

Think, do and make: co-designing spaces to tackle the climate crisis



[noelito](#)

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We brought people together to develop our strategy [Camden 2025](#) as a vision for the future but also a call to action. We developed the strategy with residents through our [citizens assemblies](#) and with anchor institutions that care about the borough through our [community challenges](#).

The [climate crisis](#) is an issue that affects all of us and that we all have a role to play as individuals and as organisations. We developed a Citizens' Assembly on the Climate Crisis which was the first organised in the country. This brought together over 50 randomly selected residents to deliberate how Camden can best tackle the climate crisis. The assembly heard a range of evidence outlining the facts of the climate crisis and the ways in which it can be tackled. They then developed 17 actions that should be taken by residents, community

groups, businesses and the council in Camden. And of one those was “mobilising community groups to address the climate crisis”.

That’s why we’re hosting a space where people will be able to take part in, develop & grow activities to help people live more sustainably...and tackle the climate crisis. As we’re in a climate emergency, we gave ourselves a fortnight to set it up and six weeks to test out, a way that we’re moving from [building services to building movements](#). And when I say we, I don’t mean the council, I mean different individuals from different walks of life who care about Camden and the climate crisis.

What do we want to achieve?



What will we do?

- We will work with groups to explore ideas and run activities that enable everyone to become more aware and involved in actions to tackle the climate crisis
- We will work with people to run activities that help connect people from different backgrounds
- We will invite groups tackling the climate crisis to run activities in the space and promote them through our different networks
- We will develop activities that help people develop different types of projects to tackle the climate crisis
- We will bring together groups tackling the climate crisis to co-design the space and programme of activities

What is the space?

We have moved quickly to find a venue and were able to secure the old Flapjack’s café in Kentish Town for a trial period of up to six weeks. The space is being designed by people in the neighbourhood in a way that attracts people to come in and that everyone feels welcome and able to contribute. We have mobilised a group of residents to develop the design &

layout of the space and will provide coffee & food. We have worked with different services to ensure the health & safety of the space.

What will happen in the space?

The space will be run in a way that everyone feels they can contribute, connect with people, develop & grow projects together and share their skills & resources. We ran a workshop where 30 people from groups tackling the climate crisis put forward activities they could run, skills & resources they could share. We are co-designing an initial programme of activities. We are convening a group of residents who want to help promote & network the space to wider communities.

What are we going to do as a council in the space?

The space will be run in a way that the council tests & learns how to use spaces to mobilise people to take action around common causes, in this case the climate crisis. We will enable staff to test & learn how to support people to develop projects to tackle the climate crisis in the space. We are convening a group of residents & staff to explore how we learn & adjust during the six weeks.

What type of activities will it be?

-  **1. Activities that are easy to take part in and help people become more sustainable**
-  **2. Activities that connect to the themes of the Citizens Assembly on the Climate Crisis**
-  **3. Activities that help people to grow & develop projects to tackle the climate crisis**

We'll be able to [listen and make sense of stories, get people together to make stuff that matters and join up the dots to involve everyone](#). From community suppers where people can make food together that's locally produced, to working with students to make furniture that helps people collaborate, to upcycle & repair clothes and equipment. From helping create

their own campaigns, films and prototypes to tackle the climate crisis to a programme that takes people through a journey to collaborate, [building on](#) what I described in a previous post.

1. Activities that are easy to take part in and help people become more sustainable

-  I share & borrow
-  I eat & cook with others
-  I recycle and repair
-  I make new things
-  I discover my area

2. Activities that connect to the themes of the Citizens Assembly on the Climate Crisis

-  Food
-  Energy
-  Transport
-  Greening
-  Awareness raising

3. Activities that help people develop & grow projects to tackle the climate crisis



Week 1. Understanding the challenge



Week 2. Immersing ourselves in the challenge



Week 3. Seeking inspiration from others



Week 4. Developing ideas together



Week 5. Growing our activities



Week 6. Celebrating & learning

What are the principles of Think & Do Camden?



We welcome people to take part whatever time, skills or needs they have



We treat everyone involved with dignity and respect



We value each other's perspectives & experiences



We help people become more aware and involved in actions to tackle the climate crisis



We connect with people from different backgrounds



We collaborate and learn from each other



We help people be creative & innovative in tackling the climate crisis



We are open & honest and challenge ourselves to improve the space

For me, I'm really excited about this activity, as it creates a space where we can all work out together what we create around one of the most important issues I care about, we can test out different methods, that attract different communities to get involved and it blends the [serious and the playful](#). There's an [ambiguity](#) in the purpose of the space as it as as much about we create the spaces for people to collaborate to test actions they can grow in their neighbourhoods as it is to tackle the climate crisis.

People will think hosting a pop up space is at best playful and at worst superficial in the face of the climate crisis. However, You can't develop future policies or practices if you don't create the space for imagination. But you can't just imagine those futures, you need to start enacting them so people can see what they might look like and then adjust & challenge them. And there are futures where you need systemic change that you can't create just by practising it, you need to mobilise people to demand better futures.

From my experience of trying to make change happen, you need to

- [Blend the experimental and the systemic](#)
- Do different things that achieve different outcomes at different times
- [Develop communities of practice](#) around the ideas you're developing, which we're doing through bringing together people in groups to design the space, design the communications & networks, the way we test & learn

What are the measures of success going to be?

- People become more aware and involved in actions to tackle the climate crisis as a result of visiting the space
- People have increased connections with people from other backgrounds as a result of visiting the space
- Groups tackling the climate crisis see the number of people involved in their activities increase
- New ideas and projects are developed within the space and people feel they are able to develop projects
- Groups tackling the climate crisis feel they are working better together and have been able to influence the space & programme

What have we learnt so far?

Reflecting on the fortnight since we started the co-design, the key lessons we learnt is that we:

- **Mobilised people around not just an issue that is critical but around values of working together in the open and valuing each other's skills**

We're using the experiment to challenge ourselves collectively on what we know about the world and how the climate is affecting us in a way which challenges our unconscious biases and instead experience how different people live their lives to better empower them

We're each challenging ourselves — whether we're council staff, community organisations, businesses or startups involved in what our role is beyond a service provider to one which is just as much a sense maker, storyteller, facilitator, campaigner, movement builder or protector.

We're challenging ourselves in how we work in a way where we don't come with ready-made solutions, but instead test and learn in a way which is open and encourages challenge. For example, we're worried about not giving enough notice will have been given to people to join the activities, co-designing a space which doesn't feel inclusive for everyone to feel

welcome and not going beyond what we're already doing in our own organisations, but genuinely doing something collaboratively that has an impact on people's lives.

We're challenging ourselves in how we shape the place around us in a way which isn't just funding, commissioning or regulating, but influencing different types of organisations to work innovatively around common causes

We're [testing, empowering and stretching](#) people, whether they are other colleagues, partners or indeed myself. We're creating the space for [others](#) to lead. Even if we need to do more celebrating and reflecting of the journey we've been on as what's different to setting up a service is that the testing & learning is part of the building a movement not the preparation phase.

Most importantly, people are bringing skills, resources, equipment and connections they didn't know they had, whether it's a local designer, community organiser, artist, student or council engineer.

We're working at pace to co-design this and soon we'll have a digital presence, somewhere where you can sign up for sessions and most importantly suggest sessions you want to run, but if you're curious and want to find out more, get in touch either below or at <mailto:noel.hatch@camden.gov.uk>!