaces that may already exist in your local community or use the links on the next page to begin your research online.

Keep in mind:

1) Research Questions

When you carry out research it is useful to keep a list of questions in mind. For example:

– Why, and how, do architects choose to work with communities?

– How is community architecture different to other kinds of architecture?

– How can designs and structures be flexible, or multi-purpose, to suit different activities, age groups, social and/ or physical needs?

– What kind of architectural approach, style or materials do I like?

– What ideas can I reuse or adapt for my own project? What can I do better?

– What skills do I need to build my project? What materials can I use?

2) Research Records
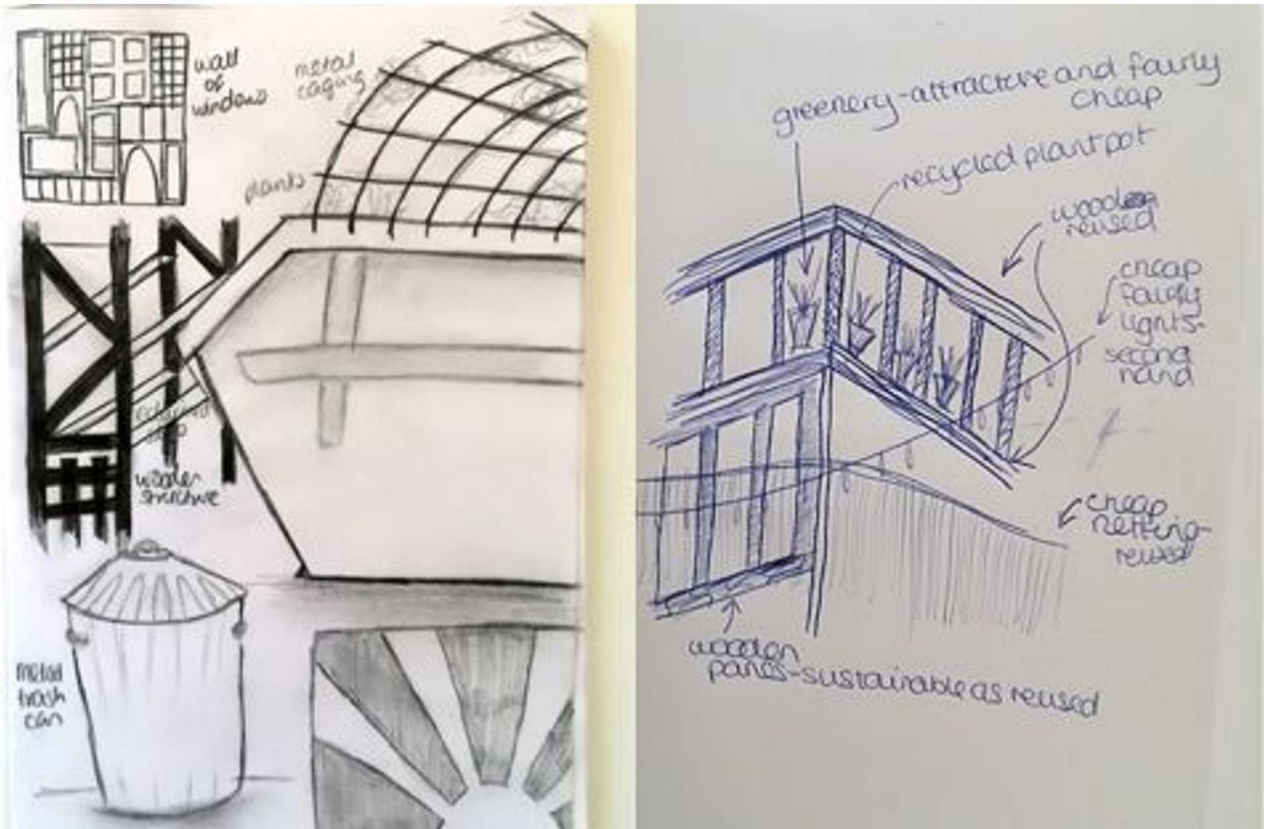
Make sure you record your research and ideas as they develop. Be creative!

– Take notes

– Make sketches or models

– Photograph or take screenshots of designs, elements and structures you like.

– Experiment! Draw, use collage, Photoshop, build with Minecraft, Lego, or …? Chose a
  way that suits *you* to capture and develop your ideas.

### Here are some links to online resources and projects that might be helpful:

– The [Introduction](#) and [Reading List](#) from the exhibition *Making it Happen: New
  Community Architecture*, RIBA Architectural Gallery, 2019

– Hayatsu Architects, [A Time and a Place for Pleasure](#), 2018

– dRMM, [Hastings Pier](#), 2016

– Processcraft/ Angus Ritchie + Daniel Tyler, *Lookout*, 2014: [Lookout](#), 2014

– Apparata, [Old Manor Park Library](#), 2015

Plan, Develop, Design

Keep your list of aims and objectives close by to remember who you are designing for and why! Use your Research Records to sketch out your initial ideas for the space.

To ensure everything you want to include in your space will fit appropriately, you may choose to draw a plan of your site to scale.

A **plan** is simply a drawing that can be used to show a space – it's layout, sites, spaces, buildings and details - as seen from above.
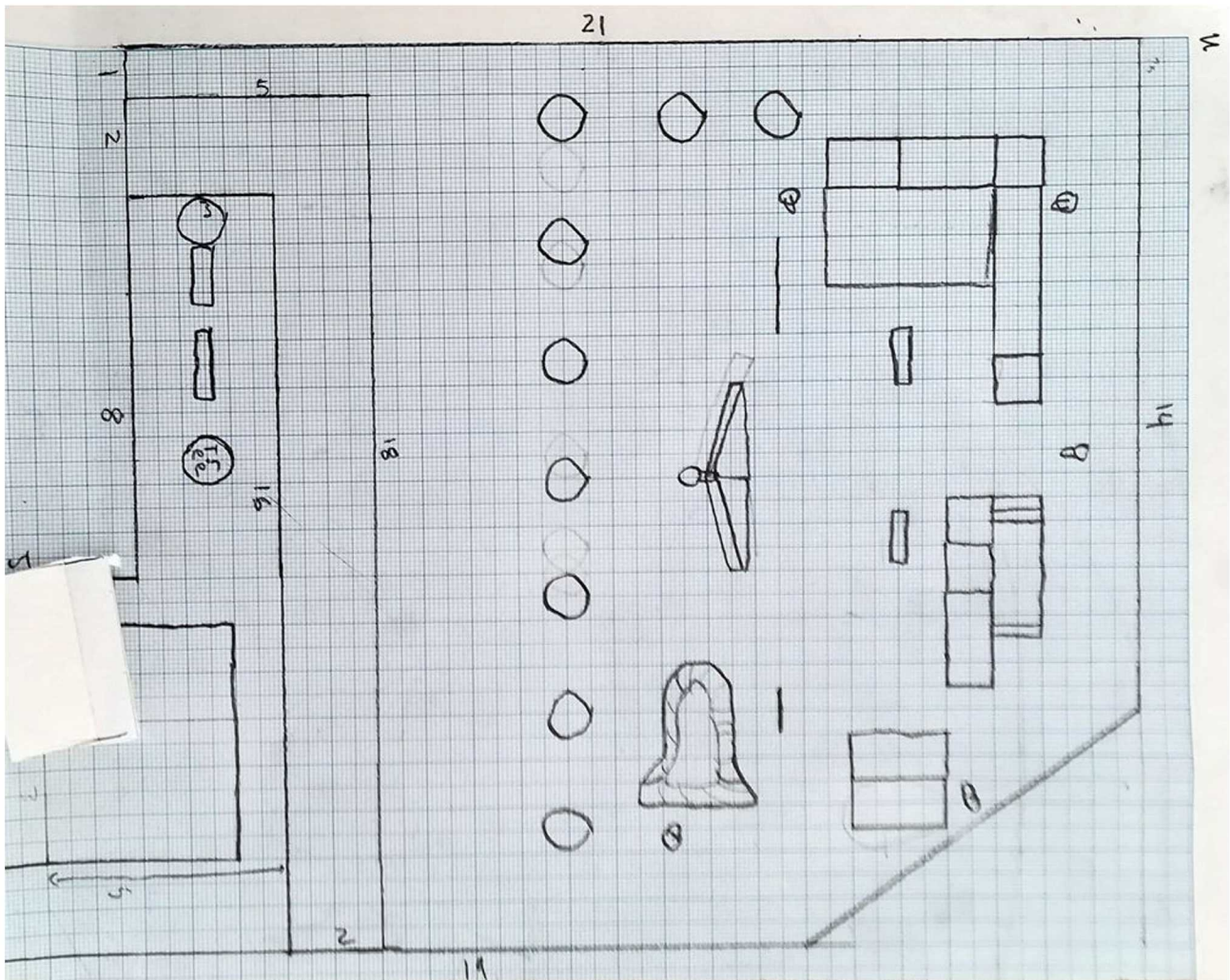
Plan view drawn by participant during RIBA SkillUP workshop, 2019

Try to work to scale too, if you're up for it!

Scale is important because it enables us to understand the relationship between a drawing, or a model, and its real-life size. Scale-drawings are also used in the design and planning process to ensure that everything fits in.

Make your plan to scale

Your available space is 18 x 12 meters. Unless you have a piece of paper that large you need to scale your drawing so that it accurately represent the proportions of both the site and its elements. In the real world the scale is 1:1, i.e. 1m = 1m. In a scale drawing of 1:100, 1m=100m, or 1cm = 100cm. In the scale of 1:50 1cm=50cm, or 2cm=1m

Experiment with drawing the rectangular site-outline in a scale of 1:100 (18cm=18m) and 1:50 (18 cm = calculate it!)
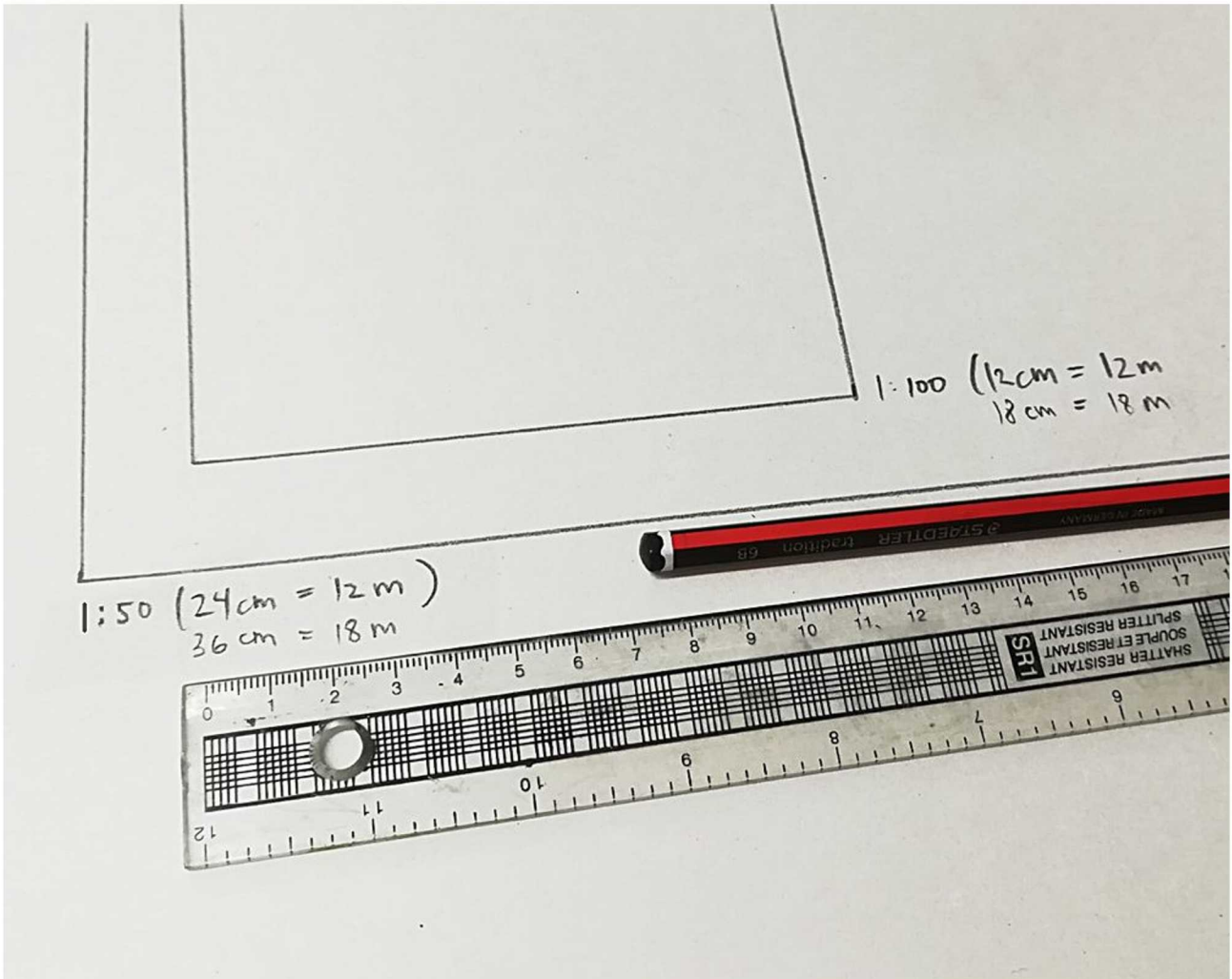
Choose the scale that best suits your paper-size and the level of detail you want to include. The smaller the scale, the larger the drawing = more room for detail!

You can draw elements of your design, cut them out and move them around your plan to test how different configurations may work. For this to work, remember to use the same scale for the elements and your plan!
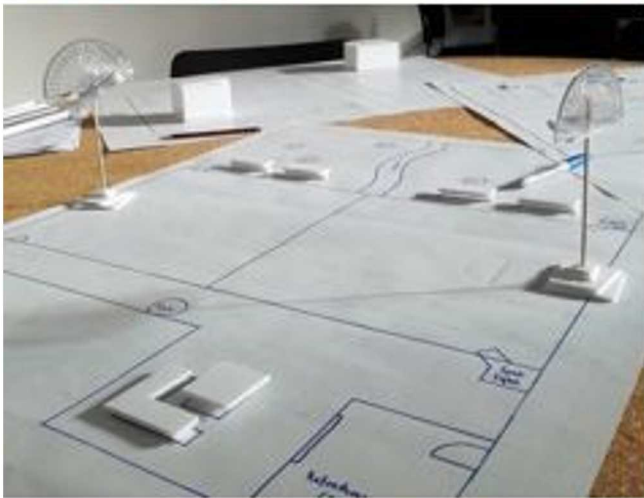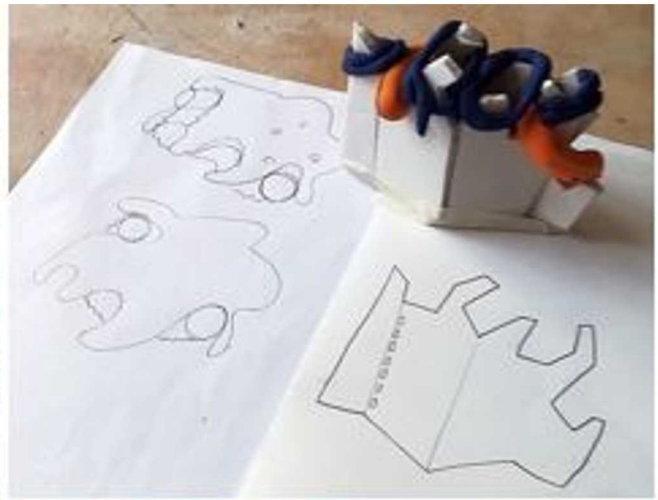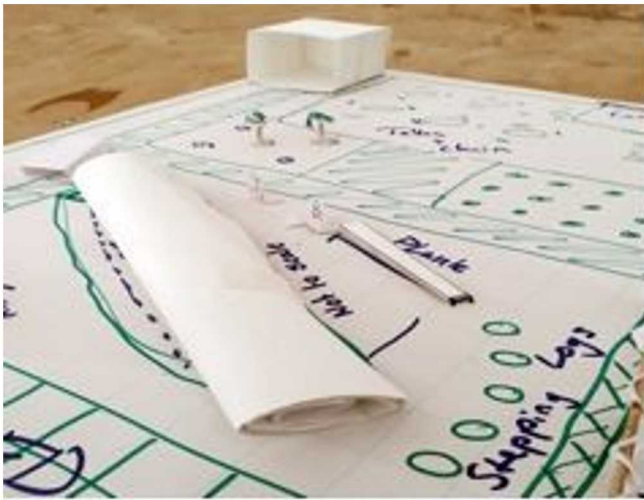
Presentation Drawings +

Presentation drawing made by participants during RIBA SkillUP workshop, 2019

When you are happy with your plan, you can create a final presentation drawing to demonstrate and showcase your designs to the world. Think of your drawing as a sales-pitch! You want people to support your project and make it happen!

You can:

- Include your aims and objectives to highlight why the project is important, who it is for and how it will be used.

- Draw details or symbols, use colour or collage, to highlight particular details or emphasise the materials used.

- Draw some important or innovative elements in perspective, to make them easily understandable. (There are plenty of tutorials on how to draw perspective online: here's one by Dan Beardshaw, but do find one that suits your own learning style)

- Use materials you have in the house to build models of your flexible structures. Build them to scale!

Presentations by RIBA workshop participants, includes plan drawings with models made from plasticine, paper, cardboards and protractors and bamboo skewers (for the basketball hoops)!

Share your work and ask for feedback

Present your work and ask others what they think. Share it with family and friends, with your local community and on social media using #ArchitectureAtHome

We'd love to see what you have done!

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