



# THE ACADEMY OF URBANISM STRATEGIC PRIORITIES 2026-29

**THE ACADEMY  
OF URBANISM**

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## WHY A NEW STRATEGY NOW?

As we celebrate and reflect on the Academy of Urbanism's first twenty years, we should all feel proud of our organisation and what it has achieved. We have progressed against a background of significant geopolitical, technological and behavioural shifts alongside increased climate pressures. The post-pandemic landscape in which we operate is constantly changing but we have grown from a small founding group of esteemed practitioners to an extraordinary multi-disciplinary network of urban champions with over 1,500 members in 29 countries.

The AoU steps into the gaps between professions and we see first-hand how cross disciplinary debate and shared learning impact the way experts engage and work. We regularly hear that the activities we develop and facilitate provide excellent (and often fun) CPD and that our international network brings inspiration for bold direction.

In today's world, great places need diverse voices with a range of expertise and our community benefits from our tradition of experiential collective learning. Whether through immersive visits with privileged access or exchanges with those from different spheres, every member has a stake in the future of the Academy. As we advance, the importance of our shared values becomes ever more meaningful.

Although we are building on solid foundations, it is clear that there are serious challenges to be met and we need to focus on becoming more sustainable and relevant. Our strategic goals reinforce our long-term commitment to place excellence and are not just a plan for growth but a commitment for all of us to combine our strengths to create better urbanism. They are informed by our purpose and mission statement:

***The Academy of Urbanism is an independent network that celebrates and learns from great places and the people who shape them. We create connections and share knowledge to influence and support towns and cities to thrive.***

This is a pivotal time for the Academy, but with the combined endeavour of our Co-Chairs, Board, Exec Team and our impressive membership we are well-positioned to ensure we have a resilient organisation. One that is inclusive, rooted in the experience and knowledge of our members and able, in the next twenty years, to have more impact in shaping the futures of places.

**Christine Smallwood**  
Managing Director



# INTRODUCING THE AOU'S 2026-29 PRIORITIES

Over the last twenty years, the Academy of Urbanism has successfully engaged a community of international professionals across disciplines, to share learning, experience and, identify exemplars of great places.

As the AoU enters its third decade, it faces the twin challenges of building organisational resilience and remaining relevant, both to increasingly fragmented and pressured professionals and also to a public more attuned to what good urbanism and placemaking entail. With an increasingly dynamic competitive market for placemaking activities, this challenge is not small. In short, the world has changed since 2006, and we need to keep pace.

The AoU Board and staff spent time during 2025 reflecting on two decades of the organisation and our current operations in order to determine vital priorities for how we enable another 20 years of activity. As part of that, the Board and staff identified the need for a sharpened purpose/mission statement that more fully articulates the AoU's uniqueness. We agreed three core priorities to guide the organisation's activity over the next 3 years:

- **Securing a Resilient Organisation**
- **Ensuring a Connected Community**
- **Extending Meaningful Impact**

To realise this, we identified an action-oriented pathway forward. You'll find details on the following pages. Together with the rest of the Board and our Exec Team we will continue to facilitate learning related to great places, and make the case for improved urbanism with shared ambition and renewed energy.

We can only do this with the support and commitment of the AoU membership and look forward to moving the Academy forward with you.

**Matt Lally and Shane Quinn**  
AoU Co-chairs





## **A Living Strategy**

This strategy sets direction, not prescription. It will be reviewed by the Board annually, with progress tracked against measurable signposts.

## **The AoU's Strategic Context**

Urbanism and placemaking are collective efforts. The AoU's core strength lies in how it connects people and ideas through the real experience of place and evidence of how great places are made and sustained. We value and champion experiential learning, strong relationships, and a people-centred lens, with a special appreciation for multi-disciplinary viewpoints.

Adding further strength to this core is the organisation's reach into and across European practice, with studies and examples of world-class standards easily accessible thanks to the relationships we have built and nurtured, alongside our official partnership of the New European Bauhaus.

## **Purpose/Mission Statement**

The Academy of Urbanism is an independent network that celebrates and learns from great places and the people who shape them. We create connections and share knowledge to influence and support towns and cities to thrive.

## Strategic Priorities

In order to focus effort and guide decisions about where to invest the Academy's collective time, funds and energy, the Board and staff have agreed three Strategic Priorities for 2026-2029:

- 1. Securing a Resilient Organisation:** To thrive over the next twenty years, we need to future-proof the Academy's offer so that our activities and people are valued. We will improve our multi-disciplinary appeal with innovation and relevance.
- 2. Ensuring a Connected Community:** Our membership is at the heart of the Academy's activity. We will enable more opportunities for all to build upon and learn from all of our members' connections with people and places across Europe.
- 3. Extending Meaningful Impact:** Our members are committed to achieving real-world outcomes. We will translate the AoU's collective learning into wider impact so that we more clearly shape how people, organisations, and governments at all levels think about and deliver excellent places.

## Guiding Principles

The Academy organises a highly varied activity of events and initiatives. As a member-based not-for-profit our resources are limited and investment decisions need to be made wisely. The following principles will therefore be applied to guide our decision-making:

- 1. Purpose first:** every activity must align with at least two strategic priorities.
- 2. Embrace curiosity:** prioritise cross-sectoral thinking and approaches that elevate the cutting-edge.
- 3. Value and viability:** the AoU will deliver activities that better balance member benefit, visibility, community connection and impact against delivery capacity.
- 4. Collaboration:** we will continue to work in partnerships that extend our reach and align with our priorities.
- 5. Learning loop:** evaluation of all programmes will be central to refine and adapt activities so they remain relevant.

