

# AJ 40 under 40: Common Ground

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Originally set up as Croydon's in-house architect, AJ 40 under 40 practice Common Ground is already working for others and likely to survive the council's current troubles

It has been a tough year for cash-strapped Croydon Council and, in turn, for its housing delivery arm Brick By Brick, the parent company of emerging practice Common Ground Architecture. Both may yet be sold by the bankrupt local authority. Whatever the outcome, it is likely Common Ground, a rare design collective bridging the private and public sectors, will survive in some form and its talented team will continue to be a significant player in this field.

Common Ground's genesis about five years ago was as a small, in-house architecture team within the council. Its life as an independent commercial practice officially began in 2017 on the back of work by Chloë Phelps, Common Ground's head of design, as part of the inaugural Croydon Smaller Sites Programme for Brick By Brick.



Pump House housing in South Norwood, part of Brick By Brick's smaller sites programme  
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Former Lifschutz Davison Sandilands project director Phelps, 39, now leads a nine-strong team, all of whom are under 40: Nikki Cutler, 39, Oliver Osborne, 38, Elizabeth Owens, 34, Sarah Hutchison, 36, Beth Day, 30, Alex Barretta, 29, Hema Ganesan, 29, and Alice Foreman, 26. It continues to look at tricky, tiny and seemingly unviable sites in Croydon and beyond. Although all profits currently return to Croydon Council, its sole shareholder, the studio is already designing for others. About 10-15 per cent of its current live projects are for private clients. Common Ground says: 'As an office we are demonstrating that architectural practice does not need to follow the norm.'

## Milestones

**2015** Chloë Phelps becomes design head of Croydon Council's in-house architectural services team, working predominantly for Brick By Brick, the council's housing development company

**2017** Architecture team evolves into standalone commercial practice Common Ground

**2018** Wins approval for a nine-home scheme in Croydon's Coombe Road for Brick By Brick

**2019** Selected by Brick By Brick to take on five infill sites and masterplan 27 others

**2020** Completes its first scheme, the £3.8 million Pump House flats in South Norwood

**2021** Work scheduled to start on site of 83-home development as part of the wider development around Croydon's Fairfield Halls

Common Ground: 'We want to become a genuine leader in residential design'

First housing scheme by Common Ground Architecture unveiled in Croydon

Go-ahead for 400-home MICA and Brick By Brick Croydon scheme