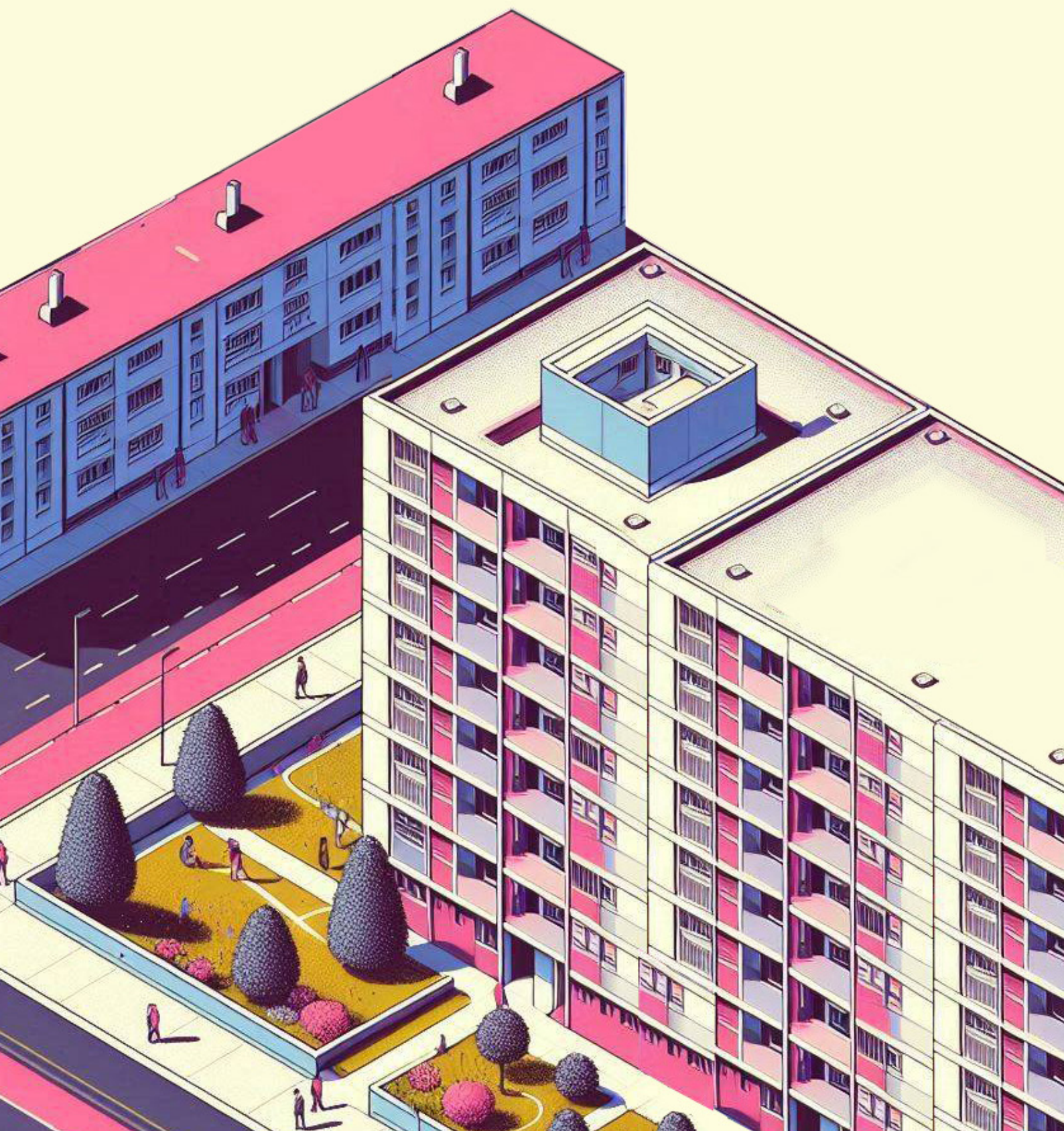


Ageing Well in Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities

*Evaluation of the Hopton Court NORC
programme: Executive Summary*



Whilst supporting **'ageing in place'** has been the main emphasis in policy in recent decades, the capacity of some neighbourhoods to support this is varied, particularly in the context of cuts to public spending, the cost of living crisis, gentrification and social exclusion of older people. These conditions, disproportionately impacting already marginalised communities, reinforce health and social inequities in society. As with many areas, Hulme in Manchester, UK, has limited housing options for older people, and despite challenges faced by older people the majority express a strong desire to age in place, leading to a long history of tenant-led action aiming to make Hulme a great place to grow older in.

Hopton Court is a nine-storey social housing tower block in Hulme, owned and managed by One Manchester. Although not specifically designed for older people, 75% of tenants in Hopton Court are aged 50+, with the majority (96%) single households. It is located in an area of Hulme with significant social, financial and health inequities, with hospital admissions for coronary heart disease and COPD around twice the national average, and many tenants experiencing social isolation and associated mental health challenges.

To address this, tenants came together with voluntary groups, One Manchester Housing Association, CLASS, Cornbrook Medical Practice, Turn2US and researchers from Manchester Metropolitan University and University of Manchester to develop a **'Naturally Occurring Retirement Community' (NORC)** initiative. NORCs seek to proactively support ageing in place through a resident-led partnership model, combining integrated health and social care provision with a rich social programme that seek to create inclusive, cohesive communities. The Hopton Court NORC has been supported by pilot funding for an Independent Living Outreach worker (2021-2023), funded by Manchester City Council Adult Social Care and One Manchester, and a NORC Development Worker (2022-2024), funded by the Dunhill Medical Trust through the 'Co-Creating Age-Friendly Social Housing' project.

Evaluating the Hopton Court NORC programme

We draw on the World Health Organisation's **'Conceptual Framework for Social Determinants of Health' (CSDH)** model, drawing attention to how the NORC programme addresses three key components of the CSDH approach – addressing social inequities through generating resource, reducing exposure to risks of poor health, and reducing vulnerability to these risks.

This evaluation has found that the NORC initiative has addressed the social determinants of health in varied and sophisticated ways, with demonstrable influence on the vulnerability and exposure to risks of poor health, enhancing the independence and quality of life for older social housing tenants living in Hopton Court.

The Ageing Well in Place in Hulme partnership addressed **social inequity** by:

- Raising awareness and building a coalition of support around issues facing tenants at Hopton Court, led by tenant engagement in creative and performative methods
- Undertaking tenant-led research as a means of qualifying and quantifying the social inequities in the block, making a case for investment and support.
- Being proactive in seeking financial resource to deliver on their ambitions to create a NORC, albeit through temporary pilot funds rather than long-term arrangements that are needed.

The Independent Living Outreach Worker reduced **exposure** to risk of poor health in Hopton Court by:

- Improving connections with health and care providers, including supporting 26 residents to engage with health services and reducing barriers for ambulances, carers and social support workers to gain access to the block.
- Aiding 19 tenants to have adaptations and repairs undertaken in their properties – services that are available to all tenants, but which many did not engage with due to complex challenges faced by some in Hopton Court.
- Providing targeted support to help tenants access the financial and social support they are entitled to, including previously unrecognised issues with fuel poverty and hunger experienced by some tenants.

The NORC Development Worker reduced **vulnerability** to poor health in Hopton Court by:

- Increasing the confidence, enthusiasm and sociability of tenants by undertaking a person-centred campaign of engagement, adopting a multitude of approaches to inclusion that address the specific barriers facing tenants in Hopton Court
- Fostering the creation of community-led activities based on the skills and interests of tenants living in the block, building positive interdependencies as a means of reducing vulnerabilities to poor health
- Facilitating greater links between tenants and service providers in the neighbourhood, to build greater quality and quantity of community connections.

We believe the NORC programme at Hopton Court offers an exemplar of place-based support for ageing well, with the hyper-localised nature of the intervention allowing connections between health, financial, housing and social inequalities that are otherwise hidden. There is an ability for empowered tenants and dedicated workers to anticipate, identify and respond to multi-faceted problems experienced by older vulnerable social housing tenants through partnership and collaboration. In keeping with the WHO CSDH, the Hopton Court NORC demonstrates how approaches grounded in intersectoral action, social participation and empowerment can have a transformative impact on communities, with clear benefits for tenants, local partners and wider health, care and housing systems.

Our analysis has demonstrated that the NORC programme at Hopton Court has supported a shift from reactive intervention to proactive engagement, avoiding the need for complex interventions when problems become acute because issues have been identified, anticipated and thus addressed in advance. This includes proactive mitigations against potential changes in health that might necessitate a costly move into specialist care facilities, or prevent older tenants' timely discharge from hospital should they need to be admitted.

Despite this, our analysis highlights the ongoing negative effects of precarious funding and staffing turnover as a barrier to maintaining and developing the NORC further. This recognises that while the community at Hopton Court has shown extraordinary commitment to the NORC programme, there are limits to what residents are able to deliver alone without a sustained commitment from other national, regional and local stakeholders.

Our research recommends:

- 1.** Stakeholders should come together to work in partnership to support NORC programmes, committing to invest both time and resources, recognising their unique ability to address systemic barriers to ageing well in place. This is already the case in areas of the USA such as New York, where there is greater recognition of the significant benefits the model has in supporting ageing well in place.
- 2.** Support should prioritise long-term programmes of work, targeting areas with high concentrations of older people with complex needs, where the greatest opportunity to address social and health inequities exist. This recognises the importance of developing social capital amongst older tenants, which is predicated on stable models of engagement, and the limited capacity of marginalised communities to engage in constant piecemeal funding efforts.
- 3.** Embrace programmes and delivery at a sub-neighbourhood scale (eg. a block, a tower, and estate), recognising the ability for transformative, person-centred delivery models based on trust, respect and innovation. Through this, programmes need to value the lived experiences, ideas, aspirations and labours that older people have, which are integral to any successful NORC initiative.

This evaluation has been produced by Dr Mark Hammond, Manchester Metropolitan University, and Dr Niamh Kavanagh, University of Manchester. We would like to thank the tenants of Hopton Court and the wider partnership for their extraordinary efforts bringing the NORC into fruition, and for collaborating with us on this evaluation. For enquiries, please email M.Hammond@mmu.ac.uk