



The Davidson Prize – 2026 Brief

THE 2026 THEME

Changing the Game: Building Play into Housing

Play is a fundamental activity required by humans of all ages. It shapes learning, fuels creativity, builds social bonds and supports physical and mental wellbeing. The spaces and places that house playful experiences and behaviours are essential in enabling us to flourish. The Davidson Prize 2026 is unpacking the challenges facing play today and seeking new solutions for people of all ages inside and outside our homes.

In the 1970's 'No Ball Games' signs started appearing across housing estates, and continue to be a common feature, acting as everyday deterrents to play, sending the message that outdoor play is unwelcome or not allowed. Today, up to 7000 such signs in London alone warn against ball play across housing estates, discouraging around half a million children from being active. Far from being an everyday universal commodity, spaces for play are under threat and becoming more of a luxury than ever.

At a time when humans are focused on screens - phones, televisions and gaming, all addictive and largely sedentary - playful movement and activities are needed more than ever to get us out of our chairs. In residential design, play is often siloed or overlooked which can negatively impact opportunities for interaction and joy across generations.

The 2026 Davidson prize explores what can be done to enable play for all. It seeks to uncover new models that allow for safe games and spontaneous play at home and in public, while balancing the concerns of neighbourliness, property, and maintenance. We would like entrants to unpack how architecture, design, signage, governance, and spatial form can be combined to *reclaim* domestic and communal spaces for play.

This competition also invites multidisciplinary teams to rethink how play can be embedded into the design of the home. Too often, play is treated as separate playground 'over there', but what if play was part of the doorstep, the stairwell, the courtyard, the rooftop, the balcony? What if housing itself could become a safe, joyful, intergenerational playground, where every resident has space to move, connect and have fun?

For the first time this year, The Davidson Prize is open to different types of approach. We are seeking entries that either look to create designs that enable play:

- within the domestic space – inside the home and potentially its transitional spaces;
- in the public realm, outside the home and across communal spaces and place;
- or explore a blended solution that bridges the gap between inside and outside.

Teams are asked to combine their ideas into a single billboard image, communicating the imagined design concepts to a wide range of audiences.



The competition encourages multidisciplinary teams: including the likes of architects, designers, landscape architects, product designers, artists, urbanists, social scientists, health experts, educators, engineers, and communicators. Collaboration across disciplines and organisations is essential to propose designs that are practical, imaginative, and socially inclusive. All teams must include a qualified architect, and should show evidence of working with members across at least two organisations.

The Davidson Prize 2026 challenges teams to enhance and maximise a culture of healthy play. It looks forward to innovative and inspiring design that embeds play into the home and local environments as a genuinely shared and intergenerational resource.

Design proposals should:

- Make a compelling case for your scheme and its chosen site
- Clearly state whether your proposal is for a domestic or an environmental approach
- Communicate typologies for transformational play that promote collective and individual wellbeing
- Convey a sense of the experiential qualities of the project

Other considerations:

- Be safe and inviting for all
- Consider different ages and demographics – play is not just for young people
- Bring new vision to everyday spaces whether your approach is focussed inside or outside the home
- Encourage joy, creativity, movement, and connection in daily routines
- Balance freedom with comfort, managing issues of safety, noise, and neighbour relations

Entries should:

- Engage lay audiences with exciting ideas in relation to play
- Demonstrate the added value of multi-disciplinary collaboration
- Show awareness of how the project might encourage communication between generations, neighbours, local economies and authorities, landlords and/or housing providers

USEFUL REFERENCES

Child's play: designing for early childhood - The Architectural Review
<https://www.architectural-review.com/essays/childs-play>

Hyper-Architectures of Play - The Bartlett, Unit 26
<https://architecturefoundation.org.uk/schools/the-bartlett/hyper-architectures-of-play>

The Adventure of Playground: Architectures of Contemporary Play - Nottingham Contemporary
<https://www.nottinghamcontemporary.org/record/the-adventure-playground>

Kingdoms of fun: A New Era of Play in Architecture
<https://architizer.com/blog/practice/tools/kingdoms-of-fun/>



At Play - Architecture and Play - Metalocus

<https://www.metalocus.es/en/news/play-architecture-and-play-exhibition-delving-creativity-and-imagination>

Playable - Examining the role of play in the built environment for all ages - Studio Egret West

<https://studioegretwest.com/propositions/playable>

Local Government Association - Supporting youth in low-income neighbourhoods stay active through sport

<https://www.local.gov.uk/publications/supporting-youth-low-income-neighbourhoods-stay-active-through-sport>

Playing Out - Play Streets for Community Development: A toolkit

<https://playingout.net/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Playing-Out-Toolkit-final.pdf>

Strangers need strange moments together: A book by Daily Tous Les Jours

<https://www.dailytouslesjours.com/en/publications/strangers-need-strange-moments-together>

See 'Key Dates', 'Entry Requirements' and 'Judging' below for further information.

KEY DATES & PROCESS

The Davidson Prize is open to multi-disciplinary creative teams. Each team must include an architect registered with ARB (UK) or RIAI (Ireland).

The competition is organised in TWO STAGES leading to the announcement of a winner.

You have until 02 March 2026 to work on your Stage 1 submission. Please send your submission folder via downloadable link (WeTransfer / Dropbox etc.) stating whether your submission focusses on the domestic or the environmental approach (or both) to hello@thedavidsonprize.com.

STAGE 1:

- The deadline for Stage 1 submissions is **18:00 GMT on 02 March 2026**
- All submissions will be reviewed by the 2026 Davidson Prize jury leading to the selection of a longlist

STAGE 2

- A Stage 2 shortlist of three finalist teams will be selected by the 2026 Davidson Prize jury panel
- Each finalist team will be awarded an honorarium of £5,000 and a one-hour consultancy workshop with leading visualisation studio Hayes Davidson to develop their ideas
- The Stage 2 submission deadline is **18:00 BST on 21 May 2026**
- After submitting their developed concepts, the teams will pitch to the jury in a live presentation in Central London
- Stage 2 pitches will take place in May/June 2026

The winner of the £10,000 Davidson Prize will be announced in June 2026.

The Davidson Prize will also be running a People's Choice Prize. The public will be invited to vote for its favourite project from the 2026 longlist. Details on how to vote will be announced once the longlist is published.



ENTRY REQUIREMENTS

STAGE 1

Stage 1 submissions must include:

- A landscape ‘marketing billboard’ poster selling your design concept with minimal text (3600x1800) pixels | PNG format
- A social media advert (choose one):
 - 15–30 second video in 9:16 format suitable for Instagram or TikTok
 - Or a carousel of 3–5 portrait format images (1080x1350)
- A completed submission form (downloadable from our website) providing:
 - Full details of your multi-disciplinary team including the ARB or RIAI number of one registered architect
 - A 250-word statement explaining how your concept addresses the 2026 theme
 - A 100-word statement on how you envisage developing your proposal at Stage 2

The above will be used for shortlisting and may be used for exhibition and publicity purposes, including social media.

STAGE 2

At Stage 2, the three finalist teams will each receive an honorarium of £5,000 and a one-hour consultancy and ideation workshop with Hayes Davidson to support teams in developing their concepts

Finalist teams are required to prepare a 10-minute presentation to pitch these developed concepts to the jury panel. Your Stage 2 pitch must include:

- 3 x high-quality hero images demonstrating your developed concept (3600x1800 pixels | PNG format)
- 3 x 30-45 second films in 9:16 format selling three different elements of your developed concept – content might include drawings, models, animation, talking heads, VR, or other media to communicate your design ideas (provide a version with and without subtitles)

You must nominate two team members to pitch. The pitch will be followed by a Q&A.

You will be asked to submit your pitch material by 18:00 BST on 21 May 2026. Please also supply hero shots and film as separate files. The above will be used for judging, possible exhibition and publicity purposes, including social media.

The winner of the £10,000 prize will be announced in June 2026 during a celebratory event.

Please note that visual material that has previously been paid for by a client or any party may not form part of your submission.



JUDGING & JUDGES

The 2026 Davidson Prize jury panel comprises:

- Deborah Saunt, Founding Director of DSDHA (Chair)
- Russ Edwards, Project Director at Latimer
- Neil Emery, Director at Clifton Emery design (winner of the 2025 Davidson Prize)
- Vicky Spratt, Housing & Society Correspondent at *The i Paper*

The full judging panel will be announced in due course.

All judging sessions will be attended by representative(s) of the Alan Davidson Foundation.

Stage 1 submissions will be reviewed by the 2026 Davidson Prize jury panel, leading to a longlist.

Stage 2 submissions will be reviewed by the 2026 Davidson Prize jury panel, leading to a winner.

Please note that the committee and jury panel's decisions are final.

OUR CREATIVE PARTNER

For 2026, The Davidson Prize is partnering with leading visualisation studio Hayes Davidson who will provide creative consultation.

ANY QUESTIONS?

Please contact hello@thedavidsonprize.com