

Croydon Urban Room

Location:

The Parent is located in Croydon Town Centre, whilst the Atelier travels across the borough.

Run by:

Croydon Placemaking Team - Spatial Planning.

Commissioned by:

Croydon Council.

Date:

First pilot was in 2019. Next iteration is planned for autumn 2022 - 2023.

Timing:

2019 pilot - 6 weeks; 2022-23 programme - 18 months.

Space:

Shopfront and workspace + website.

Description:

The Croydon 'Urban Room' is a physical home for public participation in the shaping of Croydon; fostering meaningful connection between people and place; past, present and future.

The Croydon Urban Room has been delivered as a series of pilots. First launched in 2019 as part of the Local Plan Review consultation, the Croydon Council Cabinet Report in August 2021 proposed to re-establish the Croydon Urban Room in 2022 - 2023, to be a physical manifestation and focus for catalysing the sustainable renewal and vitality of Croydon town centre.

The project has collaborated with a diverse and evolving group of partners in Croydon and beyond, including GLA, Central Saint Martins, Migrants Bureau, VU City, Connected Cities Catapult, Museum of Croydon, Turf Projects, UCL, Kingston University, alongside local business owners, landowners, Croydon council colleagues, residents, schools and youth programmes.

Image:

Croydon Urban Room Pilot, 2019.

Credit: Ruth Ward.



Aims of the UR:

Planning is often top-down, political and inaccessible to many. At Croydon we are seeking to disrupt this norm and make planning populist, through a physical and online space for exhibition, events and active participation that is accessible and part of everyday life.

Our overarching aim is to democratise access and understanding of the planning process specifically through education and open dialogue, focusing particularly on underrepresented communities. We see this as the fundamental step in ensuring that the built environment of Croydon is for all that live, work and visit here.

Its key objectives in its 2022-23 iteration are:

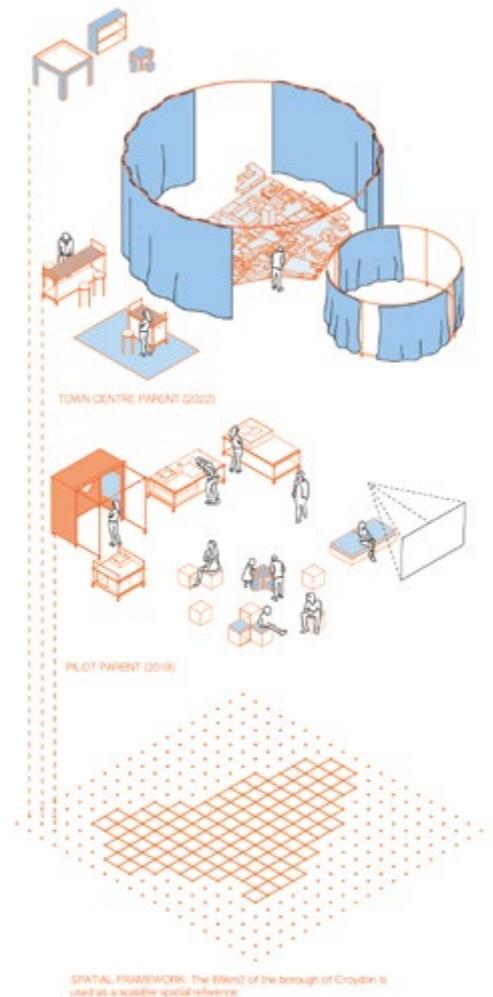
- to make future planning and placemaking accessible and inclusive, through upskilling, empowering, building and sharing knowledge and skills to generate feasible, economically viable ideas and proposals for the Town Centre Recovery Vision, presented within exhibitions, events and learning programmes
- to provide a physical manifestation and focus to the Croydon Town Centre Community Collective and Town Centre visioning, resulting in the preparation of a community informed Action Plan for the future of the Town Centre
- to create a collective space for exchange and test new forms of town centre and retail space activity by occupying an empty shop unit in the town centre.

How was the UR funded and resourced?

2019 Pilot - Local Plan consultation budget.

2022-23 programme - mixed funding including s106, in kind contributions, GLA Growth Zone funding.

Image and Credit:
Croydon Urban Room



Activities of the UR:

The project has an established and collaborative exhibition and events programme, including:

Planning shopfront (to inform)

The physical shopfront space provides a de-institutionalised public project space for civil servants to do their work, where the public can observe, enquire and participate in council projects live 'in action', and where the two can collaborate and exchange.

Reciprocal learning programme (to educate)

An education programme open to members of the public, all community groups, industry and council staff, and designed for reciprocal exchange, for individuals to share perspectives and expertise.

Live exhibition/archive (to collaborate & create)

A live archive and exhibition space for the public, industry and government to research, explore and collaborate.

Creative membership (to inspire)

Membership initiatives are the foundation of empowering civic agency in practice; providing formalised forums for influence and feedback, via physical and digital networks.

**Image:**

Croydon Urban Room Pilot, 2019

Credit: Ruth Ward

Impact of the UR:**On placemaking:**

The conversations, output and contributions collated and exhibited in the Urban Room Pilot in 2019 helped to inform the review of the Local Plan.

The 2022-23 programme will be focused on the Croydon Town Centre, providing a space for ideas exchange and imagining the future of the area. The activities and ideas will result in a practical Action Plan for the Town Centre.

On participants:

The exhibitions, participation methodologies and activities - particularly the Planning Game - help to explain complex planning processes in an accessible and inclusive way. This resulted in a broader participation reach, particularly in young people, during the 2019 Pilot.

On the host organisation:

The methodologies set out in the Urban Room project have influenced and informed the Croydon Placemaking teams wider practice of working, across the various scales and outputs; from policy and masterplanning through to design advice, public realm design. The Urban Room allows us to develop and nurture a closer relationship with the public we serve, as local government officers. It has also allowed the team to connect and collaborate with a wider range of industrial, business and community partners - sharing resources and knowledge.

The Urban Room project has been used as a precedent for many other Councils, including Enfield, Kingston, and Watford.

What was the primary challenge for your UR and how did you tackle it?

The primary challenge for the Croydon Urban Room is related to funding and ongoing resourcing, given the financial limitations and resource pressures within a local government context. To respond to this, the Croydon Urban Room is purposefully additive and flexible, in design and focus, to align with physical and funding opportunities as and when they become available. This has been a key to the success, working incrementally and with an agile framework of physical furniture, programmatic partners, and methodologies that can grow and iterate over time.

What advice would you give someone setting up an Urban Room?

To be ambitious (for the long term) and embrace work-in-progress (in the meantime). In our experience, many of the relationships, partnerships and knowledge sharing initiated in 2019 are now resulting in really exciting outcomes, but it takes time!

Image:

Croydon Urban Room Pilot, 2019
Credit: Ruth Ward

**More information:**

www.urbanroomsnetwork.org/network/croydonurbanroom.croydon.gov.uk
www.nla.london/projects/croydon-urban-room

Acknowledgements:

The Urban Room Toolkit has been funded and supported by The University of Sheffield, the Greater London Authority and [Urban Room Folkestone](#) and the [Urban Rooms Network](#).

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Graphic design by [Jon Cannon](#)
Website design by [Ross Bennett](#)

The Urban Rooms Toolkit is a public resource to be used, downloaded and shared by anyone interested in situated creative community engagement in placemaking. If you have any ideas or experience you would like to share and potentially contribute to the Toolkit please join the [Urban Rooms Network](#)!

This document is a downloadable, printer friendly version of the Urban Rooms Toolkit which can be found at urbanroomstoolkit.org

