Repositioning Muse as a market-leading Placemaker.

For publication
Client: Muse
DBA Design Effectiveness Awards entry
Agency: Smiling Wolf

Executive summary

This submission details the comprehensive rebrand of Muse, a leading UK regeneration developer, repositioning it as a national placemaker and industry leader. Undertaken in 2022, the rebrand responded to a critical challenge: while Muse had a strong track record in delivering major, mixed-use developments, it lacked brand recognition, deeper stakeholder engagement, and a coherent visual identity. The wider perception of Muse was pragmatic but unimaginative, more builder than placemaker, limiting its ability to compete for the largest tenders and partnerships.

In response, Muse embarked on a strategically-led design transformation covering brand strategy, visual identity, website, digital toolkits, content design, film, and photography. Grounded in stakeholder research and sector insight, the rebrand introduced a clearer, more human brand narrative centred on the 'Super Citizen' archetype – an identity that champions purpose, humility, and long-term community impact. A new wordmarque, people-first imagery, bespoke typeface, and mobile-first website brought cohesion, credibility, and relatability to every Muse touchpoint.

The results were outstanding and directly attributable to the design work.

Within two years:
- The development pipeline more than doubled, from £1.8bn in 2023 to £4.1bn in 2025

- Website traffic increased by over 2000%, and Muse now outperforms industry averages in digital engagement rates

- Stakeholder confidence grew, resulting in the formation of new partnerships such as Habiko (with Pension Insurance Company and Homes England)

- Muse's role at UK's Real Estate Investment & Infrastructure Forum (UKREiiF – the key industry event for the sector with over 13,000 attendees) expanded from fringe presence to hosting a full stage, becoming the only developer on the main programme

- Award wins reached a record 26 in 2024, up from an average of 10 per year

Crucially, no major changes in operational restructuring or market shifts explain these results. The leadership transition during this time was supportive and there was was no shift in Muse's service offer or culture. Existing marketing channels were retained; it wasn't 'more marketing', but better-designed, more effective communication that delivered impact.

The Muse rebrand is a great case for the commercial power of strategic design. It enabled the business to articulate its purpose with confidence, align internally, compete at a larger national level, and unlock new commercial potential. This entry demonstrates how design, rooted in insight and executed consistently, can transform business performance and redefine market position.

Overview

Muse
Established in Manchester in 1984 originally as AMEC Properties, the real estate arm of AMEC plc, a prominent British engineering and project services company. Muse is now a mixed-use regeneration business that partners with local authorities, public bodies and institutional investors to deliver complex, multi-phase development schemes across the UK. Muse is the regeneration arm of the FTSE 250 listed Morgan Sindall Group (since acquisition in 2007) whose six divisions cover construction, infrastructure, fit-out, housing, regeneration, and maintenance. Group revenue for 2024 was £4.55b. Muse now employs 130 people across four regional offices in Salford, London, Leeds and Birmingham.

Imagine one organisation planning and delivering an entire mini-town – not just a block of flats or an office tower, but all the parts needed to make it a real community. They create live-work-play neighbourhoods, combining homes, workplaces, shops, transport, green spaces, cultural and community facilities – all designed to foster a sense of place and longevity.

Muse developments are large scale, creating neighbourhoods and infrastructure in the towns and cities it works in – Salford, Manchester, Leeds, London, Plymouth, Bristol, the North East, across the Midlands and beyond.

Some projects are huge; Salford Central has been built over a period of 15 years, and has a development value of £1billion over a 50 acre site. Delivery has included over 1,000 mixed tenure homes, public and private event spaces, shops and restaurants, 770,000 sq ft of workspace, new and improved pedestrian routes, improved highways and over 1,000 parking spaces.

Smaller schemes like Hale Wharf in Tottenham have delivered 503 homes over five years (with the creation of an important pedestrian bridge across the canal linking the residents to local rail links) valued at £200m.

Due to their scale and complexity projects are usually multi-phased over several years. Indeed Lewisham Gateway has been 20 years in the making with the logistical and infrastructure challenges of diverting two rivers and removing one the busiest roundabouts in the borough.

Muse's projects usually involve public-private partnerships, often in joint ventures with:
- Local Authorities or mayoral development corporations (Manchester, Salford, Oldham, Bury, West Yorkshire, Lewisham, Greater London Authority and many more)

- Government-backed bodies like Homes England

- Instituitional investors like Legal & General and Pension Insurance Corporation (PIC)

- Landowners and private sector clients

Longstanding partnership English Cities Fund (ECF) comprises Muse, Homes England and Legal & General to deliver large scale, area wide generation.

Newly formed partnership Habiko comprises Muse, Pension Insurance Company (PIC) and Homes England to deliver affordable energy efficient homes to rent.

What was designed?
Brand strategy
Visual identity
Brand portal
Website
Digital and social toolkits
Content design
Film
Photography

Date launched
2022

Fees
Circa £200,000

The Challenge

Despite a strong portfolio of development schemes, Muse had limited differentiation from competitors. Stakeholders didn't fully understand or engage with the brand, which led to:

- Under-leveraged marketing assets
- Low brand salience
- Stagnant digital engagement
- Poor brand recognition of Muse schemes amongst partners, collaborators and end users

Despite being a major player in regeneration, Muse lacked brand recognition and cut-through with Local Authorities. It was perceived as a solid, pragmatic construction-focused company – "well engineered, but lacking imagination" – rather than a dynamic placemaker with a strong track record of positive transformation. This perception stemmed from its public-facing brand, design, and communications, which failed to reflect core values like community focus, sustainability, and innovation. While the internal team broadly understood Muse's mission, there was no formalised brand voice or manifesto – new hires absorbed the ethos informally, resulting in inconsistent messaging and fragmented design across the business.

Before the rebrand, Muse competed with large-scale national developers like Argent and smaller, design-led regional firms such as Urban Splash, Capital & Centric, and Bruntwood. These pluckier rivals had stronger visual identities, bolder storytelling, and better public recognition – qualities that resonated with potential partners. In contrast, Muse was seen as dependable but unimaginative, falling behind competitors with more compelling narratives and considered multi-channel design.

Muse's small marketing team lacked the tools and structure to build a cohesive brand. Messaging varied by project, with no visual standards or systems in place, design was often an afterthought. The website was text-heavy, visually sparse, inaccessible, and not mobile-friendly. It failed to showcase Muse's strengths in placemaking, community impact, and design quality – key factors for client reassurance. Without a robust design and communications framework, Muse struggled to confidently bid for high-value tenders (£100s of millions over many years), which often span 6–12 months and involve intense scrutiny. To compete effectively, Muse needed more strategic, consistent design outputs to support credibility and win work.

The brief

The business understood it needed to reposition its brand to better demonstrate the impact of its work and improve visibility in a crowded B2B market. With little change in perception or communication over the previous decade, Muse required a research-led brand transformation.

Objectives

1. Drive commercial growth by repositioning the Muse brand around its unique role as a placemaker to access bigger opportunities

- Increase development pipeline by 50% over two years (from a baseline of £1.8bn)

2. Increase brand recognition and engagement across stakeholder groups

- Create a more distinctive visual language, better tell Muse's story

3. Modernise digital platforms to reflect the new identity and improve performance and engagement

- Grow web traffic by 500% within 18 months (albeit from a low baseline of 325 visitors per month)
- Improve digital engagement metrics (bounce rate, email open rate, LinkedIn followers)

4. Improve efficiencies in Muse's marketing processes and outputs

- Develop systems to unify design, and deliver more quickly via the marketing team

Design solutions

1. Drive commercial growth by repositioning the Muse brand around its unique role as a placemaker to access bigger opportunities:

Brand Strategy
Brand surveys identified Muse's existing brand archetype and qualities, while stakeholder workshops provided qualitative insights and secured internal alignment. Remote interviews with key customers, local authorities, landowners, and legal partners, revealed underused brand equity in Muse's ability to create purposeful places, a white space unclaimed by direct competitors. These findings informed a holistic rebrand centred on the 'Super Citizen' persona, heroic yet humble, repositioning Muse as a placemaker with a visual identity rooted in authentic imagery, human stories, and regional pride.

2. Increase brand recognition and engagement across stakeholder groups:

Visual identity
Muse's new, simplified wordmarque strikes a balance between approachability and authority—crucial for public-private partnerships. It stands out across hoardings, digital platforms, and bid documents, especially at small sizes, offering instant recognition and a familiar presence.

Assets, including a softer, sometimes unexpected colour palette and bespoke 'Citizen' typeface, shift the tone towards a more characterful, people-focused identity – emphasising placemaking over engineering. Design systems and editorial approach reinforce the business's robust and organised reputation and when combined with a new photographic & film library of Muse places they convey the urban transformation across a UK portfolio. Imagery now forefronts people and activity over infrastructure – architecture becomes the backdrop for community life rather than the focus. Long and short-form video content better show what a Muse place is like and what it stands for. This richer storytelling and distinctive visual identity boost brand recognition, reposition Muse as a true placemaker, and strengthen engagement with stakeholders. The brand now feels more relatable and confident, supporting commercial growth, joint venture bids, and meaningful local connections.

3. Modernise digital platforms to reflect the new identity and improve performance and engagement:

Website
The new website exemplifies a modern digital platform through its clear brand positioning and responsive design. It communicates strong value messaging – "We create beautiful, diverse and sustainable places" – and adopts a mobile-first, responsive layout for seamless navigation across all devices. The content-driven user experience is enriched by a journal and stories section that highlights thought leadership, using structured headings, compelling visuals, and pull-quotes to engage users. Transparency and a focus on ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) are evident in the dedicated content addressing social impact, sustainability, and placemaking, as well as the inclusion of awards and partnerships that build trust and credibility. A strong visual identity is maintained through high-quality project imagery and multimedia content, including downloadable resources that support brand consistency and user engagement.

4. Improve efficiencies in Muse's marketing processes and outputs

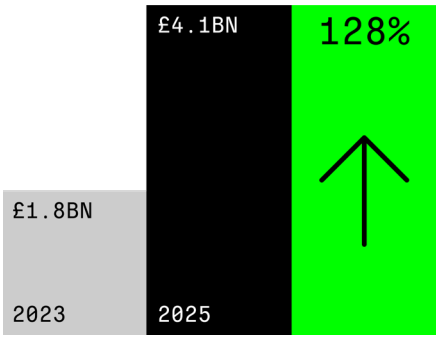
Brand portal
Organisation-wide access to a digital brand standards platform (made in app.standards.site) with guidelines, toolkits, libraries, assets and comprehensive templated documents means that the small marketing team can quickly produce effective, on-brand, good looking communications, in-house or with other design partners.

From web to pitch, Muse's visual identity and digital platforms act as a commercial enabler – leveraging good design to improve deal flow.

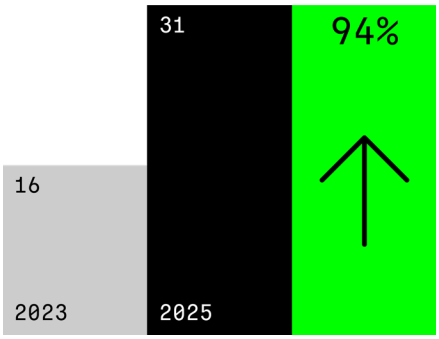
Results

Objective 1
Drive commercial growth by repositioning the Muse brand around its unique role as a placemaker to access bigger opportunities
▪ Increase development pipeline by 50% over two years (from a baseline of £1.8bn)

Results



PIPELINE GROWTH



LIVE PROJECTS

Dramatic commercial impact
Post rebrand Muse more regularly compete alongside the national giants of LandSec, Related Argent, British Land and Allied London – a step change in the scale of competitor and size of project.

Phil Mayall, Managing Director, Muse
"The rebrand has really helped shift the dial on our business. This wasn't just a new logo and website, we really dug deep to get to the essence of who we are as an organisation, and to articulate that. It's given us the language and the tools to talk about ourselves, and to untap a collective pride in who we are. This has been particularly evident in our new business efforts, helping us to build new partnerships, with the business going from strength to strength. Last year, our development pipeline saw an increase to £4.1 billion, up from £1.8 billion in 2023."

Objective 2
Increase brand recognition and engagement across stakeholder groups
▪ Create a more distinctive visual language, better tell Muse's story

Results
Potential partners now have an increased confidence in Muse's positioning and track record through clearer storytelling, suitable brand assets and greater sector recognition. A recent brand perception survey undertaken in June 2025 shows that Muse now has a reputation for Social Impact, and association with creativity and innovation has grown by 20 points, the greatest change in its brand perception overall. Dispelling the old associations of "well engineered, but lacking imagination".

Emphasis of improved position as a Placemaker and Industry leader:
▪ Creation of Habiko, a partnership between PIC, Homes England and Muse to deliver new sustainable homes and places across the UK

Events
Sector Engagement:

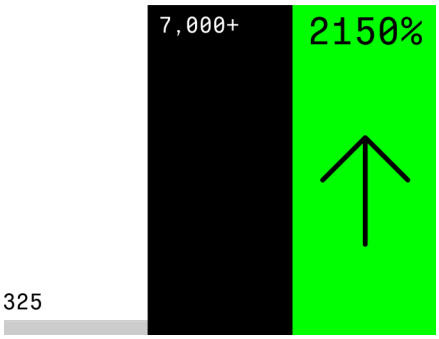
▪ UK's Real Estate Investment & Infrastructure Forum (UKREiiF) event attendance:
From fringe attendance (2023) to running a stage with 1,200 visitors (2024) → nearly 2,000 (2025) Muse now hosts a dedicated stage and features on the main programme and App for the event, the only Developer partner to be added.

Awards
Muse now has more confidence in entering more awards schemes:

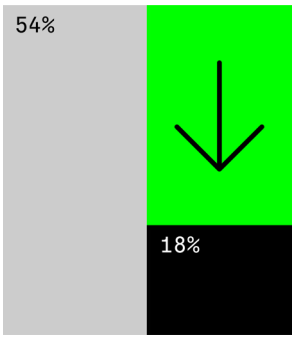
▪ Awards won in 2024: 26
(highest ever in Muse's 40-year history)
▪ Previous average: 10 per year

Objective 3
Modernise digital platforms to reflect the new identity and improve performance and engagement
- Grow web traffic by 500% within 18 months (albeit from a low baseline of 325 visitors per month)
- Improve digital engagement metrics (bounce rate, email open rate, LinkedIn followers)

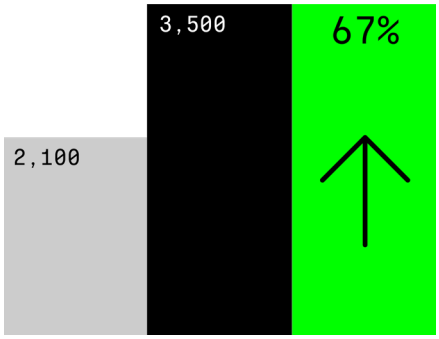
Results



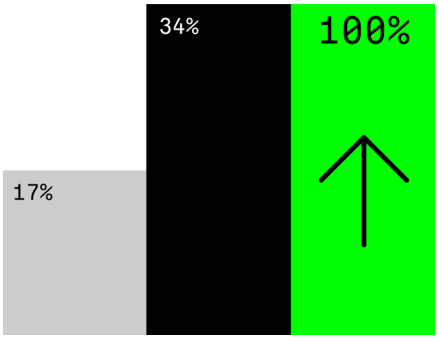
UNIQUE MONTHLY WEBSITE VISITS



BOUNCE RATE



MAILING LIST SUBSCRIBERS



MAILOUT OPEN RATE
NOW DOUBLE THE INDYSTRY AVERAGE

Objective 4
Improve efficiencies in Muse's marketing processes and outputs
- Develop systems to unify design, and deliver more quickly via the marketing team

Results
Internal efficiencies:

- More effective and coherent marketing bids and business responses

- Cost and time savings for internal team created through brand platform and templates (brand assets, digital brochures, press releases, photography, bid documents, social media)

- Easier to use website that better tells Muse story and proposition

Catherine Beaumont, Content Manager, Muse
"Having worked at Muse for over decade, I've witnessed first-hand the transformative effect of the rebrand on our business. Prior to the rebrand, we always had a strong message, story and track record, but what we lacked was a brand that enabled us to **share** that story in an effective, creative and engaging way. What we achieved through the project was really finding our voice and clearly articulating our messages with our target audiences. It gave us the words and the visual tools to be able to do this. It gave us one voice - a consistency across the business and the means to tell our story and shout about our successes."

Other influencing factors

Sustainability agenda
Whilst the brand transformation has coincided with growing industry trends in sustainable development and new government initiatives to increase housebuilding it's too early in the timeframe to determine uplift. Planning of significant new schemes takes years to filter into the system (rather than the few months the Government's new ambitions have been published). Muse credits its strategic repositioning as the key enabler of this phase of growth. The clarity, cohesion, and confidence the new brand brought allowed Muse to pursue new partnerships, secure larger development sites, and engage more meaningfully with stakeholders.

Marketing channels were not expanded
Muse did not dramatically increase the marketing channels it employed. The same channels (website, bid documents, hoardings, and digital communications) were used post-rebrand, but with dramatically improved impact due to the strategic use of design, storytelling, and identity systems. This reinforces that it was not more marketing, but better-designed marketing, that made the difference.

External market conditions
While the UK regeneration and infrastructure market saw modest, sector-wide growth, this context alone cannot explain Muse's improved brand engagement or increased confidence in high-value JV bids. Other players operated in the same climate without seeing a similar leap in recognisability or perception – highlighting the rebrand's distinct effect.

Internal communications and alignment
Although internal values and culture were strong prior to the rebrand, they were inconsistent in how they were expressed. The rebrand formalised these into a clear brand voice and visual system, equipping teams with the tools and confidence to tell a unified story. This was not a cultural shift, but rather the result of design-led alignment.

Leadership Change – strategic continuity maintained
Muse underwent a leadership transition during the rebrand, following the retirement of successful founder and long-serving Managing Director Matt Crompton. Kate Bowyer was appointed as his successor in early 2022 but held the role for only a few months before stepping down in 2023, after which Phil Mayall was appointed as MD. While the leadership evolved, there was no shift in Muse's service offer or culture. Both Bowyer and Mayall supported the design-led rebrand, using it to better articulate Muse's long-standing strengths in public-private partnerships and regeneration. This strategic continuity reinforces that the transformation in perception was driven by design, not structural overhaul.

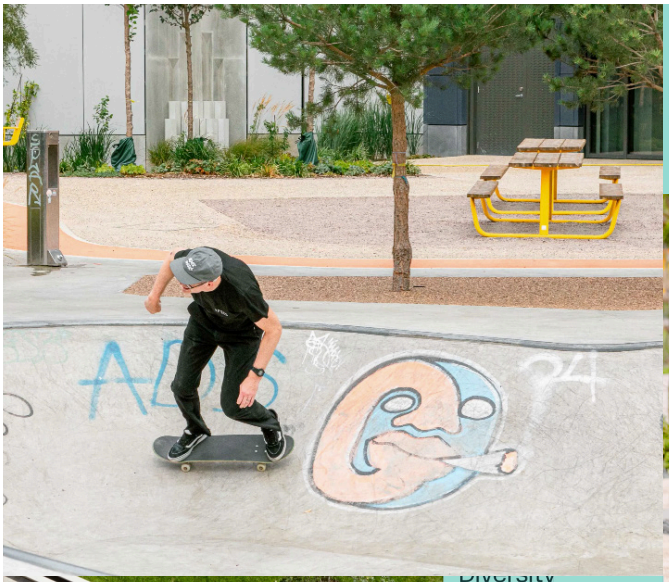
Design as the Primary Driver
Every significant outcome; increased brand recognition, stronger stakeholder engagement, improved tender success confidence, and repositioning Muse as a credible placemaker, can be directly linked to the rebrand.
The project gave the business a cohesive visual identity, formalised brand voice, and storytelling framework that didn't previously exist. No other external factor contributed materially to the results.

The project proves the long-term commercial power of design grounded in insight. The rebrand of Muse, anchored in research and executed across every channel, has delivered measurable, sustained effectiveness. It not only transformed perception but unlocked real business potential, redefining Muse's role in the property sector for years to come.

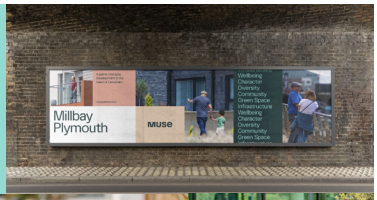
Pre rebrand


muse
DEVELOPMENTS
Relationships you can measure
SOCIAL VALUE PLAN RELEASE
The regeneration partner of choice
The urban landscape ... transformed
City centres – a developer's perspective

Post rebrand

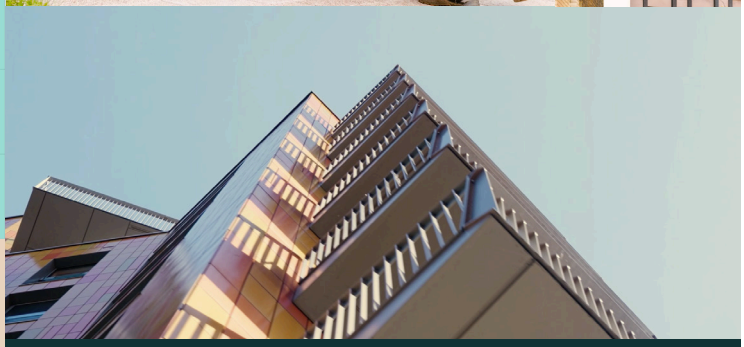


We're building a brighter future, together.



MUSE

Community
Wellbeing
Green Space
Infrastructure
Character
Diversity
Community
Wellbeing
Green Space
Infrastructure



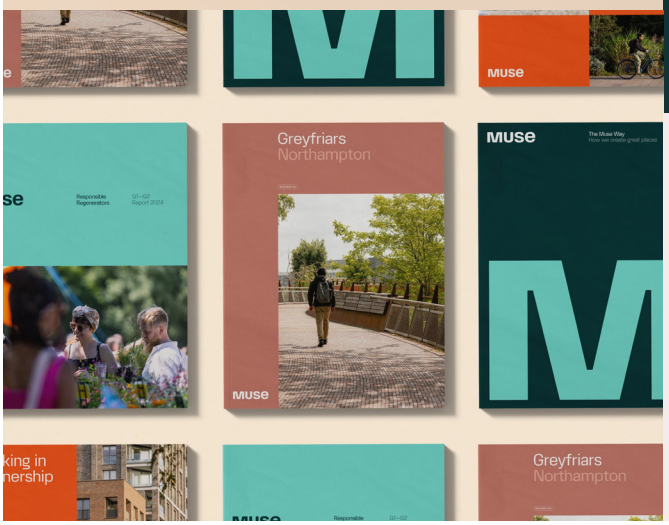
Citizen Regular
Medium
Semibold
Bold

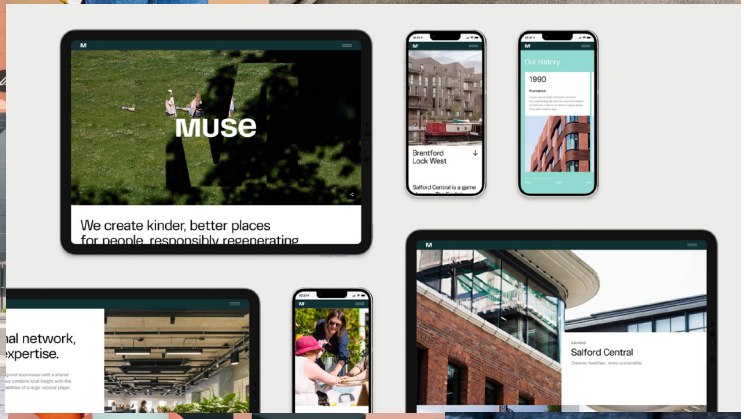
ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
0123456789

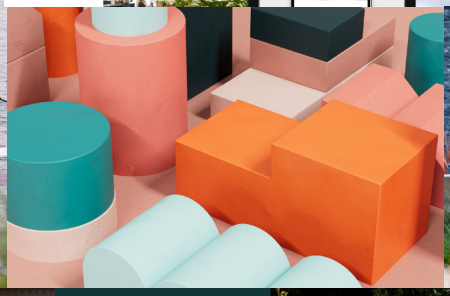
ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
0123456789

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
0123456789

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz
0123456789



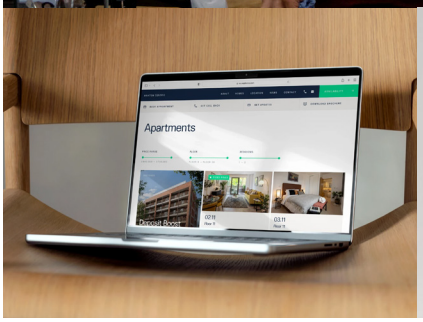


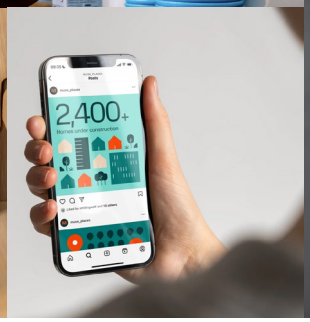


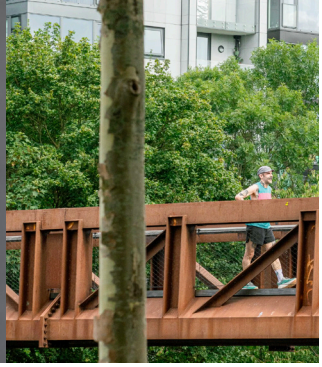
Delivering change that resonates.

MUSEPLACES.COM

muse







Credits

Smiling Wolf

Creative director
Simon Rhodes

Design lead
Jim Hough

Web developer
Stephen West

Studio & production manager
Andy Syson

Design
Alys Mordecai

Design
Scott Carroll

Film & photography
Bellboy

Typeface
M22 type foundry

Animation & film
People & Pixels

Muse client-side

Head of Brand and Communications
Orla McGrath

Head of Communications
Carly Jones

Brand and Marketing Manager
Thea Silvani

Content Manager
Catherine Beaumont

Iona MacRury
Regional Marketing and Communications Manager

Regional Marketing
and Communications Manager North West
Charlotte Kennedy