‘El Reto de la Vivienda’

The ‘NORC’ as an innovative approach for addressing housing inequities for older communities

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Manchester Urban Ageing Research Group (MUARG)

- Interdisciplinary and place-based research on ageing in urban environments
- Pioneers creative, coproduction approaches with older people, policy actors, practitioners and community organisations
- Shapes the development of inclusive ageing policies at local, national and international levels

Urban Ageing and Housing

- Interplay of population ageing and urbanisation
- However, ageing intersects with wider urban challenges (e.g. gentrification, financialisation of housing and austerity)
- The UK facing a ‘housing crisis’ (7.5 million people living in non-decent homes)

(Rolnik, 2022; Buffel et al., 2024; Rose, 2024; Centre for Ageing Better, 2025)

Urban Ageing and Unfit Housing

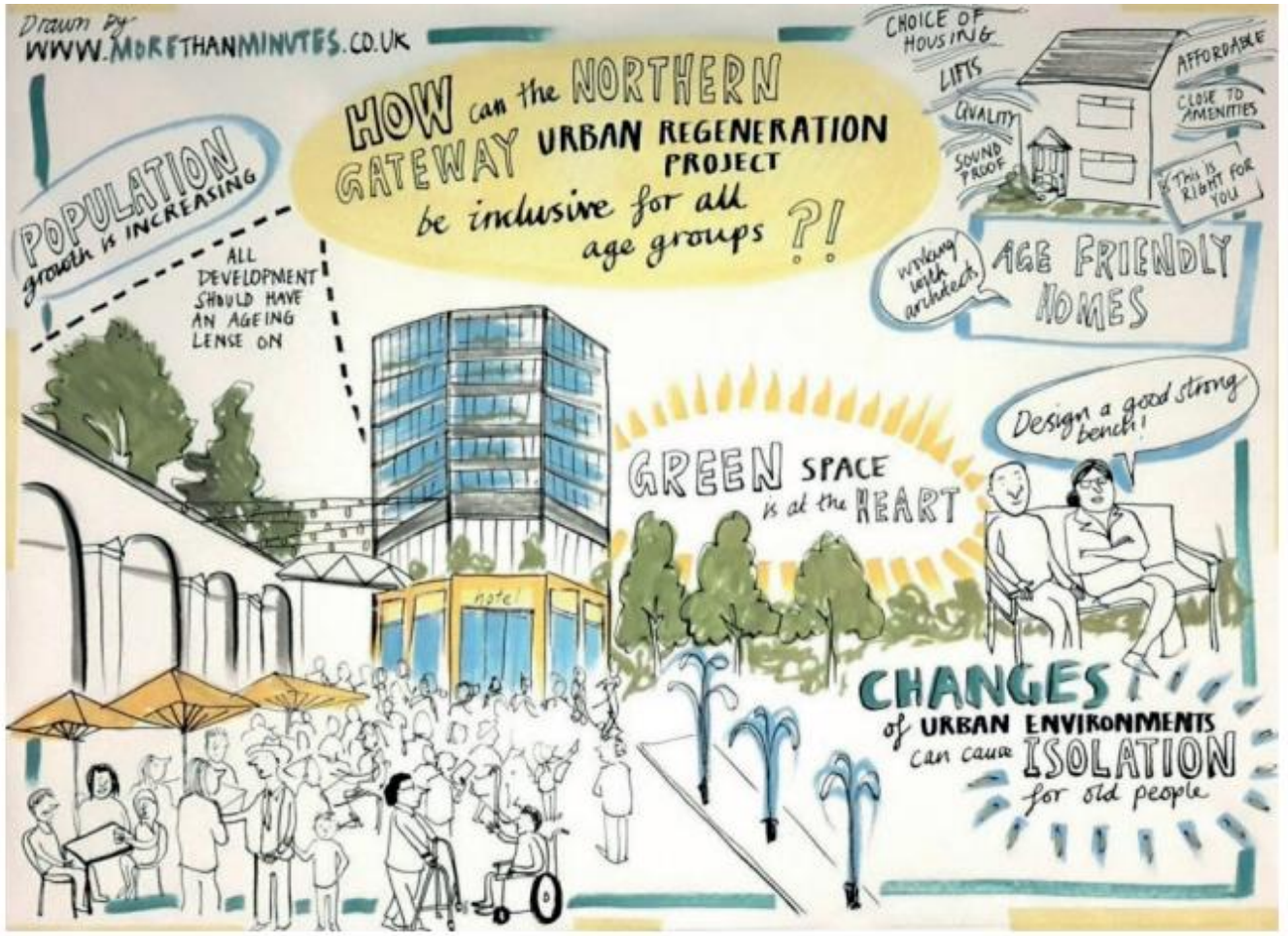
- Housing inequalities felt acutely by older marginalised communities
- For example, older homes difficult to adapt and fuel poverty heightens risk of illnesses and poor mental health
- Changes to community infrastructure exacerbate social exclusion
- These impacts ripple out, costing the NHS £595million in health care costs annually.

(Lewis et al., 2022; Yarker, 2022; Centre for Ageing Better, 2025; Hammond and Buffel, 2025)

Housing Inequities…

How do we support and develop housing for an ageing society?

How can we devise approaches that are inclusive and equitable for different groups of older people facing housing inequities and undergoing urban change?



Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities (NORCs)

*NORC programmes respond to the high number of **older adults concentrated in one area** by providing a range different **services of health and social support** that are **retrofit into the existing housing structures** older people have always lived.*

- Established in the US, typically in high-rise towers
- Foster 'ageing ***well*** in place'
- Built on **collaborative partnerships**, that are **resident-led** and **place-based**

(Jiaxuan et al., 2022; DePaul et al., 2022)

Hulme (Manchester) and Hopton Court

- Undergoing major redevelopment and social change
- Proximity to university campuses means an influx of student accommodation
- **Hopton Court,** a 1960s social housing tower block
- High concentration of older adult (75%) facing a range of structural inequalities and limited care access

"We are a community of ghosts" (Hopton Tenant)

Co-developing the Hopton Court NORC

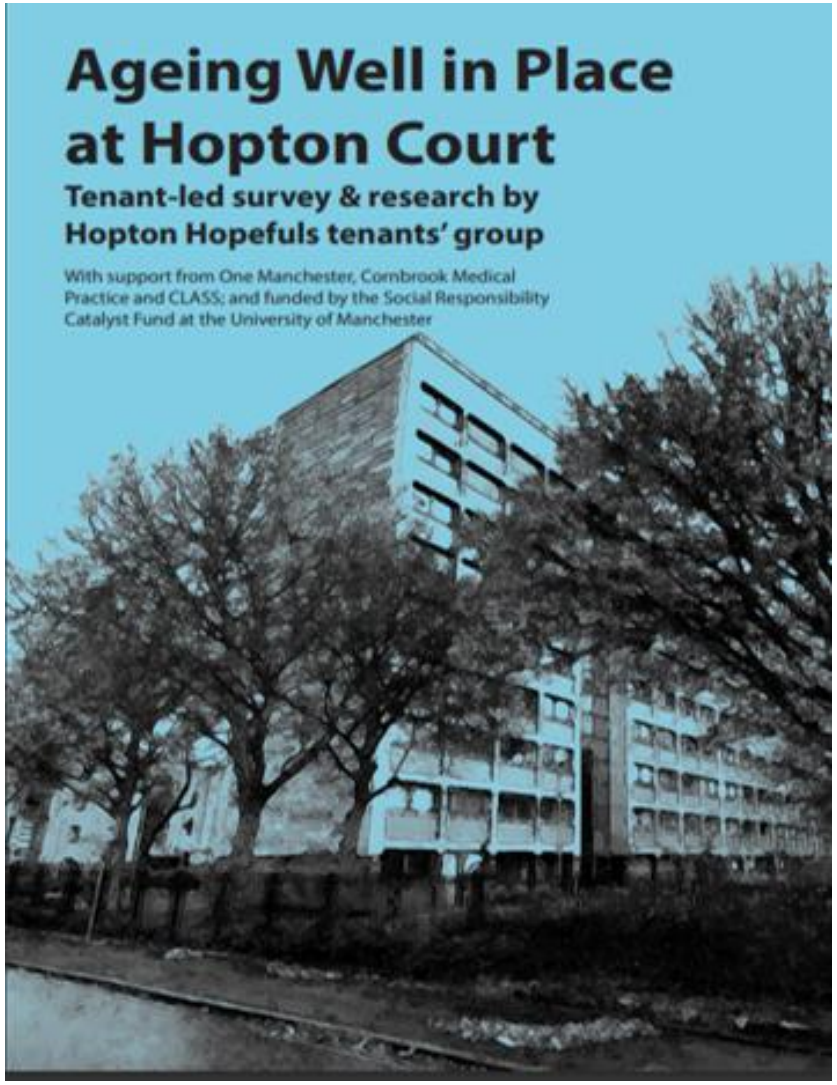
- Older tenants organised creative campaigns against poor housing
- Formed a partnership between tenants, housing provider and academics
- *The NORC as a collective response:*

a) employing staff for care and development;

b) converting a flat into a shared community space;

c) building local health and social links.

The first UK NORC in a disadvantaged, gentrifying area – exploring local barriers and opportunities



Co-implementing the NORC model (2022-2025)

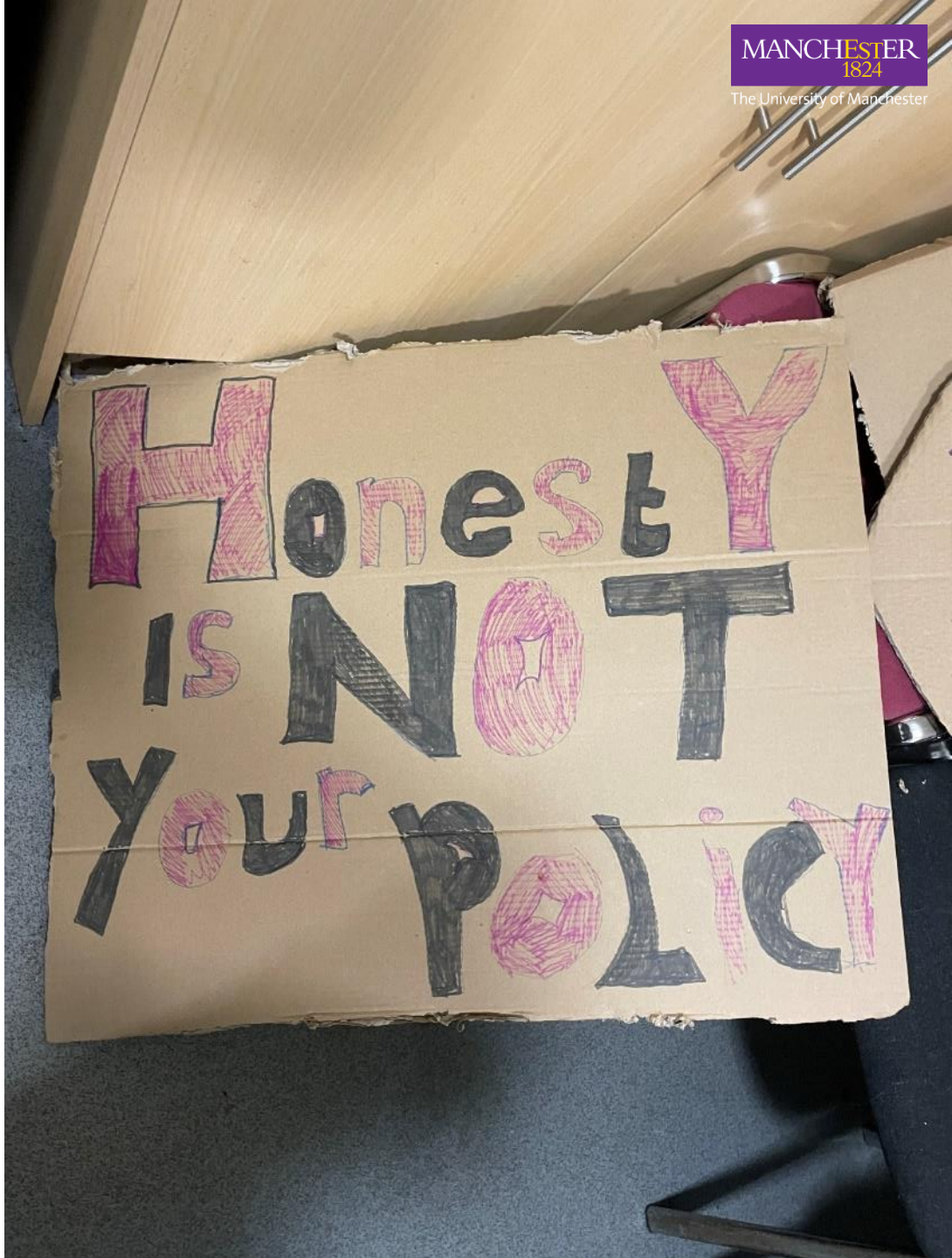
- Funded a NORC Development Worker
- Built trust through drop-ins, events and meetings
- Linked activities to NORC goals (e.g. BBQ consultation)
- Partnered with local health centre for on-site checks

(Hammond et al., 2025)

Challenges in the Hopton Court NORC

- Ongoing delays in delivering the community space
- Limited integration of statutory health services due to resource constraints
- Historical tenant-landlord distrust created friction and conflict in the collaborative partnership

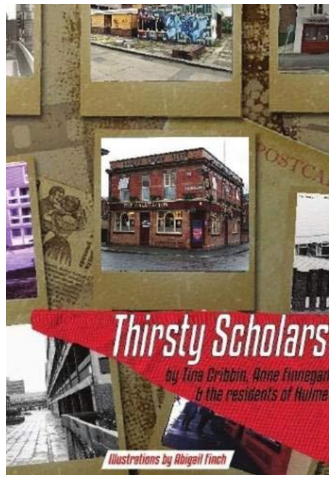
(Kavanagh et al., 2025a; Kavanagh et al., 2025b)

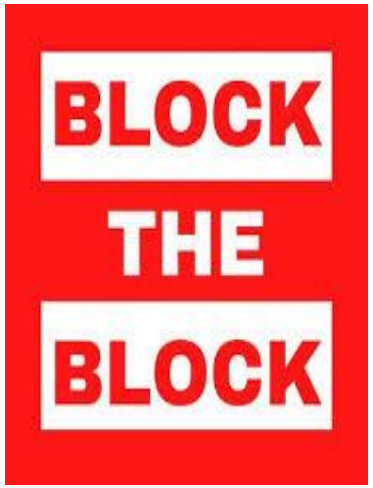


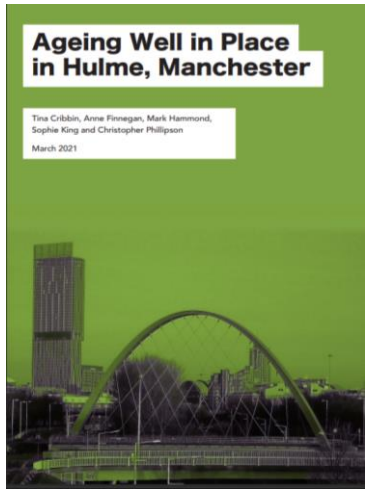
RESISTANCE

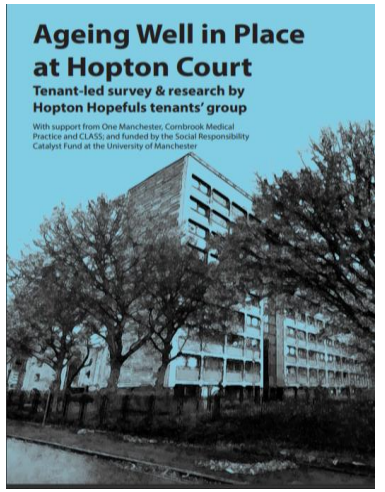
The power of housing initiatives to address wider forms of inequity through collective organising

"Manchester is going through a growth period and is expanding at an alarming rate...there is a community [in Hulme] but it's being slowly eradicated...if someone is ageing, should they lose their community, at a time when they need the community more than ever?" (Hopton Tenant)









RESISTANCE (cont.)

Actions stem from necessity, highlighting the value of building on local, grassroots contributions rather than top-down approaches to 'age-friendly' change

"We will keep up the fight because we are a community that has a right to be here, a right to services and right to be heard…if we buckle under the pressure, we are done for" (Hopton Tenant)

(Kavanagh and Hammond, forthcoming)

IMAGINATION

The need for co-creating alternative housing futures, creating space for new models to be imagined through creative methods that support collective visioning.

"When I first heard about [the NORC], I was empowered by it. From what I can understand, it's about keeping ageing people in their own properties. And so it makes sense from a community perspective, in building community" (Hopton Tenant)

IMAGINATION (cont.)

Efforts need to go beyond surface-level coproduction, de-formalising processes to make engagement more inclusive to explore equitable, alternative futures

“I was knocking on and being like, ‘You want to come downstairs and have a brew [tea]?’ And then being, ‘Oh, there’s a meeting going on. You may as well stay.’ Yeah. Because sometimes obviously people don’t like the word meeting, but it’s very chilled and gets more people in the space” (NORC Development Worker)

Conclusion: *Tackling the Housing Problem*

- New tools and methods needed to address housing inequities
- Specialised housing construction is slow, and there is an opportunity to rethink existing housing
- Wider calls in age-friendly movement for more radical, creative and aspirational approaches
- ***RESISTANCE*** and ***IMAGINATION*** demonstrate the power of creative, collective approaches for reimagining alternative housing futures with older people at the forefront.

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Hammond, M., Kavanagh, N., Lewis, A., Buffel, T., McGarry, P., Phillipson, C., White, S., Yarker, S. (2025)

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MUARG newsletter sign up

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