University Design Forum: Annual Conference 2027

Invitation to Members for Sessions at the Conference

University Design Forum: Annual Conference 2027 at the University of Cambridge: 'The constancy of change: making spaces for evolving times'.

Overview:

"The only constant is change", reflecting the philosophy of the Greek philosopher Heraclitus, is a key component of university planning, looking into the past, the present and the future.
The 2027 Annual Conference of the University Design Forum will be held at the University of Cambridge, which was founded over 800 years ago in 1209 and has developed and changed over the centuries to remain one of the world's great universities.

The conference itself will be based at Churchill College, the result of an architectural competition which in its day was innovative and broke from traditional Cambridge college design. The 1959 architectural competition is considered by many to be a watershed moment in British Post War architectural history.

The theme of the conference is 'The constancy of change: making spaces for evolving times'. How do designers create flexibility for the future and anticipate the many changes that are already anticipated, including the tricky question of whether universities have too much physical estate in the modern digital world? How are historic buildings, old and modern, of which there are many across the university sector, being adapted and changed to give them new lives in the 21st century, including the challenges of diverse student bodies and of climate change targets?

The programme will include discussions and building visits, plus an event the Cambridge Union where previous speakers have included political leaders from the UK, the USA and across the world.

Criteria

As Members will know from previous conference, we aim for our sessions to be creative, inspirational, forward-thinking and engender discussion. We work in partnership with our Members and any proposals which are obviously commercial/marketing will be dismissed. Our sessions are focused on knowledge-exchange.

The sessions which generally have worked well in the past have focused on one theme, such as ‘innovative learning spaces’ with two or three speakers providing short presentations of related innovative projects, leading into discussion with delegates. Other options will be considered, but the aims should be to include leading examples related to the theme with a period of discussion. Projects or initiatives which are new or have not yet been completed will be welcome as they link into the future. Presentations may be in different formats in terms of digital media but should not be technically over-complicated.

Submissions are invited on the attached proforma. The focus will be on areas such as the circular economy, sustainability, adaptive reuse (20th century buildings as well as historic), design for space efficiency and design with new sustainable materials, that reflect the theme of the conference ‘The constancy of change: making spaces for evolving times’.

It should be noted that only Members can make proposals and only one proposal can be submitted by each Member.

Submission Date: 22 January 2027.

It is hoped to respond on the submissions by the beginning of March (2027), but this depends on the number of proposals and the time needed to review them.

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