

Design For All 2025 opens for applications *alma-nac's initiative provides pro bono support for charities' building projects*



Model for Lodge Lane Baths Village © Design For All.

In England, there are countless charities and community groups with building projects on their wish lists. From new HQs and meeting spaces, to community gardens and children's activity centres, there are pressing needs for all sorts of architectural provisions. But, all too often, those needs cannot be met, as the early-stage design work required is too complicated and costly for a small charity to undertake. As a result, many – potentially life-changing – projects never get off the ground.

Design For All is fixing that. Set up in 2023 by London-based architecture practice, alma-nac, and run by a consortium of professionals, the programme offers charities a full suite of professional services, giving them the chance to kickstart their building projects, getting them over the initial hurdles and a step closer to reality.

DESIGN FOR ALL

The initiative was born of alma-nac's ambition to reach beyond their network – evident in their early years when they set up a stall in Portabello Market offering 'free architecture' to passersby. A workshop hosted by Built by Us, the social enterprise focused on equality and equitability in the built environment, brought partnering consultants together to develop the concept which resulted in the Design for All platform.

In addition to alma-nac the consortium includes structural engineers **Simple Works**, planning consultancy **NTA**, quantity surveyor **Stockdale**, and engineers **OR Consulting Engineers**. A partner in the earlier cycles was engineering firm **Beyond Carbon**.



Community consultation workshop with 2024 recipients L8 Matters Community Land Trust.

In the past two years, Design for All has been gaining ground: 13 applications were made in the inaugural year, increasing to 27 in 2024. Today, 23 April 2025, Design For All opens its third annual round of applications, inviting England-based charitable organisations to apply for access to professional expertise that will help get their vision built. The programme will shortlist up to six projects and award up to three successful applicants a share of £30,000-worth of professional architecture and design services – everything from concept sketches, capacity studies,

structural analysis, to cost plans and planning guidance. It can make the difference between a pipe dream and a built reality.

“We wanted to create a platform that allowed organisations that wouldn’t have the funds and might not have the contacts, to access high-quality design services, especially as funding often relies on some initial design work. The primary goal is to assist those who have excellent projects, but are unlikely to achieve them without our support. With our help, they have a good chance of success.”

– Chris Bryant, Director, alma-nac

Baths, bunkhouses and more – previous winning projects

Design For All opened for its first year of applications in 2023, and has now supported a total of five ambitious charity projects around England.

In its first year, the team developed a concept design and costing for a new timber-built arts room in the garden of Deeplish Community Centre in Rochdale to provide additional space for creative classes for all ages.



Concept scheme for 2023 grant winner Deeplish Community Centre, Rochdale © Design For All.

Design For All also supported L8 Matters Community Land Trust in Liverpool with a capacity study and a design workshop for a Passivhaus development of 19 homes. The design enabled the CLT to unlock over £80,000 of funding for their Lodge Lane Baths Village project which will see the transformation of a former swimming baths into sustainable community housing.

“L8 Matters were elated to win this grant. Design For All’s competent multi-skilled team was just what we needed to kick start our plans to develop the Lodge Lane Baths site. Their ability to enthuse us and our members and visualise what that will look like, how we will do it with a realistic timescale was exactly what we needed and we will always be grateful for this and our continued relationship beyond the competition.”

– Sonia Bassey MBE, Founding Board Member, L8 Matters CLT



2024 recipient Woodcraft Folk’s Biblins Bunkhouse - existing and proposed.

In the programme’s second year, Design For All’s team selected the Woodcraft Folk’s Biblins Bunkhouse, diverting the group from demolishing a dilapidated bunkhouse on the River Wye, recognising the potential for its restoration and extension into an accommodation centre for young people. In tandem, they produced a feasibility report to help the E16 Community Land Trust source funding for the conversion of a derelict building into a community hub, and they helped Royal Cornwall Hospitals Charity understand how an existing building could viably be transformed into a Family Accommodation Centre to support patients in critical care.

“The Design For All team’s combined efforts have been invaluable in ensuring we have all the information we need to move forward to the next stage of our accommodation project. We are fully committed to providing somewhere to stay, in times of crisis, and this work will have been fundamental in progressing this for the people of Cornwall.”

– Richard Kramer, Chair, Royal Cornwall Hospitals Charitable Funds Committee

Thanks to Design For All’s support, each of these projects is now on the pathway to becoming reality. Now, as the programme opens for its third year, alma-nac and Design For All’s partnering consultants are looking forward to giving a fresh cohort of charities the opportunity to begin the journey from brief to building.

2023 call now open

To apply, a charity needs to be based in England, have a turnover under £1million, and have a viable building project in mind that: a) Design For All can help with; b) will make a positive difference to the charity users and community; and c) can be delivered in a sustainable manner. Applicants are asked to contribute 7.5% of the total grant value, to demonstrate commitment to the project and underline its value to the charity.

Applications should be made via a short application form on the Design For All website (designforall.uk) before the programme closes for entries on 23 May 2025. Shortlisted applicants are then invited to an interview to discuss their project, and up to three winning projects will be announced on 1 July 2025.

Each winning project will be provided with a tailored package of services designed to take it to the next stage, drawing from Design For All’s pool of professionals, which includes alma-nac’s own team, as well as those of the programme’s supporters.

Applications are open until 23 May 2025 at designforall.com.

Notes for editors

For image and interview requests and further information about alma-nac and the Design For All programme, please contact Claire Curtice at almanac@zetteler.co.uk

alma-nac

alma-nac is a next-generation architecture studio, leading the charge for sustainability as an industry priority. Founded in London in 2009 and now a certified B-Corp, the practice has spent the last 16 years framing a new way of thinking about the built environment – one that puts its collaborative spirit and social consciousness at the forefront of its work.

alma-nac's reputation was built on a portfolio of thoughtful and ingenious retrofit projects, conjuring desirable living space where none might have seemed possible before, and masterminding the sensitive and intelligent transformation of homes and spaces into smart and sustainable places to live and work. The practice now works across several sectors, including housing, workspace, culture and education. Current projects include a new net zero carbon library building for the Lower School of Dulwich College, a community space in Erith, and Barking Energy Centre, a landmark infrastructure project for B&D Energy, which is currently under construction in Barking Town Centre. Demonstrating its commitment to sustainable practice, alma-nac is leading the pilot phase of the DfE Net Zero Accelerator Pathfinder for Schools, a nationwide programme to demonstrate net zero carbon building practices and to inspire and support positive environmental behaviors in schools.

alma-nac founded the Design For All programme in 2023 to provide charities and community groups in England with free professional guidance for their building projects.

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