

Things We Need

A sketchbook of ideas



Introduction



At Studio Berman we want to see built environments that bring joy to day to day life and that make people feel well and keep people healthy, in the broadest sense of the word.

This year has drawn sharp focus to the importance of communities, and we have been thinking about ideas that could make the most out of local surroundings, making places better through design.

We believe in the value of spaces that are beautifully designed, in such a way as to give everybody access - equally - to green, sustainable and functional homes, parks, streets and infrastructure.

In 2020 we have been thinking, sketching, talking and dreaming. The following [ideas book](#) has been assembled by our design group Studio Berman, to offer up and share some of the things we have been talking about this year; things we've been dreaming of and that we'd love to see happen in the public realm.

We have worked on a number of interior spaces this year but during the lockdown we turned our attention to consider our immediate outdoor environments.

The diagrams and notes on the following pages are outline starting points. They are speculations and thought pieces on things we feel could be of benefit. The thoughts here are loose, sketchy; neither prescriptive, nor exhaustive. Some of them are merely suggestions that advocate for existing opportunities to be upgraded and strengthened.

The thoughts here are small. They are based on the premise of accumulating many good things together, to overall make wide reaching impact through [urban acupuncture](#).

The sketches here stand only as a first set of musings for additions, upgrading and edits that help public places and spaces be more generous, supportive and accessible.

We look forward in 2021 continuing to research and design for equitable place making - to carry on developing design schemes that make a positive contribution to people's day to day lives, and greatly look forward to working with so many of you on exciting, rich and diverse projects.

Zoë Berman
[Founding Director - Studio Berman](#)



Inhabited steps



We need...

Micro outdoor social spaces.

Now is the time for a Renaissance of the 'stoop', a word which comes from Dutch - a *stoep*, meaning step or sidewalk.

The idea of the stoop has in the past been particularly associated with North American cities, where steps in front of houses served as informal areas for people to pause, relax, chat and daydream and household members would use these places to greet and talk with neighbours. In urban communities, conversations held on the stoop would be a time to gossip and reaffirm informal relationships.

This year we've been seeing just how important it is for people to have well designed, accessible, usable outdoor space. Many of us have also come to greatly value getting to know neighbours and the value of having - even brief - conversations with others who share our neighbourhood.

We've been thinking about the importance of spaces that "bring diverse sets of people together for sustained interaction", as "essential tools for civic engagement" and spaces that enable "[social infrastructure ... not only for a neighbourhood's vitality but also for buffering isolation and loneliness](#)", as Eric Klineberg talks about in his book, *Palaces for the People: How to Build a More Equal and Unity Society*.

Front steps, front gardens, porch areas are small zones that inhabit the 'in-between' area between homes and public space - and they could be much better arranged with micro changes to better enable use and for small meet-ups.

["The point of both the ... banquet and the social life of city sidewalks is precisely that they are public. They bring together people who do not know each other in an intimate, private social fashion and in most cases do not care to know each other in that fashion."](#)

Jane Jacobs

We entered this outline idea for Inhabited Steps into The Developer's magazines ['Radical Rethink' call for ideas](#) in August, which led to a joyful collaboration between us and Matter Architecture. The resulting 'Front Garden City' proposal can be seen on the following page.

The Front Garden City



We need...

A new approach and supporting policy that enables people to re-purpose front garden thresholds as places to meet, share and connect with their neighbours.

Front garden gatherings and an over-the-fence-cup-of-tea socialising, help to strengthen social bonds, address issues of loneliness and improve well-being.

Our joint proposal developed with Matter Architects works with existing elements brought together synergetically. The proposal empowers people at a super local level within a strategic framework and a sequence of steps to spread the Front Garden City throughout a town or city, creating a connected network of activated front gardens, steps and frontages.

The adjacent sketch represent the moves towards enabling a Front Garden City project and those steps being brought together - a series of components that as a whole, brings into play permissions, grant funding and local neighbourhood cooperation - and represents an opportunity to bring together local governing bodies with residents - to improve streetscapes, build relationships and enable residents to better connect with one another.

Our hope is to work with a stakeholder or consortium of developers, house builders and local authorities to create the first Front Garden City in the UK.

This proposition was accepted as one of six projects that were presented as part of The Developer's Radical Rethink series with The Developer magazine. You can watch the presentation by directors Roland Karthaus (Matter Architecture) and Zoë Berman (Studio Berman) [here](#) - we present the proposal after 1h 06mins 40. You can read more about the genesis of the project [here](#)

Wild Corridors



We need...

Joined up greenways, to support wildlife and eco-systems through a network of planted highways.

The biomass of wild mammals has fallen by 82%. Natural ecosystems have lost about half of their area, and a million species are at risk of extinction. In parallel to this ecocide, humankind is meanwhile continuing to build up and densify urban settlements, and our ways of living have pushed wildlife out of cities.

Anyone who has watched a David Attenborough documentary of late will have been introduced to the point that we are ["replacing wild with the tame... And that we need to learn to work with nature, rather than against it"](#)

Wildlife corridors are not a new idea. But, whilst their merits might seem obvious, they aren't deeply embedded into every architectural and place-making scheme. They should be.

According to National Statistics, £13 billion was spent on construction works in October 2020 alone, across public and private housing and infrastructure. That is a lot of building work going on every month. Many of these projects will be small and medium in scale; but all buildings have a scrap of space that could be utilised for some sort of planting; from a rooftops, loading bays, sidings and delivery yards of industrial spaces to windowsills, balconies, front garden and back yards of housing - there's is space everywhere for that can and should be greened.

Added together there is huge potential to create connected corridors of growing to support insect, plant and fungal life - and plant life reduces the carbon dioxide levels in the air. How wonderful, if from 2021 onwards we could see every project in the UK making a commitment to planting and long-term maintenance of green life that - added together - would through critical mass create nation-wide interconnected greenway corridors.

Lights along the way



We need...

Beautifully illuminated routes, to enable and encourage people to walk around their neighbourhoods, at any time of day or night.

We are envisaging the possibility of improving access to outdoor public space and doing so with joyful lighting installations. Let's see lovely, luminous, creative lightscapes.

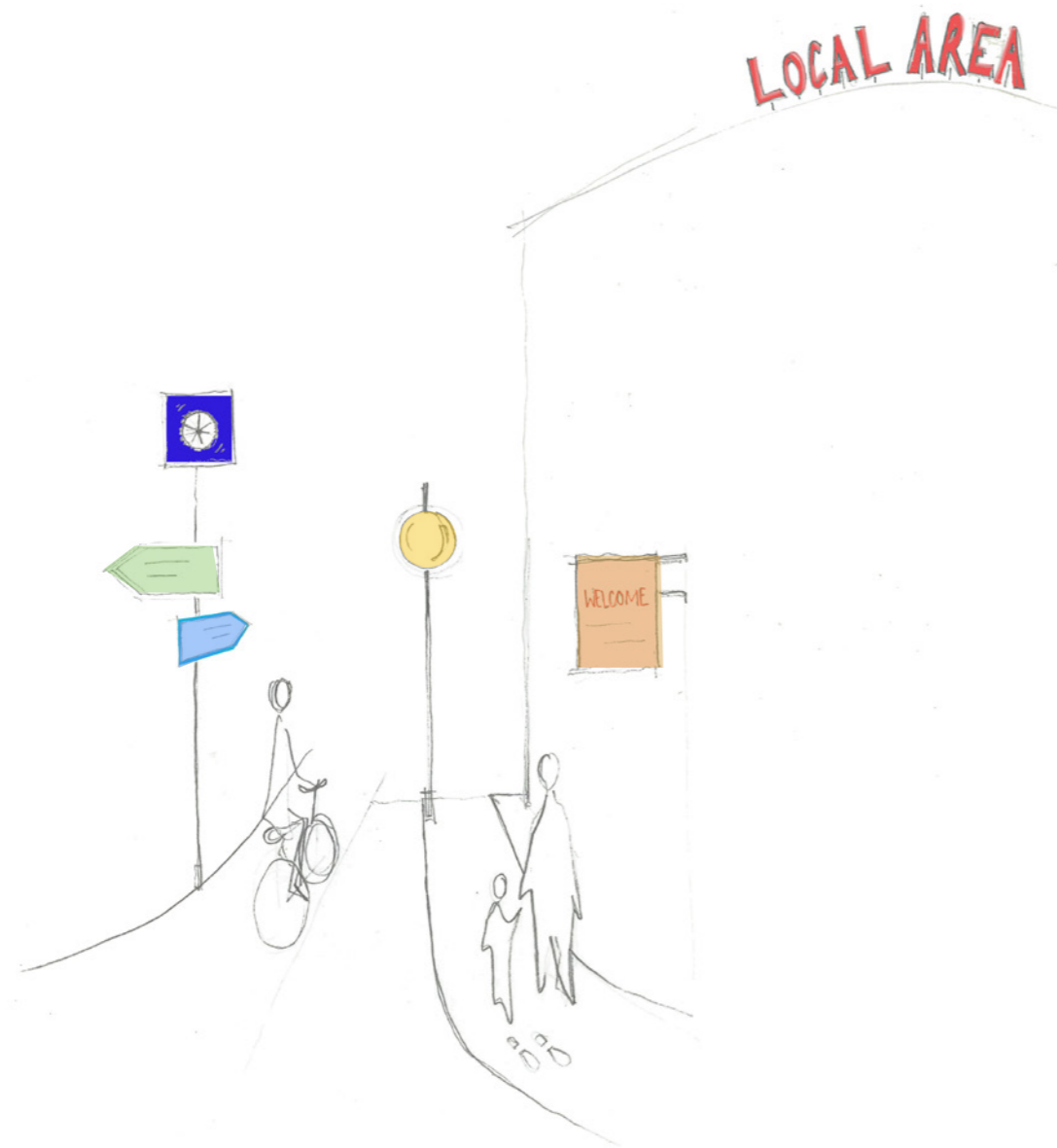
We need generous lighting schemes that bring light in a way that is both practicable and creative, to enhance, add to and enable people across village and towns throughout the day and night.

In a single hour, the amount of power from the sun that strikes the Earth is more than the entire world consumes in a whole year. There is so much potential and opportunity for lighting strategies that harness the abundant energy of solar power into lighting strategies that are responsive to need, the movements of people and seasonal day light hours.

Lively, creative and dynamic lighting of outdoor space will significantly contribute to the equality of moving around cities, towns and villages freely and safely.



Pathway guides



We need...

Legible, clear and elegant signage that both supports a greater sense of identity for an area, and greatly improves way finding.

This year the need for cycle paths and pedestrian routes has become so clear - and walking, cycling, scooting, jogging, ambling and travelling around should be supported and enabled with clear and well laid out signage that helps and guides people along accessible routes. Too often way finding is patchy, half-finished and poorly designed.

Local community signage schemes could see shops, businesses and local authorities working together to develop shared design templates for local areas to have a joined up identity along streets, pathways and building frontages, and such joined-up thinking would connect routes and better enable access for all.

No barriers



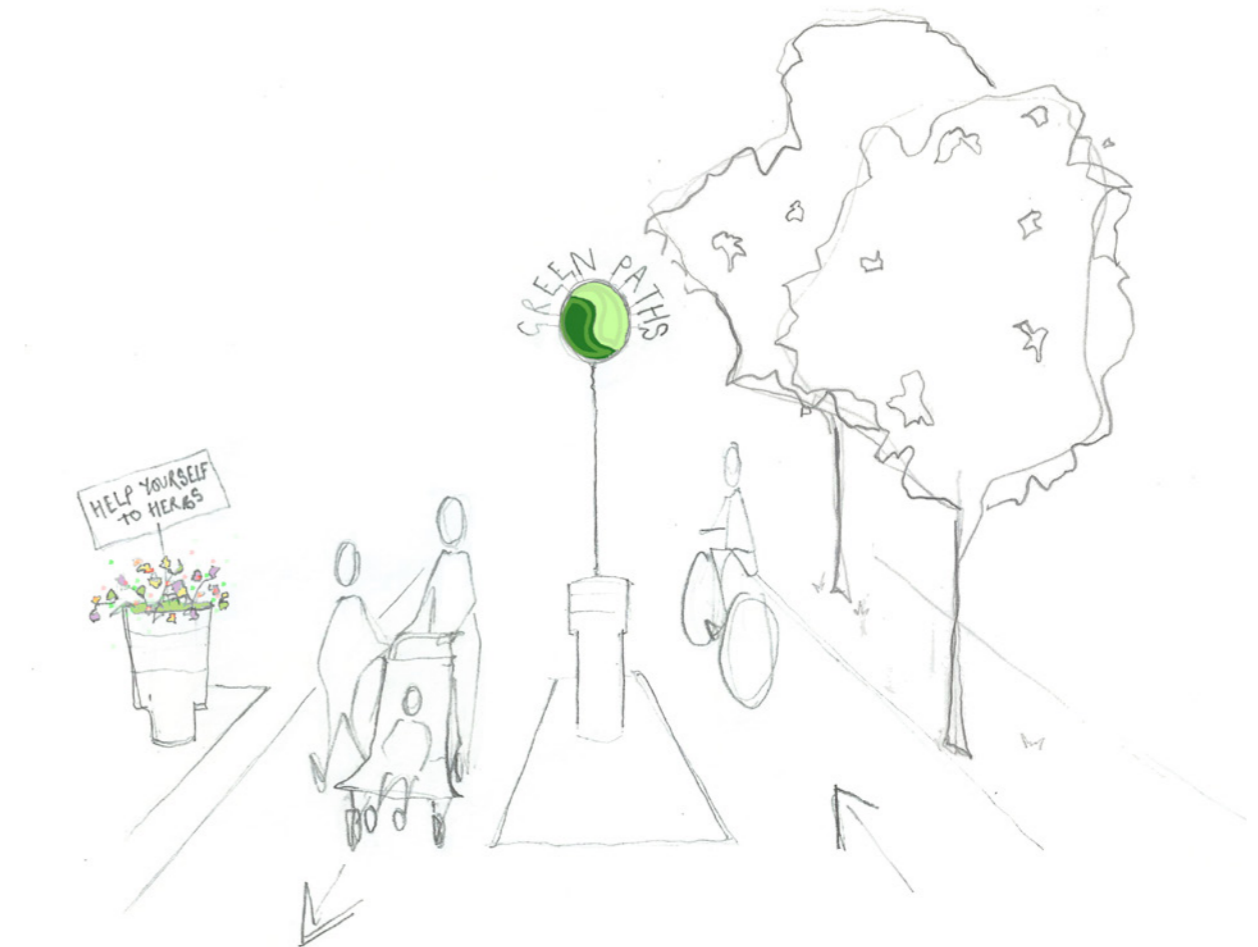
We need...

To reduce the obstacles, barriers and blockades that make the access to pathways harder rather than easier.

"It is crucial that we remove restrictive barriers on routes as part of our response to the Covid-19 outbreak ... A relatively small, low-cost measure that all local authorities and private landowners can carry out is to remove restrictive barriers and access controls."
Kierson Wise, Paths for Everyone, [Sustrans](#)

The more we've been out and about this year, we've observed the way in which bollards and barriers on pedestrian routes, intended to block cars or motorbikes, also block buggies, pedestrians and the easy passing of bicycles.

We'd love to work on streetscape strategies that create easy pathways, add planting and pockets of green in such a way as to the remove barriers to access. We've been enjoying chatting to a project leader at Sustrans about this frustration - and have been pondering ideas for how to make the situation better through design.



Wild Bus Stops



We need...

Our infrastructure hubs to work harder. Travel has dropped right down this year, and public transport has been much less used, due to people staying at home and using public transport far less.

The Covid-19 pandemic has changed the way people get around cities with an upsurge in travelling by foot, bike, scooter and skateboard. Fewer people are using buses (and trains) but those structures still remain. Let's see a transformation of bus stops and infrastructure points, becoming micro hubs for sustainable travel with existing, sometimes underused small structures working harder to serve and maintain diverse transport by: planting micro-gardens on rooftops, fitting green energy production via PVs for on-site charging points, extending shelters to cover bikes and scooter parking, adding community notice boards to exchange local news and important updates and fitting bike fixing and tyre pump stations for public use.

Together these alterations will transform bus stops into micro travel hubs.

Green environments provide innumerable benefits to people's mental and physical health, contributing towards combating the devastating trajectory of climate change. In a humble way the Wild Bus Stop shelters would help add green zones to cities. Data that we have collated and calculated helps show how much green space could be created by rolling out green bus stops:

The average bus shelter roof is **5.07m²**

Looking, by way of example, at the London context, there are some **19,800** bus stops in the capital

This equals **100,391m²** potential space for wild micro-gardens across London – equivalent to **14** Football pitches of green space to support insects, birds, wild flowers and plant life

In April 2020 bike sales in the UK increased by **60%**

Meanwhile bus travel in the UK in 2020 has dropped by approx. **71%** in 2020 – leaving bus stops far less used and underutilised.

This data ground the Wild Bus Stops ideas proposal as a useful way of making existing structures more efficient, and useful.



Play streets



We need...

More play.

Temporary play streets (or 'playing out' sessions) are short road closures, usually organised by neighbours on their own streets that create a safe space for children to play out together in their immediate neighbourhood. Play streets typically allow children to play freely, without organised games or activities that use defined or permanent structures. Instead children cycle, scoot, skate, chalk, skip, hopscotch, kick a ball around and make up games.

Joyful gatherings, held regularly are of benefit for children but too for adults of all generations who can enjoy their street momentarily freed from traffic.

Playing Out is an organisation set up by Bristol based neighbours Alice Ferguson and Amy Rose who embraced the permissions available for hosting a street party, to be reapplied as a permission for play

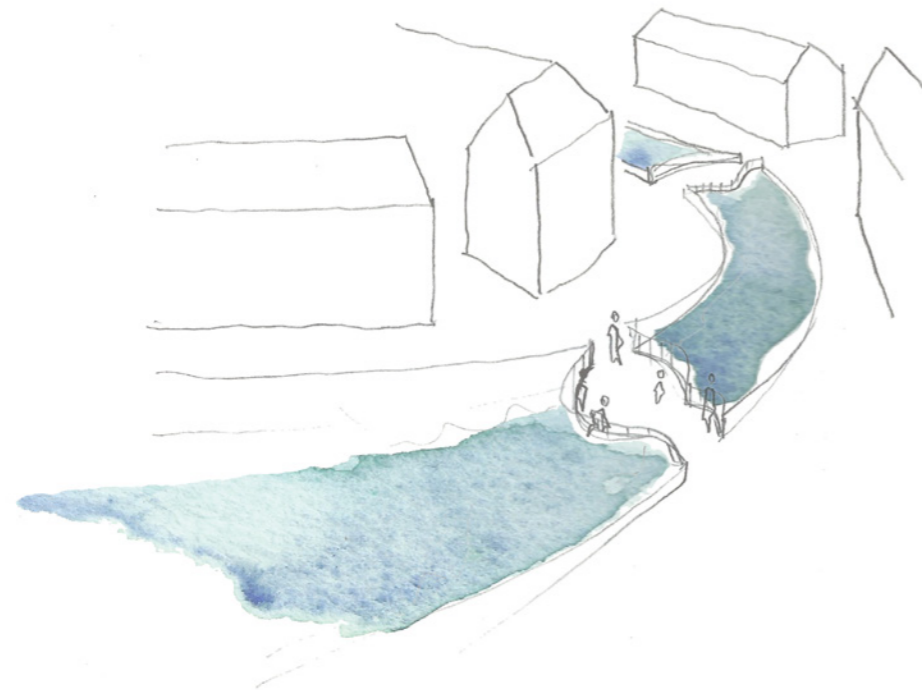
"There is so much evidence now indicating that children need the chance to play freely and energetically every day. Yet most of our children are just not getting that chance and are spending too much time indoors looking at screens or being ferried around in cars... Parents are present to keep an eye on things but the essence of Playing Out is to allow children to use the street to play however they like."

Alice Ferguson and Amy Rose

In 2012 Bristol City Council implemented a Temporary Play Street Order, which grants the right to close a street to traffic to let children play safely. The closure can take place as often as once a week for a maximum of three hours and can be valid for a maximum of 12 months from the order start date. As more and more children are stuck indoors, and there is an even greater need to safely (and sometimes as a distance) have access to free air and outdoor space, we hope more cities will put in place their own temporary play policies to enable and support outdoor play.



Bridges across divides



We need...

More crossing points.

We've fallen out of love with building bridges, for people. We're not short of road bridges - there are some 72,000 of them to be found on the local road network in the UK. However we need well designed public bridging points for people to get around easily and effectively so that travelling by foot, bike, wheelchair and with a buggy is an equally if not more appealing option for short-term journeys, in preference to travelling by car.

Crossing points over roads, safe crossings, over rivers and canals and interlinking spaces better contributes towards safer, easier and holistic forms of travel around neighbourhoods.

Bridges also have a rich symbolism of connecting people and enabling freedom of movement, greater access through good design, exchange and communality - and those ideals sit at the heart of what Studio Berman stands for.



All images in this ideas book have been co-drawn
by Zoë Berman with Izzy Hopper.

Welcome to be shared - please always credit.