

Ageing Well in Place in Hulme, Manchester

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1. Introduction

This paper examines a number of options for developing **neighbourhood-based services and support** for older people living in tower blocks in the Hulme neighbourhood of Manchester. The context for this work is:

- the emphasis in public policy of helping people to remain living in their *existing* home and neighbourhood for as long as they wish.
- *pressures* on communities arising from a combination of accelerating urban development/regeneration, gentrification, and an expanding student population.
- *inequalities* in key dimensions affecting the quality of life amongst older people, notably in areas such health, income, and housing.
- the impact of *Covid-19* on neighbourhoods, in particular those experiencing multiple deprivation.
- work to develop Manchester as an '*age-friendly city*' and Greater Manchester as an '*age-friendly*' region.

This paper contributes to the discussion about creating neighbourhood-based supports in Hulme, in four main ways:

- through a review of the development of the *concept* of 'ageing in place'.
- a summary of the Manchester and Hulme *context*.
- a *case study* of an older people's tower block called Hopton Court in Hulme which has strong potential to become a 'Naturally Occurring Retirement Community' with appropriate support.
- an exploration of *options* to support 'ageing in place' at Hopton Court and across the Aquarius estate in Hulme more widely.

2. The development of ‘ageing in place’

‘Ageing in place’ has become a popular term in current ageing policy, defined as ‘remaining living in the community, with some level of *independence*, rather than in residential care’. This approach is favoured by older people and policy-makers: for the former because it is seen to maintain autonomy, and connection to social support, including friends, neighbours and family; for policy-makers because it is seen to avoid or delay institutional alternatives.

However, there is also growing concern about the quality and appropriateness of housing stock to support ageing in place, and the need for *significant* levels of health and social care to ensure that the quality of life of older residents is maintained.

There is overwhelming evidence that the *quality of residential environments* plays a key role influencing whether people will age successfully or optimally. Equally, there is also evidence that *failure* to effectively support people ageing in place can be damaging in various ways, for example:

- Houses and flats are rarely designed to accommodate the needs of those with *physical disabilities* and *mobility* problems.
- *Population changes* within neighbourhoods may lead to problems of social isolation, with the loss of close friends and family.
- *Routine household tasks* may become more difficult for those with long-term health problems, such as preparing meals, doing housework, and managing financial affairs.
- Older people with *unmet health and social care needs* may have no ‘informal’ caregiver to whom they can turn.

Even though people may find ageing in place challenging, the evidence suggests they invariably retain a strong *emotional attachment* to their familiar homes, and neighbourhoods. Evidence for this has been reported across a range of environments, from inner-city areas to suburban and rural communities.

3. The Manchester and Hulme context

Ageing in place raises distinctive pressures in the Manchester context given the extent of health and income inequalities.

Around 22% of **Manchester's** population is aged 50 or over with a life expectancy for men of 75.6 years (UK average 79.1) and a life expectancy for women of 79.1 years (UK average 82.8). However *healthy life expectancy* (years lived without one or more life-limiting medical conditions) for men and women in Manchester is 56 years, whereas the UK average is 63 years for men and 64 years for women. This varies across the city with males in Didsbury East at 65.8 years compared with males in Miles Platting & Newton Heath at 49.6 years (Office of National Statistics, 2016).

Compared to the national average, a greater proportion of older people in Manchester are *income deprived*. The Income Deprivation Affecting Older People Index is the proportion of resident older people aged 60 and over who experience income deprivation. The definition of low income includes both those people who are out of work and those who are in but who have low earnings, including those receiving Pension Credit. Manchester is rated 4th lowest on this index with *36% of older people experiencing income deprivation*.

Hulme has a relatively low number of older people. As of the last census (2011), 11% of people are age 50+ (compared to 34% in England and Wales). There are, however, some parts of Hulme with much higher numbers of older people (50+), notably the Aquarius estate (20%) and nearby tower blocks Hopton Court (75%) and Meredith Court (46%).

While the social and economic inequalities experienced in Hulme are well documented, many of the key risk factors for social isolation can be seen in the data when filtered for age. **The proportion of older people in Hulme who are living alone (54%) is one of the highest in England and Wales, as are the number of residents claiming pension credits (60%).** 30% of older residents report day-to-day activities being limited "a lot" due to long-term health issues, which is over 50% higher than the national average (Dept. of Work and Pensions, 2018).

Data from One Manchester shows that the 12 tower blocks in Hulme house a large proportion of older people, but the distribution between the blocks is uneven. *Of the 758 residents living in the blocks, 37% of residents in the towers are aged 50 and over.* The average length of tenancy among current tenants is 12 years (the figures for tenants 50 and over are unavailable). In total, 18% of the older people living currently reside in one of the 12 tower blocks managed by One Manchester. The two blocks adjacent to the Aquarius estate, Hopton Court and Meredith Court, both have the highest percentage of older people; 75% and 46% respectively. *These two blocks also house the highest number of older people (50+) living alone: 91% of Meredith Court and 96% of Hopton Court.*

4. Community interventions to support ageing in place

A number of approaches have been developed in response to the challenges facing people ageing in place, especially those living alone. Many of these have particular relevance to people living in low income communities. One idea – first developed in the mid-1980s in the USA – comes under the heading of a *Naturally Occurring Retirement Community (NORC)*. A *NORC is a term used to describe an age-integrated housing development or neighbourhood that originally contained different age groups, but which over time has become home to a concentration of older adults, 55 years of age and older.*

New York has seen an extensive development of NORC programmes – often linked to high rise blocks with a large proportion of older residents. Typically, NORC programmes have been partnerships between a housing provider, its residents, and health and social service organisations collaborating to help older adults to age in place. The aim of the NORC is to create opportunities for people to remain active in their community supported by, in the New York case, onsite social and health service supports.

Vladeck & Altman (2015) suggest that the NORC model is an early example of a ‘place-based’ programme, combining service delivery with community-building activities. These authors make the point that: *‘Rather than just focusing on reacting to individuals in crisis – ‘one hip fracture at a time’ - it recognised that the community itself plays an important role in how residents aged’.* The range of issues faced by particular groups of older people – such as those whose experience of long-term poverty is likely to cause or exacerbate age-related conditions – placing considerable pressure on communities, residents, and professional services.

The NORC model is a good fit with the age-friendly approach pioneered in the UK by Manchester City Council. This has included the development of the Older People’s Neighbourhood Support fund which aims – working with the Local Care Organisation – to identify opportunities to incorporate age-friendly practices into their integrated neighbourhood health and social care services.

This model is also closely aligned with Manchester City Council’s recent emphasis on ‘Bringing Services Together’ at the neighbourhood scale which has been accelerated following the impact of COVID-19.

In summary, the NORC model:

- Attempts to link the **individual needs** of older people with the **community** in which they live.
- Works on developing a **partnership** between the various stakeholders supporting older people.
- Is proactive in **anticipating issues** likely to arise both with individuals and amongst the community more generally.
- Can provide a means of developing a **preventive** approach e.g. health promotion, welfare rights advice.
- Links together **single person households** who may be at greater risk of social isolation and/or limited access to services.

The pre-conditions for developing a successful NORC programme (or any type of neighbourhood-based support) are:

- **Commitment** from all relevant stakeholders.
- Mechanisms for the **direct participation and leadership** of the NORC by older people themselves.
- Funding for an onsite **community development worker** or equivalent.
- Linkage to ongoing **housing adaptations** and improvements to the built environment.

On the basis of the above, NORCs should be seen as a vehicle for establishing partnerships between older people and services in terms of:

- delivering integrated support.
- providing enhanced assistance to single-person households.
- enabling people to age well within the community.
- facilitating improvements in housing adaptations and related areas.

5. Hopton Court: Exploring the potential for NORCs in Hulme

Hopton Court is a vibrant community of older and elderly social housing tenants that has the potential to become a Naturally Occurring Retirement Community.

Built in the 1960s, Hopton Court consists of a nine storey block of 70 one-bedroom flats. The block was originally managed as over-55 age-banded council housing until a stock-transfer to City South housing association in 2008. City South merged with Eastlands Homes to become One Manchester in 2015 who now own and manage the properties. One Manchester have an over-40 requirement on allocations to Hopton Court but exceptions have been made. Hopton Court remains predominantly occupied by older and elderly people from a mix of backgrounds with 75% of tenants in the over-50 age group.

The impetus for this research exploring the potential for Hopton Court to be supported as a Naturally Occurring Retirement Community came from a tenant-led community group called On Top of the World Hulme (On Top). On Top have been supporting older tenants at Hopton Court in a variety of ways since 2014. Increasingly, they have found that older people are hiding their frailty and declining to access older people's social care, some fear being relocated into care homes or away from their social networks.



Above: Hopton Hopefuls tenants group meeting, outside Hopton Court, Hulme.

Methodology

The research reported here was carried out by Dr Sophie King at Community-Led Action and Savings Support (CLASS) in partnership with On Top Coordinators Tina Cribbin and Anne Finnegan, and with support from Christopher Phillipson at the Manchester Institute for Collaborative Research on Ageing and Mark Hammond at Manchester School of Architecture.

The aim of the research was to generate first-hand evidence about older people's current experiences and aspirations for housing provision that helps to assess what would enable Hopton Court tenants to age well in place. Wider interviews also explored the potential for Hopton Court to be supported as a NORC as one way to begin addressing the lack of specialist older people's accommodation options in Hulme.

Eleven local tenants were interviewed as part of the research. Nine tenants from Hopton Court participated in semi-structured interviews (four women and five men). Four of these interviewees also took part in a focus group discussion (FGD), together with two additional tenants living nearby on the Aquarius estate who participated in the original Hulme and Moss Side Age Friendly partnership board. Three semi-structured interviews (IV) were also carried out with the On Top Coordinators, a local GP, and staff of One Manchester. Tenant participants were from a mix of ethnic backgrounds, including Black African, Black Caribbean, White British and White Irish.

Any tenant names used in this report are pseudonyms.

This summary of findings makes proposals for ways in which the community at Hopton Court could be supported to become a NORC. The initiative could be used as an action learning site in support of adaptation or replication in other parts of Hulme or Greater Manchester more widely.

On Top of the World

“It’s bringing people together, talking together... I know a few in here and they did need talk to me for years and years and years... and we meet and we talk now.” *Alasdair*

Hopton Court is thriving on community spirit. Tenants are looking after each other when they are sick or returning from hospital. Hot meals are made and delivered to neighbours doors. Mutual aid is alive and well with poetry books exchanged for study skills support and spare chargers at the ready for people struggling with their phones.

It wasn’t always like this. Older tenants like Alasdair, who has lived at Hopton Court for 18 years, remember how people would keep themselves to themselves and that older people were socially-isolated. Things began to change following a creative collaboration between tower block tenants in Hulme and Gorton, One Manchester housing association, and the Royal Exchange Theatre over the period 2015-2018. Through a hard-hitting play called ‘*Can You Here Me From Up Here?*’, older tenants were not only able to voice their responses to the Grenfell Tower disaster, but also to make visible the discrimination and marginalisation experienced by working-class older people living in tower blocks in Manchester.

With support from One Manchester, Anne Finnegan (a dance and theatre arts facilitator), and Tina Cribbin (a writer, researcher and former social worker who is also a Hopton Court tenant), were able to continue working with tower block residents in the Aquarius estate after the Royal Exchange collaboration ended, becoming: On Top of the World Hulme (On Top). Their core focus has always been on promoting wellbeing and reducing social isolation among older people through creative arts and social events. This has included a weekly drop-in in a small caretakers’ room at Hopton Court where up to ten people could squeeze in together for a brew and a chat. On Top have gone on to take people on trips away, theatre trips, and encouraged people to participate in a wide-range of social events.

However, Tina and Anne have increasingly found themselves drawn away from “the fun stuff” and having to focus on advocating for older people with a complex array of different agencies, given the absence of other forms of support. This was never their intention, but as trust has grown between Hopton Court tenants themselves, and between tenants and the On Top Coordinators through the social activities, the level of unmet needs has become increasingly apparent. *As a result, they have found themselves struggling to navigate complex health and social care systems and even having to support elderly tenants through end of life situations.* Tenants themselves, and the On Top team (which includes Christopher Finnegan) are finding that existing systems are inadequate in and of themselves for enabling Hopton Court tenants to age well in place.

Older tenants and the On Top team want to build on the strengths of their community to co-produce a better future for older people at Hopton Court and across the Aquarius estate more widely.

Recent experiences of Hopton Court tenants

Love where you live

The Hopton Court tenants we engaged love where they live and nine out of eleven who we interviewed said they would not want to relocate in later life to another neighbourhood in Manchester or to another place altogether.

Every person we spoke to said that the single thing that made Hopton Court a great place to live was their neighbours and community. Most people had strong social ties to others within the Aquarius estate; others had strong social ties to their Hopton Court neighbours who had become their family when all or many of their relatives lived overseas.

“The positives are the people to be honest, the community... For me as I get older, I haven't got the time or the energy to know what to do, to be building them bonds with people somewhere else. It's the attachment to the area, it's the place I've always lived, it's in your blood” (IV01)

Tenants also appreciated the mix of nationalities among their community and one tenant was keen to breakdown the stereotypical ideas about communities of older people:

“old people are put into a category and they're potentially put into a silo which is either an old people's home or somewhere where they can be carolled, looked after as a whole, they're not treated as individuals anymore. We're all different in here, as different as can be” (IV02)

An African woman we interviewed, who loves attending On Top activities but spends most days alone in her flat, would like to have more opportunities to spend time with her neighbours. She also wished she had more contact with people who spoke her first language, suggesting that there may be scope for additional support reflecting variations in people's cultural or ethnic background.

Other strong positives expressed about Hopton Court were the convenience of the location in between the city centre and Chorlton with good bus links to both because of the number 86 right outside the gates, and having Cornbrook medical practice directly across the street.

"I love it here now me though, this is the finest for me, I used to live in a four-bedroom house, but I like this place better than anything now. I could go to Birmingham to live with one of my sisters, I could go here or there, but I won't, I love it here. It's great for the bus service, and my neighbours along here are great as well. [...] If there was anything wrong with me I'd go over there [Cornbrook medical practice] at 6am and they'd say 'right now [name] you go on home and one of the doctors will call you when they've got time' – its great! And sometimes if I don't want to go over there, they'll come here! Oh its brilliant!" (IV07)

Next door neighbours take care to notice each other's movements and take care of older friends:

'If I get up and I don't see his curtains open I'll check on him. He opens his curtains and he opens his bathroom window first thing" (FGD01)

"Old [name] down below is the longest here. He keeps to himself. I go to see him every day with the paper. He's coming up on 80 and you've got to keep an eye on him you know? ...Every day I'm out at 6.30 and I go and get the paper and I give him the paper and then we swap papers later. He'd never go anywhere but I got him coming [out] with us, but you've got to push him you know?" [IV07]

Everyone without exception took time to explain the huge difference that having a site-based support group like On Top had made to the Hopton Court community. An increasing amount of mutual aid has emerged in the block in response to COVID-19 which has been supported significantly by On Top's ability to keep some of their activities going in the Hopton Court gardens and through a WhatsApp group.

One male pensioner was particularly keen to explain the positive mental health and community building impacts that these activities had made especially during the COVID-19 crisis:

"When I first moved in this block, you'd let on to people and you didn't get any response. But Anne and Tina's group [...] organizing coming down and Tina saying 'well you're living on your own. Instead of sitting up there on your own, come down and make friends'. She used to make breakfast in there, bacon, sausage and stuff. And you get people coming down. [...] you'd sit there and be like: 'What am I going to do today? But now you go like, well Wednesday's the drop in. Might be only one day, but it breaks the monotony of the week, and you get people, and we've gradually gotten a few... There's a meaning now. Rather than sat there'n: 'what we gonna do?'" (IV04)

On Top is largely volunteer-run with limited resources and the needs they are encountering outstrip their capacity to provide support. The next sections outline some of these needs and experiences as well as looking at suggestions from the Hopton Court community for ways they could be supported to build on the NORC they have already begun to create.

Isolation, mental health and next of kin

Many older and elderly tenants at Hopton Court remain isolated and disengaged, and mental health challenges are a significant problem for people spending a large amount of time home alone within limited living space. This has been exacerbated by COVID-19 but is a long-standing problem.

I can't stay in.... I'm alright in the house up to about 1 o'clock... but after that... I, I like to get out. See old [name] he's been in that place down there now since March, he only walks to the corner shop and that's it like" (IV07)

"It's alright for one person but it's still small and looking at the same walls every day. You can only watch so much TV - or I can, and it's just, you need to get out to give you that sense of a bit more freedom. Get out. Walk about." (IV04)

Three tenants placed emphasis on their lack of control over how they use their physical environment or over what they might want to change or do differently.

"In terms of wellbeing, it's also about not feeling in control of where you live, not feeling like you can do anything to change it. And it's almost like, once you are inside, you are forgotten ... What it looks like on the outside is very different. You cannot imagine who are in the house 24/7, do not go out." (IV01)

"It's a really small flat and it's hard to make it homely. I put my hanging basket out and I get told it's a fire risk. As well, because I live at the end I put a small chair on the balcony. Just to get some air really. Well I've been told that's not allowed either. You're always being told what you can't do here. It's also hard because you seem to have people knocking on your door, I don't know how many times they have checked alarms and what not. It's like it's not your home you're constantly reminded you just live here. I also think having younger people in the block does not help with the noise, and the younger people don't mix. You know, I would give anything for patio doors." (IV12)

One of these tenants felt that this feeling of being instructed or controlled was exacerbated by the approach taken to building management and maintenance which could be more involving of tenants and less hierarchical:

"I'd like the caretaker to be more integrated [...] I'd like it more 'we' than 'him' so it was more involving of the tenants... it feels like an us and them thing at the moment, and I'd prefer it to be a team thing" (IV11)

Tenants were very appreciative of staff at One Manchester. Views expressed were around changing systems and approaches rather than finding fault with individuals.

A deep concern for the On Top team in relation to isolation among older people is preventing people being found dead in their flats, who may have had hidden or complex needs. In their experience, this happens most often among people without family nearby or a next of kin in regular contact. They are aware of four such cases in the last three years but suspect there are more.

Cara was one of these people who died - in 2014:

Cara

"Cara was an older lady, I don't know her age, I'd say she was in her early 70s. Anytime she was at the bus stop she'd speak to me. And then I realised that she was going up in the same lift and she was going up to the same floor and I said oh do you live here? And she went yeah. I realised she lived next door to me - and she never spoke to me again.

I think it's because she was hiding her alcoholism. So, the only way I could check on her is I used to hear her going past to the chute in the mornings... and then I'd see her at the bus stop or whatever.

I didn't hear anything for about a week. I asked about - no one knew, asked the Caretaker, no one knew. I think at the time there was a swap over of Caretakers. Anyway, eventually, you could smell the body. You could smell it all over. And I kept saying there's something wrong. And it wasn't until maggots were coming into my bathroom that...

Anyway, they came, and the Caretaker found her. Apparently, she was found in the bathroom covered in flies... And my horriblest thought is, this woman had nobody, had no family, had no one to speak for her, to advocate for her. It's like, they are putting people into accommodation and forgetting that they're human. Giving someone a house, you can't just give someone a house without putting something around it for support, it just doesn't work. And people die, I get that, but it's the way they die, it's the way they are let down."

Access and security

There are long-term problems with the security gates and intercom system. The problems have recurred over many years suggesting there is a more fundamental problem than repeated technical fixes can resolve. A local GP shared her recent experiences in October 2020:

“On Monday this week, one of our nurses and practice managers were going around Hulme to give flu jabs to the people who we knew aren’t going to get to the surgery to have the flu jabs. And so, at about half past 9 I get a message saying we’re stood outside HC and we can’t get in...And what had happened is, they were going to visit someone at HC who really is never going to answer the door in a reliable fashion and because they’re not usually the people who go and see her, they didn’t know how to get in. That said, I went to see her about three or four weeks ago and I couldn’t get in either... [the key fob system] is not fool proof, because it may not be that we’ve come from here to there... in the old days we used to have a caretaker who you’d ring the bell and say I’ve come to see such and such and they just let you in.”

Tenants, health professionals and support workers suggested that there is a need for a named contact on site who can give health and social care professionals access to the building when needed. Sometimes people are just too frail or too ill to give visitors access via digital or intercom systems.

Hopton Court tenants were clear that the need for access has to be balanced by the need for privacy and security. However, security has also become an increasing cause of concern since the concierge service was ended in 2017.

One long-term tenant in his early 70s explained how: *‘They done away with security first, and then it just went haywire, everybody walking in’.*

Another female tenant who likes to go out for a walk in the early morning described how she had seen a young man inside the security gates scouting around the flats at about 6am looking in the windows. When she asked him what he was doing he looked at her threateningly and told her to mind her own business. She was scared and worried for the other tenants but had no-one on site to report it to.

Marks have also been made on the external walls of particular tenants’ flats in paint. Older tenants are worried that these markings have been left by local gangs to mark out which flats might be easiest to break into or have elderly or vulnerable people living there. Whether or not this is the case, it demonstrates a climate of fear and a feeling that the accommodation is not secure. A serious incident occurred in March 2020 on an occasion when the security gates were broken.

Florence

An elderly woman who came to Hopton Court as a refugee and has limited English woke in the night to find a man in her flat holding a knife. She was terrified and pretended to be asleep. He remained in her flat going through her things for an hour before leaving with £200 cash and her bank cards, when she was finally able to call the police.

After talking to the police she didn't speak to anyone about what had happened to her despite feeling very shaken. It wasn't until one of the On Top coordinators did her usual ring-round that she was able to talk to someone about the incident and get some support. In the months that followed, she was afraid that the man would come back and she has been losing a lot of sleep.

One of the Caretakers was informed about the incident and said he would look at the CCTV but Florence was later told that it was wiped before the Caretaker was able to look at it. He later told her the cameras would not have picked up the intruder, but Florence's flat is positioned centrally and given that the security gates were broken at the time, it seems likely that the intruder entered through the main gate.

The police recently informed her that the man responsible has been caught and put in prison. She feels better now she knows that he is in prison but she still does not feel safe in her flat.

Knowing where to go for help

A 71-year-old tenant talked about how he had lost one of his neighbours who was a good friend. He felt that he didn't get the care that he needed in his later life and expressed sadness that his situation pre-dated the On Top drop-in at Hopton Court where he feels he would have received the help and advice he needed:

"He kept telling us that he didnee know to do this and that. He could have got plenty of help but he didn't know about it... if Tina and Anne had Top of the World running then, he wouldn't have had to ask he'd have found out." (IV06)

Another elderly tenant who had stopped using his shower some time ago for fear of being able to get out of the bath again was surprised to learn that he might be entitled to adaptations at his apartment:

"They can do anything for you once you get the health people involved, it's just getting the right people along the line that's the way it is...if you're really sick as well now... not for me - my legs are a bit fucking wobbly but... Well, they wouldn't give it to the likes of me?" (IV07)

A different male tenant explained that older tenants are not provided with information about their entitlement to apply for adaptations on grounds of disability or ageing so people just don't know about it.

Anne Finnegan expressed how frustrating it can be trying to navigate a complex system of diverse public and private services and never knowing who to go to for which issue or finding that the situation has changed again since the last time you tried to help someone:

"I just want a hotline where I can ring up and someone will put me through to the correct person to speak to about the issue I am dealing with. Like when you ring 999 and they say which service do you require? Like that but for health and social care...There is supposed to be someone who coordinates all these different services - is that a care navigator? ...for the whole of the Aquarius estate you'd need at least two."

Similarly, the local GP we spoke to explained that even as a health care professional, within the fragmentary nature of the current system, it is difficult to keep track of who to go to for the satisfactory resolution of an older person's care challenges because of constant system-change and turnover of lower-paid staff. The GP described changes over time from an effective elderly care nurse network that liaised closely with District Nurses and *'used to know people, and to know who was who'*; to the falls team who have to *'parachute in and make recommendations and parachute out again'*; to the Community Matrons who were *'really good'* but then *'the ones we had were moved to other areas of the city'*; and onwards more recently to the Care Navigators who are *'brilliant'* but who, the GP suspects, will all now be applying for jobs as Focused Care Workers because those *'are paid on Band 6 and Care Navigators are paid on Band 4 so why wouldn't they?'*.

Tenants took care to celebrate the efforts of their local housing officer who received a great deal of praise for her hard work in trying to address and then follow up about the range of issues people raise with her. The tenants were also aware that the housing officer is responsible for 1,000 properties across the city and is simply unable to meet all the needs of tenants at Hopton Court and surrounding areas.

Care navigators were another form of support which the On Top team referred to as being an excellent idea but covering too broad an area to be able to adequately address the level of need in the Aquarius estate.

Adaptations: Older tenants need support to understand their rights to adaptations to their flats in later life. On Top know of three elderly men who are no longer taking showers because it involves climbing in and out of the bath. They are now only washing at their hand basin. They suspect there are several more. There is no hand rail in the lifts. The design of the block makes the journey into the building and into a flat from the outside challenging for people with mobility issues. Several tenants suggested that the most elderly tenants should be moved to the ground and first floors.

Older people's social care

The health and social care needs of older Hopton Court tenants are heightened by the combination of ageing and multiple deprivation as the local GP set out clearly:

"The really important thing [to understand] is that it's not that we have masses of elderly people, it's the fact that within our population, the elderly people we do have, have massive, massive needs, they are really, really vulnerable... Our practice is in the second or third decile in terms of deprivation nationwide, but those elderly people are actually in an even lower decile...it's because we have so many students and young professionals that it sort of dilutes it a bit. But our elderly population and our very young population are really very, very deprived... And that is a massive part of what is causing the issues that people have."

The views and experiences shared during our own small-scale study illuminate the ways in which older people in this socio-economic group are more likely to be experiencing a whole series of other forms of exclusion and inequality affecting access to information, social participation, and even having any expectation of being looked after in older age. This results in people who need social care provision not accessing that provision and the weight of those needs falling on the shoulders of (usually) women providing unpaid informal care while living on a low income themselves, with impacts in turn on their own wellbeing. Tina Cribbin gave an account of the experiences of Callum, an elderly male tenant who passed away in 2019.

Callum

"Callum was 71, he came to England from Ireland when he was 9, lived in Liverpool and sailed all over the world, that's what he did for many years. And then he drank a lot like most men did then, and then he had colon cancer.

Near the end ... he went in hospital, he come out. The care he had was totally inappropriate. Instead of coming out to a care plan he came out to the 're-enablement team'. [...]

The re-enablement team would press the buzzer and he wouldn't respond. When I called they would say they're not coming in because he didn't answer the buzzer. I said 'he can't answer the buzzer because he's got colon cancer he's end of life care'. 'Well we're here to re-enable' they said [...] He told us things like: he was lay on the couch and he wanted to get up and he said 'Can you help me up?', and they said 'we're not allowed to touch yer...'

It got to the point where, I'd go in and check on him and he had no idea where he was, he'd be naked on the floor covered in his own faeces, freezing... it was horrific [...] From what we saw, the carers weren't caring, they had a completely different

remit, I mean it was a lot of breakdown of communication and I also think it was because Callum had no family. And it breaks my heart, that because of that, they just get treated like nothing, not even names. And I think what happened in the last two weeks of his care was, it got to the point where we didn't think we could cope with the trauma of fighting agency after agency after agency that we decided we would do what we would do. Like, deal with it. And that's what we did.

And then it came to the day when I found him again like that, I had to lift him up and put him on the bed. He was so frightened, and he knew what was happening, and I just got him on the bed, covered him, changed him, and then put my phone on Irish music for him, and his foot was tapping... And then the doctors came, the ambulance came... I felt like I hadn't slept for weeks... And the doctors came and the ambulance came and they said this is end of life, and I said yes I know that. Then they were arguing about who was going to go into the hospital with them, they wouldn't go. So I went into the ambulance with him, I didn't want him to be alone. And again, at the hospital, Anne came, and we were met by, we wanted hospice care for him, but we were told that wasn't an option. He was just put in a room basically. And then... yeah, he passed away."

One of the challenges highlighted by the GP we interviewed, and by the On Top team, is that older people who need care don't want to ask for it. A number of different reasons for this have emerged during the research. There are the more obvious issues of privacy and independence – and also cost, however, among Hopton Court tenants, there is also a concern about the quality of the care that may be provided on the basis of hearing about other people's experiences of care agencies locally. People are also concerned not to reveal the extent of their need in case this results in relocation to a care home elsewhere in the city. As Tina Cribbin recalls of a post-hospital encounter during the summer of 2020: *"John was released from hospital that morning. He had pneumonia. I visited at 4.30pm. They left him on top of the bed in thin hospital pyjamas with a coat over him. He was soaked in his own urine... I asked "why is there no-one helping you?", he said, "I don't want anyone knowing my business, they'll just chuck me out to one of them care homes miles away".*

Trust is a recurrent and critical theme arising out of the complexity of issues surrounding how to ensure older people are able to age well in place at Hopton Court. Without trust, older people who have spent many years socially isolated, or who have fears and concerns about the formal world, will not engage with the social activities and the social care that they may in reality be in desperate need of.

One of the people who usually participates in On Tops' activities is Conor who is 84 and has had several spells in hospital. Conor has been resistant to receiving additional social care support because he wants to have a relationship with the people who would be providing his care. Below, he describes some of his recent experiences of coming out of hospital and discussions about social care with Tina Cribbin:

Conor

"Well the last spell I had food poisoning I thought that was it. The nurses were good but you could see they were so busy. I had to wait for the doctor to discharge me. But I remember one nurse what was fighting for me not to go home without support. I was just dumped in a taxi. There have been a few times I've just been dumped inside my flat like a sack of potatoes [...]

When them people come from the carers and social service they were a bad shower altogether. Well they asked a me a million questions over and over. It's like they are investigating you for a bank robbery or something. I gave them a chance but all they did was write in the book and what's in it was lies! I never said I didn't want support I just wanted to get to know the people who were going to look after me. There were too many and any of them could have COVID then I'd be a gonner! [...]

I want someone who knows me. I just need help with a bit of washing, shopping and the odd cooked meal. You see we need someone like you who knows all about us. It's like it helps because you're one of us. I might need help one day but then the next day I'm fine and that's okay with you. I know you will check back on me but if it was carers you have to have all the time. As soon as you say no, they, they stop coming. It's just too much work."

As the community of Hopton Court tenants working together with On Top has grown and developed, the tenants have taken on more and more responsibility for looking after each other. When Conor came out of hospital most recently, On Top were able to call on the tenants through the Hopton Court WhatsApp group who all rallied round. Within a few hours an entire week of hot meals had been planned and people were delivering food to his door.

Sometimes however, the care needs of older tenants are simply beyond the capabilities of the On Top team and informal mutual aid among Hopton Court tenants. Safeguarding issues are always raised by On Top with the appropriate channels. On Top Coordinators are frustrated by what looks from the outside like little responsive action being taken where caring and safeguarding duties are not being fulfilled:

"There shouldn't be any more Callum's happening. But they are. That's the thing. You might deal with the lack of care with one person, and as much as you complain and as much as you bring it out, nothing gets changed. I don't know where these complaints go and what happens – it's the same with Roisin."

Roisin

Roisin is a 76-year-old lady who experiences significant mental health challenges as well as additional learning needs. She has no next of kin. Roisin has a care plan that warrants 3 hours care a day. Because of her learning needs Roisin must go to the bank daily to collect an allowance. This has been proving difficult due to cold weather and COVID-19.

Roisin has a care agency that has been brought in by her social worker. There have been many difficulties with her care. Carers have come to see her for a visit and spent less than five minutes with her. On one occasion the carer was asked to help her to get money from the bank so that she could buy food as her cupboards were empty and the carer responded that 'It's not my job'. On another occasion, a carer has been seen waving medication at Roisin through the window. She went to take the medication but the carer did not speak to her at all and then recorded that they had given her an hour's care.

On Top made a series of complaints with the care agency which meant that carers had to prove that they had been to visit her by taking photographs of her medication in her apartment. Carers then started to leave both afternoon and evening doses of medication with Roisin at the same time so they did not have to return in the evening. Roisin was then missing vital evening doses of her medication.

When speaking directly to the care agency to complain, the On Top team have been told that Roisin "is difficult". The On Top team have contacted the Care Quality Commission 'at least 5 times' regarding ongoing concerns. During their most recent phone call with the CQC, the person on the phone explained that they have contacted the care agency and the care agency have reported that they are trying their best but Roisin "is a tricky customer".

On Top coordinators have been left with a sense during their phone calls that the people they are speaking to think Roisin is lucky to be receiving care and that there is no significant problem. They report that it takes constant monitoring from neighbours to ensure a basic level of care and this was an ongoing challenge for them at the time of writing.

6. Aspirations and suggestions

Tenants have raised four types of suggestions for adjustments and improvements at Hopton Court that would improve older tenants' ability to age well in place.

i. Age-banding

All the tenants we spoke to would like to see a return to Hopton Court being age-banded as an Over-55s block. The reasons provided included:

- wanting to live around people who have similar interests and who are likely to want to participate in the same activities.
- the noise and sometimes anti-social behaviour of younger people (some residents spoke of being woken up at 4am by younger neighbours still enjoying themselves).
- and the loss of a sense of common identity and neighbourliness that a mixed-age environment brings with it.

One older male tenant summed up people's reflections on the value of age-banding as: *"if you're all the same age, you're on the same page"* (IV06). The On Top team also suggested that it is easier to provide effective support to older people if they are all accommodated in the same place. Another concern raised was that tenants are seeing an increased number of people with complex needs including addiction or significant mental health problems within the block which can create a disruptive environment for the majority older population.

ii. Age-friendly adjustments

There were some recurrent suggestions for adjustments during tenant interviews. These included:

- Windows that open fully to promote better air flow and allow moisture to leave the apartments. This was connected with a problem with damp and mould that seems to affect a number of different apartments.
- Walk-in showers and handrails in the bathrooms would be welcomed by a number of older tenants. There was a suggestion that perhaps these bathroom adaptations could be made to several apartments at the same time to save money.
- French windows or larger windows to let in more natural light was suggested by three tenants as a way to reduce the feeling of being hemmed in while also saving on utility bills.
- Tenants and a local GP raised the need for block-wide adjustments to make moving through the building and into apartments easier for older people and people with mobility issues. This might include handrails in the lifts, widening of entranceways and corridors, and removing the need to step up and over the door frame to enter the apartments.

It is not possible to ascertain the extent of the challenges facing older people in the blocks from this small-scale qualitative study. **However, our research suggests that some older people need support to ensure their basic furnishings are of an acceptable and healthy standard.**

Repairs and heating costs were also raised as a challenge. Florence (from the case study above), explained how there is damp and mould in her apartment and the paintwork and carpet need replacing. On Top have managed to find a local volunteer with appropriate language skills to provide her with ad-hoc support since the break-in, and this person helped us with the interview because Florence only has limited English. She explained the situation as follows:

'Florence has taken me around her flat to show me how everything is kind of rusty and a bit mouldy, and like, really needing renewal. It was never painted after a flood of dirty water from another flat ten years ago even though a social worker said it would need painting, well, only the ceiling was painted but the water was running down the walls and all through the flat. She needs a new carpet. And it's just not clear how you get those kinds of things done, partly because it is Coronavirus, but also just how do you get those jobs done when you have no idea what services are available, how much it would cost, and when it is not clear if it is the responsibility of the housing or others? And her electric is also costing her a lot more than it should – sometimes £50 in one week.' (IV08)

Another tenant suggested that there is a *lack of clear information* about repairs and their cost implications which may be preventing people getting them addressed:

"There are repairs that people need but now you have to pay for repairs on some stuff and [tenants] don't know the criteria. People have stopped asking for repairs because they have to pay and they can't afford it." (IV04)

Fuel costs appear to be a major challenge for tenants at Hopton Court. Florence was one of several people who reported spending £50 or more in one week on their electricity. One tenant explained that they tried to change supplier thinking it would reduce the cost but it remained very expensive. Another tenant talked about using a plug-in electric heater instead of the storage heater but that also being expensive. Another tenant explained that when you are older and at home a lot you need to have the heating on especially during the winter. In a context of ageing in deprivation, addressing the heating system to something more sustainable and affordable presents as something of a priority.

iii. Co-producing well-being through a tenant-managed community space and a Hopton Court tenants' association

Tenants at Hopton Court would like a new multi-purpose community space to be created which would enable them to build on the mutual aid and communal activities that have grown out of On Top's activities and the circumstances of COVID-19.

There have been two different suggestions for how this might be achieved:

One suggestion is to convert some of the ground floor flats into a multi-purpose community centre by knocking through some of the walls.

A second (and more popular) suggestion was to construct a new single storey community centre in the corner of the gardens. This might be a standalone structure or it might be an extension from the main building. Everyone we spoke to agreed that they would be willing to trade in some of the shared garden space for a new community building but recognised the need for the majority of tenants to agree to such a development. In whichever formation, tenants were clear that it would need to have a communal area as well as one or more separate consulting or advice rooms.

The tenants we spoke to would like for this facility to be managed by tenants themselves and some tenants are already exploring the setting up of a Hopton Court tenant's association which would create a body that could liaise with external agencies over tenants' wellbeing needs and manage this kind of space. Some discussion has also begun about whether a participatory budgeting approach could be taken, meaning that tenants look at the costs of different kinds of facilities and services and can participate in determining how their rent is used and what additional funds need raising from other sources. This may also give tenants a sense of control over their lives and their physical environment – the current lack of control was identified by some tenants as having negative impacts on their mental health.

Suggestions for how the space would be used to support ageing well in place include site-based service provision (health checks, flu vaccinations, alcohol and smoking cessation support, chiropody, hairdressers/barber; counselling, gentle exercise) and tenant-led community-building (communal meals; games; a general drop-in; creative writing and arts; a lending library; an adjoining herb garden/allotment space). On Top also suggested the inclusion of a walk-in disabled shower and toilet which was supported by three elderly tenants who were interviewed.

A local GP highlighted how the creation of a shared space where people can come together for recreational reasons, and to cook and eat together, has the potential to address some of the root causes of poor mental and physical health and in turn generate savings to health and social care services.

iv. Site-based community worker and overnight security

Tenants, the On Top Coordinators and the local GP all suggested that having a dedicated site-based support worker would make a big difference to older people's ability to age well in place: "Have a dedicated worker that would be in contact like a warden, one that does everything, that would coordinate everything" (IV05).

The On Top team suggested that re-introducing a night-time security service is the only way to really ensure the safety of older people at Hopton Court.

Having a dedicated support worker on site would mean that challenges with access and repeated breakdowns of the security and intercom systems would also be resolved, at the same time as providing support and signposting needs. There would be someone on site to call when health and care professionals were experiencing challenges accessing their patients and clients.

Having someone on site would also reduce the pressure on On Top and existing tenants who are currently attempting to meet their neighbours needs unsupported.

As Tina Cribbin explains:

"I support them through advocacy and that can be anything from helping with their phone to get a top up to finding out rights to benefits to challenging carers... Some days, it can be all day every day. And no one is accounting for that time... I provide crisis support and that can be anything from dealing with someone who has just been broken into, to supporting someone who is going into hospital, supporting someone who is coming out of hospital, phoning GPs, doctors, ambulances."

An older tenant from the Aquarius Estate mentioned an initiative years ago involving 'caring caretakers' and one of the On Top team explained that, "This had to do with training caretakers to be aware of who was living in the block, to know what was happening with them and what their needs were, and do whatever needed to be done". However, no-one we spoke to was sure what happened with that idea and others felt that what was needed was people with professional social care and community work training. Anne Finnegan explained that from her perspective, real commitment to supporting older people at Hopton Court would require: "a dedicated worker that would be in contact, that would coordinate everything...It would be like living in supported accommodation but not feeling like you are in a home." She explained how it is not enough to have a good quality house and a nice garden, giving the example of another older people's development which is beautiful to look at but has "no community spirit": "they lock themselves away in their little Shangri-La...So you can do age-banding but there still needs to be someone there to stir the pot and be the glue."

The GP that we interviewed recognised the potential financial challenges associated with getting a dedicated site-based worker in place: *“that would cost quite a lot but that would be great”*. The GP suggested that one alternative might be to work more closely with the tenants including through paid work opportunities: *“if you were paying people who lived in the same building to care for their neighbours then that would probably work well”*. Although the GP also noted there would be constraints to what could be provided without professional health or social care training.

7. Summary of options

The preceding review highlighted a series of pre-conditions that are required for an effective Naturally Occurring Retirement Community to become established. We revisit these here in relation to the experiences and interests of tenants at Hopton Court and the *Ageing Well in Place in Hulme* working group that has formed to think through the possibilities for older people at Hopton Court.

i. Mechanisms for direct participation and leadership by older people

Hopton Court tenants have already demonstrated capacity and willingness to engage in mutual aid and to take a lead in identifying issues and thinking through how they might be addressed in collaboration with others. Hopton Court tenants are in discussions about setting up a tenant's association that could be supported by CLASS as an affiliate of the Greater Manchester Savers network. Some tenants are interested in exploring a more participatory decision-making and management approach in partnership with One Manchester focused on co-producing older people's well-being. This might include analysing together the financial implications of different site-based developments and initiatives. In this, Hopton Court could become an action learning site for One Manchester, informing thinking on ageing well in place and independent living in other facilities across Hulme, and Manchester more widely.

ii. Commitment from all relevant stakeholders

Ageing well in place requires effective arrangements for linking older people in with a diversity of neighbourhood-based services and support. Developing Hopton as a NORC will require committed partnership from Manchester City Council, Manchester Local Care Organisation and the full range of service providers that older people need to access. In relation to evidencing need for additional or dedicated site-based social care provision, a health and social care commissioner explained that further and more detailed analysis would be required to examine for example, the numbers of existing tenants accessing social care services and within that group, numbers and frequency of visits to hospital and particularly to A&E. This kind of study will require a collaborative approach between tenant representatives, One Manchester and different departments of Manchester City Council perhaps with support from one of the universities. Some of this data is not publicly available for example.

The creation of a tenant-managed or co-managed on-site tenant community centre would create a physical space where integrated forms of support could be provided to tenants at Hopton Court. Depending on the scope of such a facility this could also be made available to tenants from Meredith Court who have the second highest number of older tenants across One Manchester's 12 Hulme-based tower blocks.

iii. Funding for an onsite community development worker or equivalent

There is significant community spirit and self-organisation among Hopton Court tenants

however, as detailed in the research study, there are also a diversity of needs which are beyond the capacity of tenants themselves to address. Similarly, although One Manchester strive to provide a wealth of extra support services to older people within their Independent Living Schemes, their basic legal duty is as a housing provider.

One of the challenges highlighted by this research is that there is a gap between where the roles and responsibilities of a housing provider ends, and health and social care provision begins. One housing officer with 1,000 properties within their remit, or one Care Navigator with responsibility for two or more council wards simply cannot hope to meet all the needs that fall between these two stools. This is why there is a need for a site-based worker – perhaps not just for Hopton Court, but for older people in the surrounding area of Aquarius, they might also be able to visit for signposting and advocacy support.

On-site support would ensure that tenants have access to the information they need and the support to take action in response to that information. Were an on-site community facility to be developed, having a dedicated worker on site at least part-time would help to maximise its value in relation to integrating together with other neighbourhood services.

A concern raised by One Manchester staff in relation to proposals for additional security services or site-based workers is that in the current economic climate and their own internal business situation, older tenants themselves would be faced with the costs of a full service charge recovery. Given what this research has suggested about the deprivation and fuel poverty already experienced by older tenants, funding such interventions entirely through service charges will not be viable as people simply would not be able to afford to pay. A range of alternative funding sources would need to be explored for such services. One possible source of finance for non-social care finance has been the MCC housing-related support budget but there could be potential to fund different aspects of a site-based worker's role from a range of funding sources.

iv. Linkage to ongoing housing adaptations and improvements to the built environment

A newly organised tenants' association could work in partnership with One Manchester and Adult Social Care to look at a block-wide assessment of age-friendly adaptation needs. There may also be potential for university partnership here such as with the Manchester School of Architecture who may be able to bring an innovative design perspective and have already played an important role in the Age Friendly Neighbourhoods programme. Many adaptations may be achievable in the short-term through existing assessment procedures but there may be cost-savings to be garnered from a block-wide approach.

8. Conclusions

This background paper has examined the context for older people living in tower blocks in Hulme in relation to ageing well in place. The model of *Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities* has been introduced and explored as one possible way to put older people in greater control of their environment while increasing their ability to access the support they need and age well in place, looking at Hopton Court as a case study. Further research will be needed to consider how to support older people to age well in place across the Aquarius and St Georges estates. A number of lessons can be drawn from the discussion here.

Firstly, the NORC model is highly complementary to current public service initiatives in the City of Manchester including becoming an Age Friendly city; Bringing Services Together around place; and integrated health and social care at the neighbourhood scale.

Secondly, the NORC model requires a significant drive for self-organisation and mutual aid among a particular community of older people. In the presence of this, there is strong potential to facilitate improved access to health and social care, improvements in approaches to health and social care, and positive outcomes for mental and physical well-being among older people leading in turn to cost-savings.

Thirdly, the COVID-19 pandemic has revealed a crisis in social isolation and social care needs among older people living in areas of multiple deprivation which has introduced a level of urgency in relation to the questions we examine in this paper.

Fourthly, in a context of continued economic uncertainty, there is a need to find innovative ways to finance older people's wellbeing. It is critical however, in view of the preceding point relating to contexts of multiple deprivation, that this does not translate into further financial pressure on older people themselves. Asking older and elderly people who are already living in situations of financial constraint to pay for improvements to systems that are not currently meeting their needs is not a viable solution.

9. Resources

An example of a NORC: Penn South

Penn South consists of 2800 apartments spread across nine residential towers in Midtown Manhattan, and was established by the International Ladies Garment Workers Union in 1962. The ILGWU aimed to establish an affordable housing cooperative for lower income workers, many young couple and single people. The cooperative model means that individuals who wish to move had to sell their properties back to the cooperative at below market rates, so many residents had few incentives to move. As a result, 70% of residents, many of whom move into the apartments in their 20s and 30s, were aged 60 and over by 1985. Penn South was identified as the prime example of a *naturally occurring retirement community*, or NORC.

In response, the Penn South Co-op board of directors set up the Penn South Programme for Seniors (PSPS), initially with \$8000 to set up a committee to develop a plan and find long-term funding. The programme is now funded by a mix of state funding, charitable grants and subscriptions from residents. The PSPS employ social workers to support homecare coordination, information and referrals, alongside the management of an extensive social programme, ranging from lecture series, craft workshops and a varied cultural offer. The programme is determined by the strengths, skills and passions of local residents, who are involved through the democratic processes of the cooperative housing structure. The critical mass of older people in these communities, the close ties between long-lasting neighbourly bonds and the history of self-organisation all provide conditions for a coordinated and efficient programme that support older residents to age in place. The NORC-SSP model is a key element of the New York City's ageing strategy. There are 27 NORCs recognised by the city government serving 400,000 older residents, many of whom are on lower or middle incomes.

<https://psss.org/about-psss>

Old Moat NORC in Manchester

This leaflet describes work undertaken by Southway Housing, including the establishment of a Naturally Occurring Retirement Community (NORC)

<https://www.southwayhousing.co.uk/media/1020/age-friendly-brochure.pdf>

Retrofitting extra-care: Callendar Court, Gateshead

This case study describes Callendar Court in Gateshead, an 11 storey former council housing tower block that has been remodelled as extra care housing.

https://www.housinglin.org.uk/_assets/Resources/Housing/Practice_examples/Housing_LIN_case_studies/Case_study_44.pdf

Roden Court, Haringly

This Case Study looks at Roden Court extra care housing scheme developed by One Housing Group in the London Borough of Haringey. The scheme of 40 units is integrated within a partially high-rise, urban housing development of 136 units that also includes affordable general needs and family housing and apartments for sale.

https://www.housinglin.org.uk/_assets/Resources/Housing/Practice_examples/Housing_LIN_case_studies/HLIN_CaseStudy75_RodenCourt.pdf

Living in Manchester, Our Age-Friendly City

A profile of the diverse lives of older people living in Manchester, produced by Age-Friendly Manchester team at Manchester City Council.

https://secure.manchester.gov.uk/downloads/download/6534/living_in_manchester_our_age-friendly_city

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