



# rsa spark

creativity changes tomorrow

RSA Spark is designed to help **everyone, everywhere**, find their creativity, **igniting ideas into action** to change tomorrow.

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## Where people meet

How might we reimagine and create community spaces of the future where people are connected, places are healthy, and everyone is leading a good life?





# What might the future look like if we achieve this mission?

Every community around the world, regardless of the background of their residents, now enjoys vibrant spaces and places where people and nature connect to foster solidarity and wellbeing. Previously neglected areas have become thriving centres for multiple aspects of civic life, where neighbours know each other, and everyone feels welcome.

## What are these spaces like?

Unwelcoming spaces have been transformed. Unused buildings have been reimaged, or new ones built to a high standard, creating stunning centres of life and connection. Architects partner with local leaders to add beauty and nature.

Some spaces have solar panels on their roof, or lush wall gardens, attracting local pollinators. These spaces honour local heritage, sometimes breathing life into historic buildings or weaving stories of local people into their design. Accessible to all easily by sustainable transport, they welcome new residents warmly.



## How are these spaces used?



Inside, healthy cafes, art classes, and social gatherings welcome people of all ages and physical abilities. People access and lead fun activities that keep them healthy close to home. This might be walking and cycling groups, learning to make nutritious food, or simply enjoying the company of friends. Each community space is unique and meets specific local needs. Some spaces teach parenting, crafts, and career skills, or support local businesses by sourcing materials and services from the neighbourhood. These hubs are bustling marketplaces where artisans thrive and new ideas flourish. Each project creates volunteering and paid roles for local people, boosting the economy and providing opportunities.

## What did it take to make this happen?

Local people, supported by politicians and big institutions, led the way. They built new connections and ensured everyone's voice was heard, especially those previously ignored. Newcomers were welcomed, creating a safe space where people mixed freely. Organisations from the public, charitable, and business sectors worked with local people to share knowledge and resources. Each hub is now owned and run by the community.

These projects have made people happier and healthier, inspiring residents to collaborate, to believe in their power to create positive change, and to dream big for their futures.





# Background to the brief

Communities coming together can be powerful forces for good. With the right support and conditions they can create wonderful, sustainable places to meet, organise and deliver a wide range of positive activities. There is cause for optimism.

Community ownership is on the rise. This is where a local group comes together to own a building or business and make decisions collectively, using tools like crowdfunding, community land trusts, social enterprises and cooperative financing.

Global health experts recognise communities and places make a huge difference to a person's wellbeing. There is consensus that the future of healthy populations is dependent on our ability to move healthcare out of hospitals and into communities. Our aim is to create places that keep people healthy rather than focus on curing sick people.

Regenerative architecture is a growing movement. Going beyond 'net zero' or being green, it designs buildings and spaces inspired by nature, and where nature thrives together with people. We also have a belief that everyone should have access to beautiful and loved buildings, wherever they are born or live.

As climate change and globalisation mean more people traveling to new countries and living in different ways on the planet, communities are shifting to become more resilient and welcoming to all. The benefits will be felt most by those communities who are currently overlooked.

Devolution from central government to local governments in the UK and in other countries has the potential to lead to more political and economic power being held by local communities. This means communities don't need to wait for changes from Parliament or the Government before they act.





# Inspiration for you when answering the brief

While outside places like parks, forests or rivers are great for communities gathering, this mission invites ideas which rely on physical buildings or structures to bring people together.

## Which spaces can I use?

- ◆ **Existing spaces:** Think about places you can already use – like schools, places of worship, cafés, barbershops, or libraries. Who owns them? Who visits them?
- ◆ **Unused buildings:** Look for empty or under-utilised buildings like closed shops, old chicken sheds, or shipping containers. You could turn them into something new.
- ◆ **New spaces:** What would it take to build a new space? Look for clear land and find local people who might help you.

## How do I make this a community space?

Think about how you will make the space:

- ◆ **Inviting:** How can you make the space exciting and welcoming for everyone? What changes, activities or services could you add to make it more appealing?
- ◆ **Connected:** How does this space connect and add to others in the area?
- ◆ **Specific:** What are the unique needs and opportunities in your neighbourhood for everyone to lead a good life?
- ◆ **Green:** How to build in low energy consumption, active travel and material reuse and recycling from the start?
- ◆ **Innovative:** How could emerging technology and thinking be applied to these spaces? Are there things in other areas of design and innovation that can be applied to this mission?

## Community space examples

(see toolkit for more):

**Bolton's 'All Souls'** building is a community hub in the UK. Renovated from a church, it now provides spaces for health services, social events, and educational programs, engaging and supporting the local community.



All Souls building. Photo: All Souls website



Barefoot College building. Photo: Barefoot College website

**'Barefoot College'** is a social enterprise in Rajasthan. They train local women to be solar engineers, installing solar lights in villages. This renewable energy project improves education, health and life quality by providing community skills, clean energy and reducing health disparities.



## Meet the mission partner

### *The Rayne Trust*

Established in 1965 by Lord and Lady Rayne, the Rayne Trust prioritises activities that promote positive social change, understanding and integration here and abroad.

Lord Rayne was a key contributor to the post-war rebuilding of London. His charitable activities saw significant investment in health and wellbeing, giving money to medical research, hospitals and wider social and cultural institutions. Later, the Trust promised to help the most 'vulnerable or disadvantaged communities' and their work continues to do this.

## The 'Where People Meet' programme

The 'Where People Meet' programme is guided by the belief that people, wherever they are born or live, have the right to a good life.

That is why we want to create community spaces that support people to lead good, healthy lives. Community buildings should be a source of local pride, enabling social connection, a thriving civil society and, positive economic and environmental outcomes.

To achieve this, a long-term approach based on collective investment of resources to improve the prospects of communities, particularly those facing the most severe challenges, is required across different sectors and organisations.

We have promised to help by:

- ◆ Running a c.£2.5m fund supporting a small group of areas to create new, or improve existing, community spaces.
- ◆ Making and sharing high quality research and evaluation of our funded work.
- ◆ Building a broad network of different types of organisations, to explore the potential for a large, multi-partner, independent fund in the future.



# The Rayne Trust



Where People Meet program, 'All together choir'. Photo: The Rayne Trust website



# Share your idea!

We are excited to see your (team's) idea come to life and encourage you to share it with others via the RSA Spark Awards platform. By posting your idea, you will receive a digital badge and feedback from the Mission Sponsor and other innovators. You will also gain access to other opportunities including invites to meet the Sponsor sessions, our annual Festival and more!

To post your idea, go to the RSA Spark platform and make your way through the submission form (platform goes live January 2025).

A submission invites you to upload:

- ◆ An introduction to you, your team and what inspires you to take positive action
- ◆ A more specific question you have been answering with your work e.g. how might we make the local health centre in Leigh Park better serve holistic community needs?
- ◆ The research and work you have done so far
- ◆ How you have listened to, and learnt from, others
- ◆ Your idea and how you think it could be implemented
- ◆ What impact you want to have and how you will track your progress
- ◆ What you want to do next and what help you would like

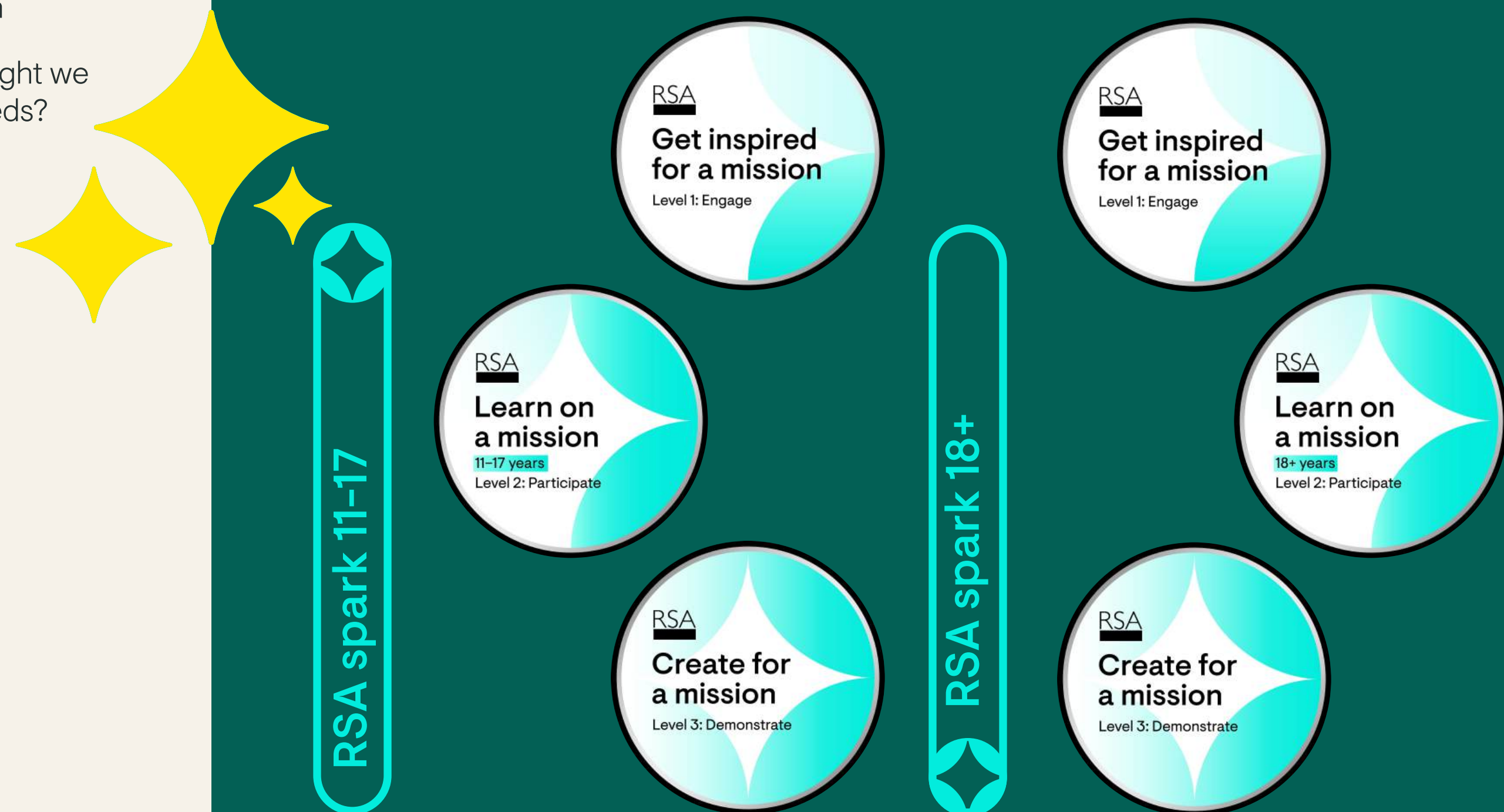
# Get support and recognition

To help with your learning and ideas, the Rayne Trust can offer:

- ◆ A learning session with one or more of the practical projects being supported by the Where People Meet grant programme
- ◆ An online 'masterclass' session with organisations and leaders in the place-based regeneration sector to offer inspiration, advice and respond to questions

All participants who want to be recognised for their learning can gain a 'digital badge' for working on this brief. A digital badge is an official way to show universities, employers, your team, friends and family that you have gained specific skills.

By participating in an RSA Spark learning journey you can receive three badges for each learning journey. These are at different levels depending on how your progress.



# How to approach this brief

You can choose to respond to this brief individually or as a team. In responding to this Mission brief, you have an opportunity to tap into and grow 10 life skills or ‘capabilities’ that are key when innovating in ways that positively impact people, places and planet.

You can find out more about these capabilities [here](#).

There is also more information about how to develop these capabilities within the RSA learning journeys. You can sign up for these learning journeys via the RSA Spark platform.

Examples of what you can consider and develop for each capability are provided in the table below.

## Citizenship

- What makes you a great change-maker?
- Why are you passionate about this project?
- How is your approach making things better for people now and in future?
- Is your idea hopeful and exciting?
- How are you using materials in smart ways that care for the planet and all life?

## Collaboration

- How will you get thoughts and ideas from people with different backgrounds to yours?
- Who is part of your team and how will you manage working together?
- Who is already working in this space that you can learn from and partner with?

## Communication

- How are you using your voice – and the voice of others – to tell the story of your idea?
- How are you listening to other people?
- In what different ways can you share your thoughts and ideas (in writing, pictures, games...)?

## Care

- How have you thought about and listened to people who might need the most help?
- What would animals, plants and other natural things make of your idea? How can you have them included?
- How will you listen and learn from people and nature in a kind way?

## Composure

- Who might disagree with your idea and what would you say to them?
- Once you have an idea, have you shared it with people and asked them what they think?
- What’s something that might be tough to do but that would make this idea even better?
- Am I asking big and important questions about the world?

## Courage

- Who might disagree with your idea and what would you say to them?
- Once you have an idea, have you shared it with people and asked them what they think?
- What’s something that might be tough to do but that would make this idea even better?
- Am I asking big and important questions about the world?

## Critical Thinking

- Who might disagree with your idea and what would you say to them?
- Once you have an idea, have you shared it with people and asked them what they think?
- What’s something that might be tough to do but that would make this idea even better?
- Am I asking big and important questions about the world?

## Curiosity

- Who might disagree with your idea and what would you say to them?
- Once you have an idea, have you shared it with people and asked them what they think?
- What’s something that might be tough to do but that would make this idea even better?
- Am I asking big and important questions about the world?

## Creativity

- Who might disagree with your idea and what would you say to them?
- Once you have an idea, have you shared it with people and asked them what they think?
- What’s something that might be tough to do but that would make this idea even better?
- Am I asking big and important questions about the world?

## Change

- Did you test your ideas and make changes based on feedback?
- How will your idea keep changing over time so it becomes even better?



# Toolkit

## The Green House, Copenhagen, Denmark

The Green House in Copenhagen is a sustainable urban development project that integrates green spaces, affordable housing, and community facilities. The building features green roofs, rainwater harvesting systems, and renewable energy sources. It also includes communal areas, promoting a sense of collective ownership and well-being.

## The Beach Hut Cafe, Brighton, UK

The Beach Hut Cafe is a community-owned establishment located on Brighton Beach. Operated by a cooperative of local residents, it provides affordable food and beverages, as well as a venue for community events and meetings.

## The Rural Studio, Alabama, USA

The Rural Studio, an initiative of Auburn University, is dedicated to using design and architecture to address social and economic challenges in rural communities. For instance, their 20K House provides affordable and sustainable housing solutions, and the Hale County Animal Shelter serves as both a shelter and a community gathering space.

## The Sands End Community Centre, UK

The Sands End Community Centre in Fulham features connected pavilions around Clancarty Lodge. It provides a café, changing rooms, and flexible event spaces, all designed with sustainability and community engagement in mind.

## The Kigali Genocide Memorial, Kigali, Rwanda

The Kigali Genocide Memorial in Rwanda is a powerful example of using architecture and design to promote healing, reconciliation, and remembrance, honoring the memory of those lost during the Rwandan genocide. Through educational exhibits, memorial gardens, and community outreach, it serves as a catalyst for dialogue and peacebuilding.

## East Quay, Watchet, UK

East Quay in Watchet is a community-led arts and cultural center. Developed by Onion Collective, it includes studios, a gallery, and educational spaces, fostering local creativity and economic resilience.

## The Edge, Brisbane, Australia

The Edge in Brisbane is a state-of-the-art community centre and innovation hub. It offers digital media studios, fabrication labs, and coworking spaces, all aimed at empowering individuals and fostering creativity and collaboration. It serves as a model for community wealth building by providing resources and opportunities for local entrepreneurs and creatives to thrive.

## Nudge Community Builders, UK

A social enterprise in Plymouth that transforms unused spaces to benefit local communities. They have revitalized areas on Union Street by creating community hubs, supporting local businesses, and hosting numerous events and activities. Their initiatives boost the local economy, enhance social connections, and improve overall community well-being.

## The Africa Centre, Cape Town, South Africa

The Africa Centre in Cape Town is a cultural institution dedicated to showcasing and celebrating African art, music, and literature. The center's modern architectural design incorporates sustainable features such as passive cooling systems and rainwater harvesting, reflecting its commitment to environmental stewardship.

## Lynnsport, King's Lynn, UK

King's Lynn's Lynnsport offers extensive sports and recreational facilities. Community-driven, it includes gyms, swimming pools, and event spaces, promoting health and social engagement within the local area.

## The Fishermen's Cooperative, Cinque Terre, Italy

The Fishermen's Cooperative in Cinque Terre is a community-owned organization that supports local fishermen and sustainable fishing practices along the Italian coastline. It operates a fish market, processing facility, and cooperative restaurant, showcasing fresh seafood caught by members of the community.



## Hastings Pier, UK

Hastings Pier, community-owned since 2013, provides leisure and educational spaces. Following significant renovation, it now hosts events, markets, and social gatherings, boosting local culture and economy.

## Bromley by Bow Centre, UK

The Bromley by Bow Centre in East London integrates health, arts, and social initiatives. Founded in 1984, it offers services such as primary healthcare, employment support, and creative arts programs, promoting holistic community development and well-being.

## Taman Bacaan Pelangi (Rainbow Reading Gardens), Indonesia

Taman Bacaan Pelangi is a network of community-owned libraries housed in repurposed buildings, across remote areas of Indonesia. They provide free access to books, educational resources, and literacy programs, empowering children and families to pursue lifelong learning and personal development.

**Additional Resources:** <https://www.corganisers.org.uk/what-is-community-organising/>



# Glossary

**Sustainable transport:** Environmentally friendly ways to travel, like biking or using electric buses.

**Renewable energy:** Energy from natural sources that can be replenished, like solar or wind power.

**Regenerative architecture:** Building designs that restore and benefit the environment.

**Climate change:** Long-term changes in temperature and weather patterns, mainly due to human activities.

**Devolution:** The transfer of power from a central government to local or regional administrations.

**Crowdfunding:** Raising small amounts of money from a large number of people, usually via the internet.

**Community land trusts:** Nonprofit organizations that hold land for the benefit of a community, ensuring long-term affordability and stewardship.

**Social enterprises:** Businesses that aim to make a profit while also benefiting society and the environment.

**Cooperative financing:** Financial arrangements where people or organizations pool resources to support mutual benefits.

**Community ownership:** When a group of local people collectively own and manage a building or business.

**Social connection:** Interactions and relationships with others that provide support and a sense of belonging.

**Multi-partner fund:** A financial resource pool supported by various organizations working together.

**Fabrication labs:** A small-scale workshop or space offering people access to digital making.