



# Shaping Our Healthy Futures:

## Co-design conversations towards inclusive outcomes

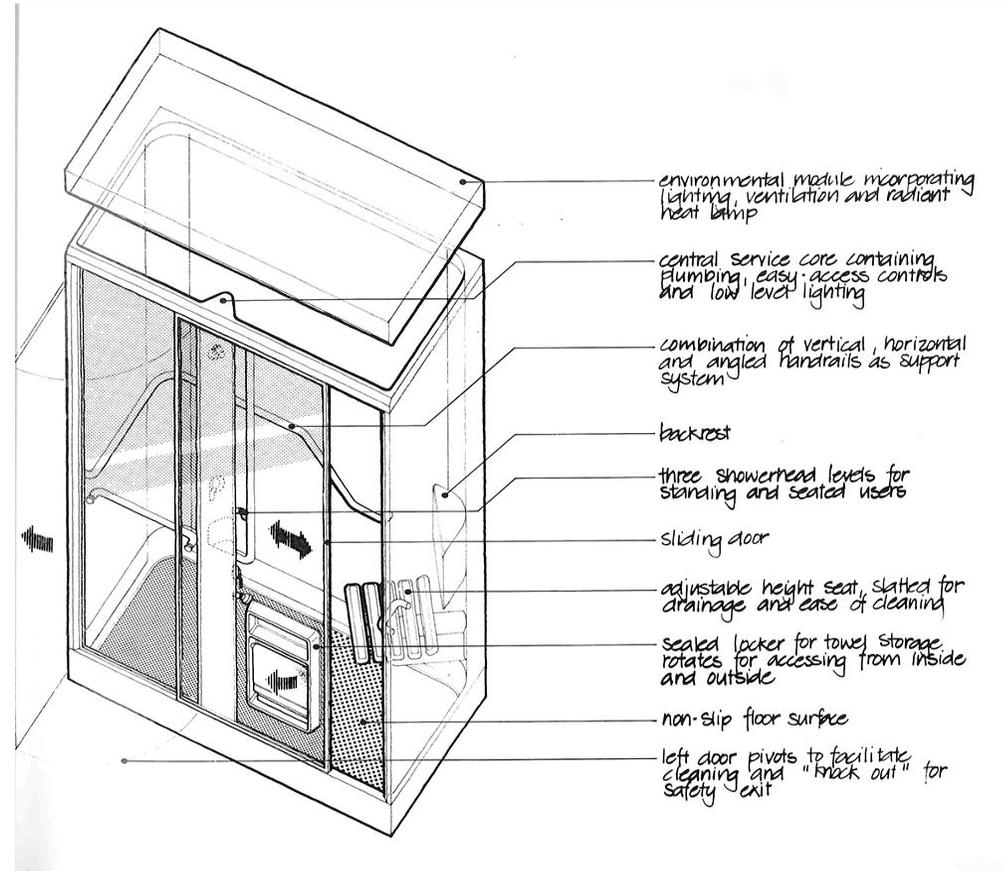
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Helen Hamlyn Centre for Design, Royal College of Art

**Our work  
explores the role  
of DESIGN and  
EMPATHY to  
IMPROVE LIVES,  
considering the  
broadest  
dimensions of  
AGE and  
DIVERSITY.**

# 1986



**Kenneth Grange**

**badly designed  
products,  
services, and  
environments**



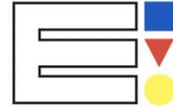
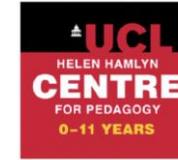
**unhealthy,  
unhappy  
ageing**

**well designed  
products,  
services, and  
environments**



**healthier,  
happier  
ageing**

# Partnered with over 200 organisations...



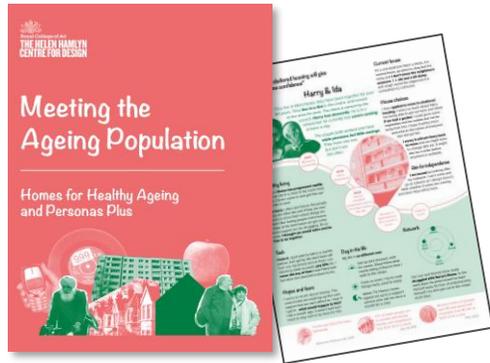
Sample Year of Project partners

...on over 300 projects.



# Modes of Engagement

## Scoping Studies



## Industry Projects



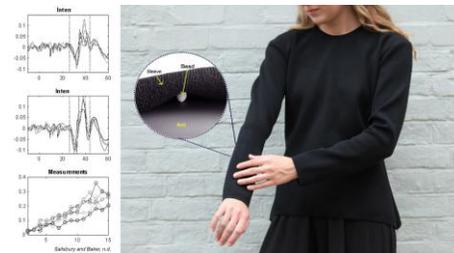
## Academic Collaborations



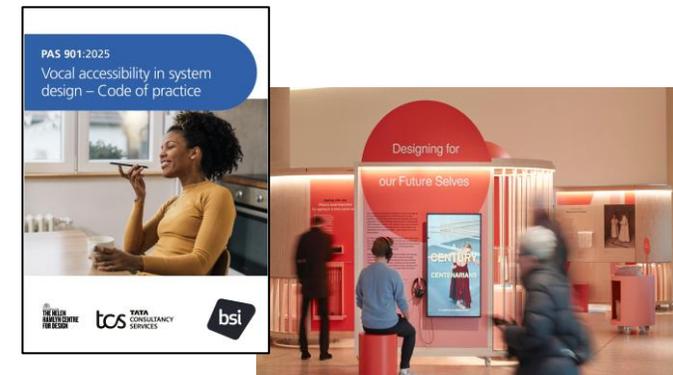
## Knowledge Transfer Partnerships



## PhDs



## Publication & Exhibition



**ENGAGING CITIZENS/COMMUNITIES IN CONTEXT**



People are  
**EXPERTS**  
of their own  
**LIVED**  
**EXPERIENCES**

**INVITING REFLECTION AND CONVERSATION**



Y BIGGEST

**FEARS**

My 3 biggest **DIFFICULTIES**

next 3 years \_\_\_\_\_

next year \_\_\_\_\_

next month \_\_\_\_\_

next week \_\_\_\_\_

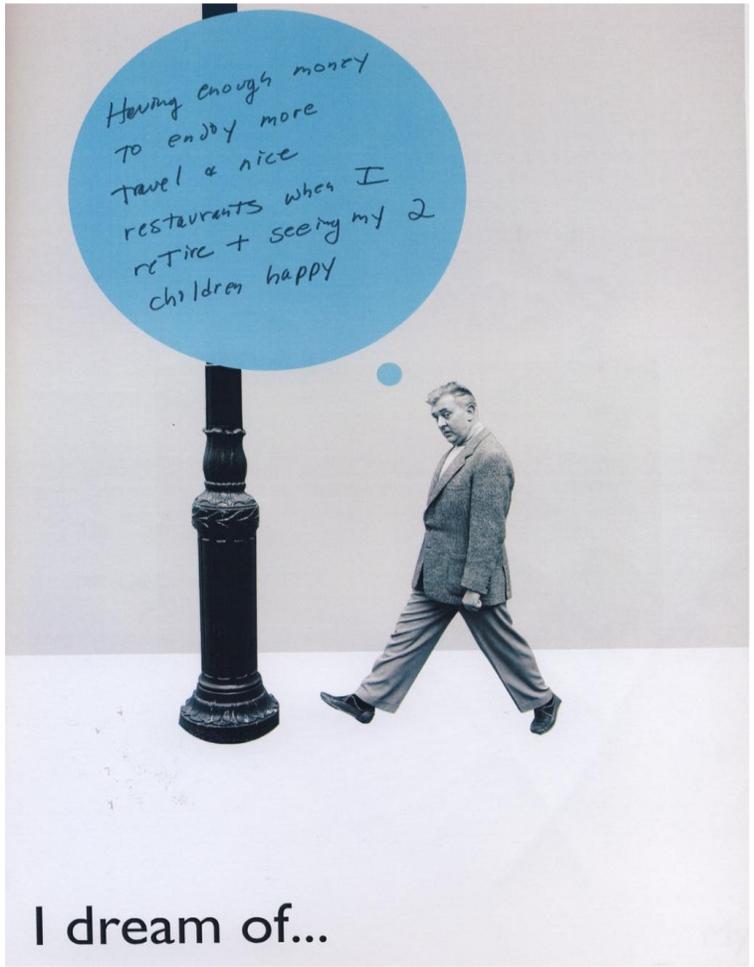
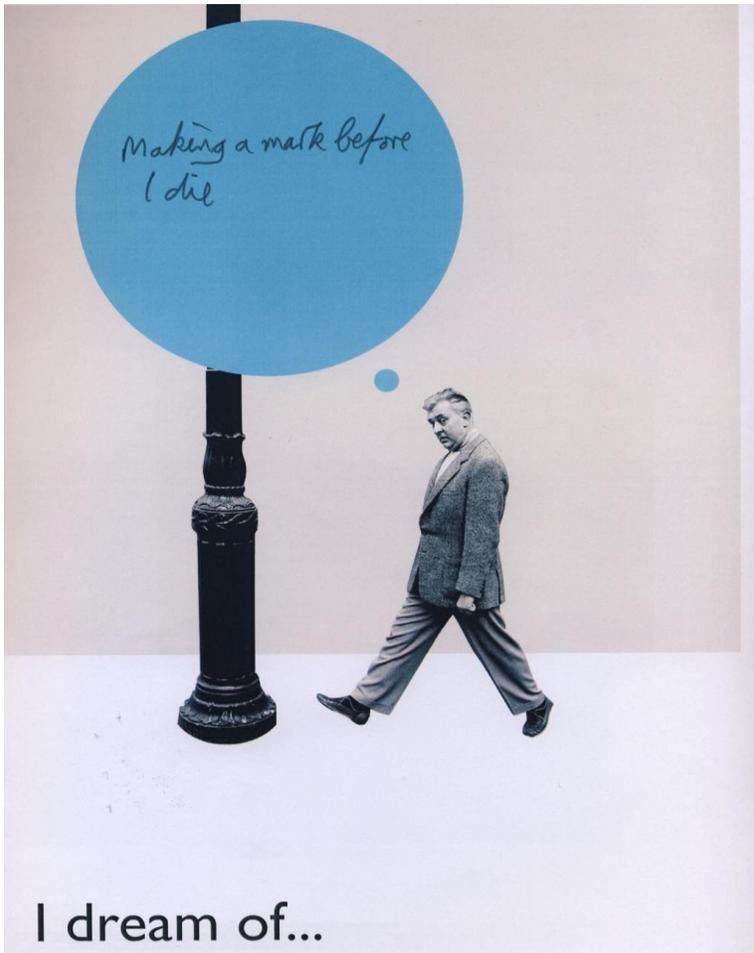
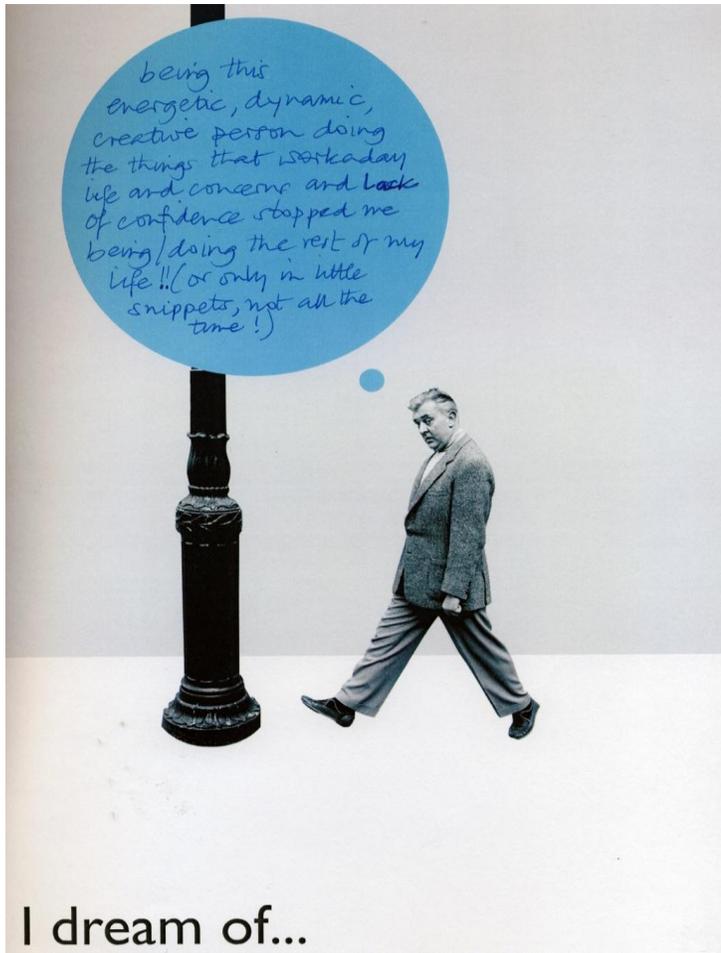
**Next plans**

**People around me**

Please place on the diagram below the people from your social circles. The diagram indicates how close they are to your heart and how close they are geographically.

On the example on the right, I did place my parents who live quite far from me and my German teacher who is one of my neighbour.

My German teacher



# DESIGNING WITH PEOPLE





**FROM...** engaging  
individuals for insights

**TOWARDS...** using  
design to engage citizens  
and communities to  
author their own futures



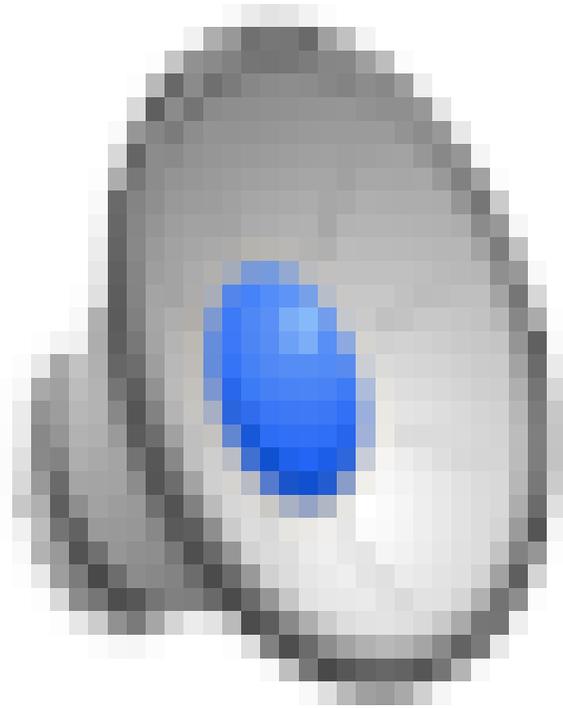
Source: Clara Gaggero  
Helen Hamlyn Centre for Design



**Design is often perceived as...**

**problem-solving**

**A significant part of our process is...**  
**problem-framing**



**FROM...** engaging  
individuals for insights

**TOWARDS...** using  
design to engage citizens  
and communities to  
author their own futures



What does HOME mean to you?



What does HOME mean to you?

Sociability

Privacy

Identity

Choice

Variety

Control

Security

# THE CONNECTOR

2025 • HELEN HAMLYN CENTRE FOR DESIGN

## Helen Hamlyn Centre for Design

The Helen Hamlyn Centre for Design is a global leader in Inclusive Design, Design Thinking, and Creative Leadership.

## Vivensa Foundation

Vivensa Foundation is a charity that funds the groundbreaking science and transformative social change needed to help everyone age well.

## The Guinness Partnership

The Guinness Partnership is a resident-focused national organisation that provides housing across England.



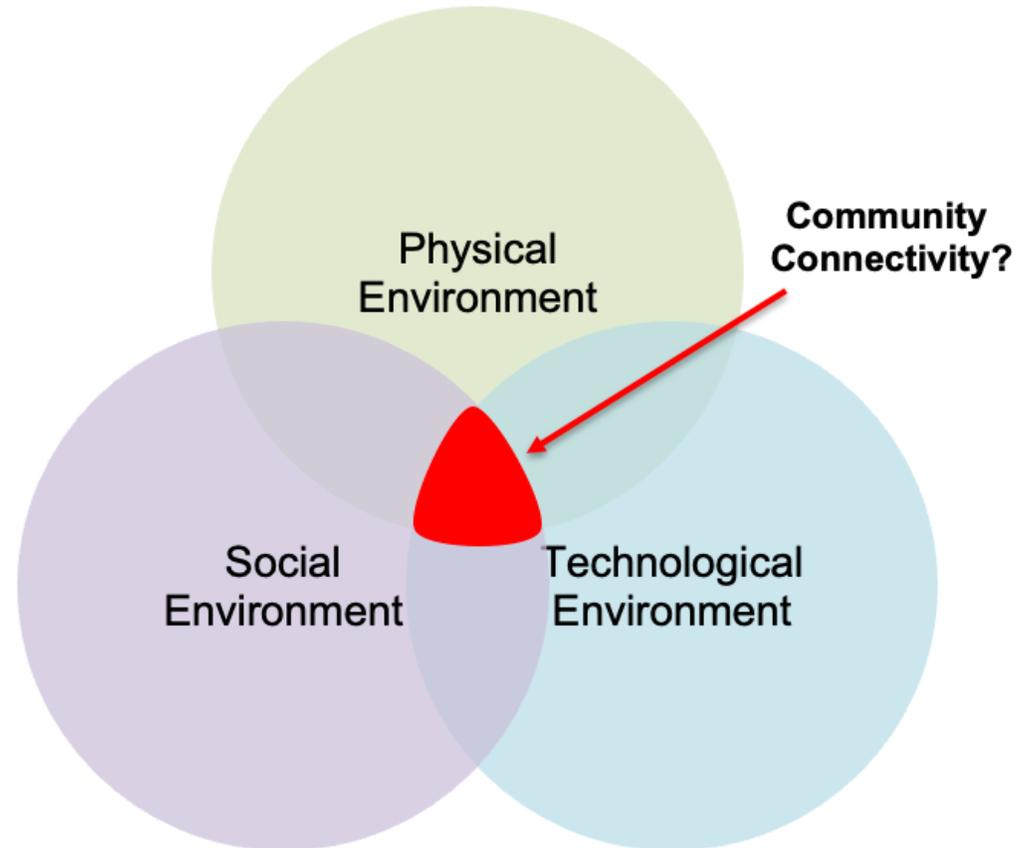
Illustration by Ben Connors

Royal College of Art  
**THE HELEN  
HAMLYN CENTRE  
FOR DESIGN**

 Funding for the  
future of ageing well  
VIVENSA FOUNDATION

 the  
guinness  
partnership

# Enhancing Community Connectivity for Ageing Well in Place



Community Connectivity Research Themes

# THE CONNECTOR

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Illustration by Ben Connors



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### About the research partners

#### Vivensa Foundation

Vivensa Foundation is a charity that funds the groundbreaking science and transformative social change needed to help everyone age well. It supports researchers and commercial systems and services, fundamental science and applied design. The foundation is committed to inclusion, addressing inequality, and making the interdisciplinary connections that bring ideas to life.

#### Helen Hamlyn Centre for Design Royal College of Art

The Helen Hamlyn Centre for Design is a global leader in Inclusive Design, Design Thinking, and Creative Leadership, collaborating with government, industry, academics, and the third sector. Originally founded in 1991 to explore the design implications of an ageing society, our centre now works to advance a socially inclusive approach to design through practical research and projects with industry.

#### The Guinness Partnership

The Guinness Partnership is a resident-focused national organisation that provides housing across England. Established in 1890, it owns and manages nearly 70,000 homes and provides services to nearly 800,000 residents. The organisation works to improve people's lives and create possibilities for them. It does this by providing as many high-quality homes as possible and delivering the housing services residents need most.

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## INTRODUCTION: Co-Designing for Later Life Connection

Collaborative approaches to creating meaningful connections in later life.

This publication provides an overview of approach and resulting guidance from the design research project *Enhancing Future Community Connectivity for Ageing Well in Place: Co-designing technology and Environments (SLP2310-17)*. The project was part of Vivensa's *Creating Sustainable Living Environments and Communities for an Ageing Population* initiative. The project aimed to explore how people of all ages, especially older adults, can live in homes that support their physical, social, and digital needs, helping them to stay connected and thrive.

It emphasised the importance of designing in ways that meet older people's needs by involving them directly in the design research process. Working with residents from across three Guinness Partnership housing sites, the project used inclusive co-design methods to derive a collection of *Community Connectivity* concepts towards improving residents' lives. It intended to inform future design interventions, conversations, and evidence-based research practices by including ageing populations in the process.

This publication concludes with illustrated *'Preferred Futures'* design concepts and accompanying descriptors. These concepts offer insight, guidance and suggested approaches to consider when creating future interventions around community connectivity in terms of object, service and space.

Note: The project was conceived during the project's early stages. Due to the uncertainty of that time the research was proposed to be carried out remotely. This intention was preserved in the project post-pandemic, adding a challenging and complex component to the research process that followed.

The process, discussion and implications around it will be written up separately in academic publication.

This publication captures the design research project *Enhancing Community Connectivity for Ageing Well in Place: Co-designing Technology and Environments*, carried out by the Helen Hamlyn Centre for Design at the Royal College of Art in partnership with the Guinness Partnership, and funded by the Vivensa Foundation (formerly The Dublin Medical Trust).

The aim of the project was to explore how future community connectivity within social housing might be improved through a better understanding of residents' needs, aspirations, and physical environments, specifically engaging with residents of the Guinness Partnership.

The project focused on exploring the needs and challenges of staying connected in later life. The fundamental requirement for a good home is that it meets its residents' needs, including strong connections with friends, family, neighbours, and the broader community. This connectivity can be facilitated through various physical, social, and technological interventions.

Working closely with our partner, the Guinness Partnership, we identified homes and participants for the research to best capture a diverse range of experiences. The project engaged three Guinness Homes sites across the UK in North, South, and Coastal locations, each with its own traits and distinct identity in terms of characteristics, residents, and communities.

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## INTRODUCTION

Within each location, we collaborated with a Guinness Independent Living Advisor (ILA), who provided information and support to residents on site, and acted as a conduit between residents and the Guinness Partnership.

The Guinness Partnership suggested Independent Living Advisors to facilitate our design research engagement with residents towards uncovering desired experiences around community connectivity in later life. By engaging residents in outlining criteria and co-creating future visions, the project sought to demystify what future community connection should look like from the perspective of residents. It builds on themes of community cohesion and resident voices that were identified during an earlier pilot study with the Guinness Partnership.

Through Design Future activities, we explored current experiences and future connectivity aspirations with residents. These activities enabled us to create insight resources, identify recurring themes, and produce briefing materials. We also brought in perspectives from experts gathered through dedicated interviews and workshops, expanding the depth and scope of our findings.

These materials were, in turn, developed by our team through workshops with students, in which the students co-created illustrative concepts and themes, accompanied a cycle of design guidelines and policy implications relating to community connectivity.

**Research Methods: Inclusive Design**  
Inclusive Design is a participatory design approach that actively involves stakeholders as collaborators throughout the design research process. For this study, we ensured that Guinness residents, Independent Living Advisors, and community members were integral to the design research process. Rather than designing for participants, Inclusive Design emphasises designing with them, fostering collaboration, sharing ownership, and mutual learning.

This approach enables the generation of ideas, solutions, and outcomes that are more contextually relevant, inclusive, and reflective of diverse lived experiences in context.

In this project, co-design workshops with residents were a key method for exploring and enhancing themes of community and connectivity. By engaging residents in the co-design process, the project tapped into local knowledge and captured diverse perspectives and tensions, helping uncover authentic needs and aspirations. This participatory method supports the development of more meaningful, grounded, and sustainable outcomes.

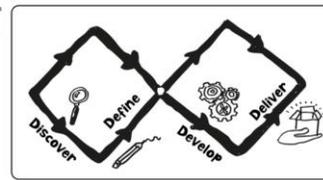
### Approach: Double Diamond Framework

This study used the Double Diamond design framework to clearly communicate the design research process to both designers and non-designers. The two diamonds represent two ways of thinking: first, broadly exploring the problem (divergent thinking), and then focusing on potential solutions (convergent thinking). This approach helped support learning and collaboration throughout the research.

This publication follows the stages of the Double Diamond to illustrate the research journey. The first diamond, Discover, involves contextual research, including literature reviews, early-stage data collection through cultural probes, and interviews with residents and experts. Next, Define synthesises insights to frame the main challenges. In Develop, ideas are iteratively tested through prototyping and co-design workshops. Finally, Deliver presents the refined concepts and solutions.

**Discover Phase (divergent):** The focus is on exploring the original brief and hypothesis, conducting contextual research, and identifying the participants or communities involved in the project.

Illustration of the Double Diamond model.



**Define Phase (convergent):** Design ethnography is planned and carried out. Insights from this research are used to create people-centred design briefs.

**Develop Phase (divergent):** Involves generating a range of ideas through co-creation and design ideation processes.

**Deliver Phase (convergent):** A selection of ideas is taken forward and developed into outputs such as prototypes, service concepts, or practical guidance.

The process is not strictly linear, teams often revisit earlier stages as new insights emerge. Early testing can occur at any phase, and solutions are continuously refined based on feedback.

### Insights and Impact

This publication is designed to provide insights for stakeholders that experience or influence the development of housing and community engagement, this could be designers,

policy-makers, urban planners, researchers, housing associations, residents, or anyone engaging in the conversation about connected communities.

It also offers valuable insights for anyone interested in understanding the design research process and its potential for social impact. At its core, this work highlights the importance of identifying personal needs and organising space in ways that prioritise and reflect those needs, an essential consideration for any designer involved in developing later life connectivity concepts.

Within these pages, you'll find a record of the processes and methods we used, along with examples of spaces shaped by conversations with residents and those who support them. By incorporating participatory research methods, our aim was to empower communities and decision-makers to co-create environments that support both individual and collective well-being.

The insights and design recommendations developed within this project are intended to provide designers and policymakers with insights and suggestions for developing adaptable, inclusive, and community-centred spaces that reflect the needs and aspirations of the communities they serve.

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# COMMUNITY PARTNER: The Guinness Partnership

The Guinness Partnership is a leading UK social housing provider.

The Guinness Partnership is a leading UK social housing provider with a strong focus on delivering affordable, safe, and community-focused housing. Its approach to housing for older people is to offer living schemes designed for adults aged 55+ that promote independence, accessibility, and social connection.

Towards providing homes that meet the needs of diverse older cohorts, the Guinness Partnership places an emphasis on independent living, providing well-designed homes with features such as lifts, emergency alarms, and low-maintenance layouts to support ageing in place.

The Guinness Partnership strives to support community cohesion and wellbeing, and approaches this through creating communal spaces such as shared community rooms and garden spaces, and promotes social activities to combat isolation. They are interested in providing adaptive homes for evolving needs, utilising partnerships with relevant care and technology providers to offer appropriate support where it is needed.

By combining affordable housing, community-building, and adaptable design, the Guinness Partnership aims to enhance the quality of life for its older residents, while tackling broader housing challenges.

The Guinness Partnership is keen to explore how design can be used to understand and address challenges associated with later living homes. A previous resident engagement project between the Helen Hamlyn Centre for Design and the Guinness Partnership identified Ownership, Community, Voice and Visibility as key themes to explore towards improving

resident experience. These themes acted as the starting point for this research project, highlighting 'Community Connectivity' as a prime area for future design intervention.



Illustration of Primrose Court



Illustration of Arthur Kille House



Illustration of Rupert House

Illustration  
of Arthur  
Kille House.



## Rupert House

Rupert House, located in Kennington, London, is a later-life housing scheme managed by the Guinness Partnership. Built in 1978, it comprises 46 self-contained flats with one or two bedrooms. The communal facilities include a lift, communal lounge, laundry facilities, gardens, and weekly activities. On-site resident management staff and alarm services provide additional support. The site focuses on affordability, community, safety and low-maintenance living. The scheme welcomes new older residents (typically 55 and over).

Kennington benefits from convenient public transport connections and is situated near local shops, health services, and parks.

## Primrose Court

Primrose Court, located in Hayfield, High Peak, Derbyshire, is a later-life housing scheme managed by the Guinness Partnership. Built in 1992, it offers 27 one and two-bedroom flats. The communal facilities include a lift, communal lounge, laundry, guest facilities, gardens, and weekly activities. Resident management staff and an alarm service are available. The site focuses on affordability, safety, a village experience and low-maintenance living. The scheme welcomes new older residents (typically 55 and over).

Hayfield is a peaceful village near the Peak District, with local shops, health services and public transport connecting to nearby towns.

## Arthur Kille House

Arthur Kille House, located in Waterlooville, Hampshire, is a later-life housing scheme managed by the Guinness Partnership. Built in 1971, it provides 59 self-contained flats and bungalows with 1 or 2 bedrooms, including homes designed for mobility and wheelchair accessibility. The communal facilities include a lift, communal lounge, laundry, guest facilities, gardens, and weekly activities. Resident management staff and an alarm service are available. The site focuses on convenient setting, affordability, community, safety and low-maintenance living. The scheme welcomes new older residents (typically 55 and over).

Waterlooville has good local amenities and regular bus services to Portsmouth and the surrounding areas.

# Redefining Community Connectivity for Later Life in the UK

A review of current thinking and research informed community engagement on connectivity and cohesion.

A broad ranging literature review was conducted prior to engagement with residents in order to better understand current thinking and research, campaigns and the challenges in community connectivity. The literature explored community connectivity within three critical dimensions – physical, social and technological.

With life expectancy increasing and birth rates declining, the UK faces both challenges and opportunities in reimagining social infrastructure.<sup>2</sup> Demographic shifts are reshaping society, meaning that designers and policymakers will have to rethink how best to support and foster meaningful connections and ensure quality of life for older adults.<sup>3</sup> There is the potential for all to experience loneliness, and the downward spiral that can occur if loneliness is left unchecked. Isolation is physically being alone; loneliness is about a lack of meaningful social contact. It is possible to feel lonely even if one is surrounded by others, or live in a busy environment, yet feel alone and unable to connect in ways that are consequential. There is potential to remain socially connected through technology and/or community ties, but older people may need to be encouraged to utilise such technology.<sup>4</sup>

There are numerous shifts transforming the way people in the UK connect, and fundamental changes for many in terms of their relationship with home, surrounding environment and community spaces. Research underscores a distinction between physical isolation and emotional loneliness.<sup>5</sup>

Working lives are extending for many, due to pension age rises and financial pressures. Hybrid work is becoming more common, with over a quarter of workers now working remotely at some point in their working week.<sup>6</sup>

Current trends suggest there will be 1.4 million over-85s living alone by 2032, and that in the future fewer older people will own their homes. Dementia cases are projected to nearly double by 2051. The UK's ethnic minority population is projected to expand nearly sixfold from 2011 levels to 3.8 million by 2051.<sup>7</sup> Traditional physical community anchors are disappearing at exceptional rates, such as libraries, which the BBC highlights are experiencing an average of 40 closures annually,<sup>8</sup> or pubs across England and Wales which are experiencing six closures a week according to the British Beer and Pub Association.<sup>9</sup>

While 50% of retirees now use the internet, up from 20% in 2003 and accelerated during the pandemic, this has also created a growing divide. For every older adult embracing digital technology, another faces exclusion from essential services.<sup>10</sup>

Community connectivity may prove as vital to health and wellbeing as localised medical provision, therefore forward-thinking approaches need to be integrated and supported across society. Hybrid solutions that combine technological and physical connectivity are a compelling proposition and could support numerous forward-looking developments in how we connect.<sup>11</sup>

These could range from social prescribing, linking healthcare with community activities to intergenerational housing models that blend younger and older residents, or age-inclusive technology design that builds and supports more natural forms of connected daily life.<sup>12</sup>

3.6 million older people in the UK live alone, over 2 million of whom are aged 75 and over.

(AgeUK)

As life expectancy increases, incidences of chronic diseases will also rise, with more people living with multiple conditions.

(Government Office for Science)

1 in 5 people aged 65 and over do not use the internet.

(AgeUK)

Technology adoption has become a daily norm for many, yet it has deepened isolation for those left behind.

(Sixsmith et al.)

The UK's ageing population experiences significant inequalities in wellbeing, physical and mental health, life expectancy, financial security, social connection, and living environments.

(Centre for Ageing Better)

Some people maintain their health and independence into their 80s and beyond, while others experience diseases and disabilities typically associated with later life in their 50s.

(AgeUK)

The UK is losing libraries at a rate of about 40 each year.

(BBC)

# CAPTURING INSIGHTS: Using Design to Empower Communities

Cultural Probes' explored residents' daily lives, values, and connections to better understand current experiences around community connectedness.

## What We Did

Cultural Probes are research tools consisting of various creative tasks and materials given to participants to capture insights about their personal lives, values, and environments in an open-ended way. These probes were employed as a primary method to gain a deeper understanding of the residents' daily lives and values, understanding the physical, social, and technological aspects of their day-to-day experiences. The findings from these probes informed the overall research and were critical for the design and development of *Design Futuring* workshops.

## How We Did It

36-page booklets were distributed to 15 residents across three Guinness Homes sites, guided by the local Independent Living Advisors. The booklets, titled *About Me, My Community & Technology*, were divided into four sections: *About Me*, *About Me and My Home*, *About Me and People I Know*, and *About Me and Technology*. These probes included open-ended questions, drawing tasks, and journaling prompts designed to capture personal reflections on everyday life and daily routines. The booklets presented an opportunity for residents to showcase and reflect upon their individual unique interests and activities in detail, on their own terms, and in their voice.

## What We Learned

The booklets captured insights into the physical, technological, and social dimensions of residents' lives. These themes were further explored in follow-up interviews, allowing

for deeper understanding and informing the creation of designs that promote community, support diverse lifestyles, and balance technology with meaningful human interaction.



Cultural Probe Activities

# Insights

## Physical

Expectations in how the home environment will be used vary, and this can at times make the living experience isolating.

“ The majority of people are between 75 and 100 years old. OK I'm 71 but a young 71. Nothing that they do is of interest to me. I want to keep myself young... 75% of people here don't come out of their flats. They've sort of come here to die in a way. ”  
– Resident, 71

This quote highlights that the experience of ageing is individual, and chronological age is not necessarily indicative of how people feel and what they want to do. Residents are not a homogenous group and the physical space has to support different needs and expectations.

## Technological

Perspectives around technology varied, with an even spread of positive, negative and neutral responses. However, there was consensus that technology should support natural person-to-person interactions, rather than replace them. One resident stated,

“ I wouldn't look to technology. It would be more a human contact. Technology is dividing us even more because you're relying on an inanimate object, electronics, and it's taking away that human interaction. ”  
– Resident, 61

## Social

Residents valued social engagement, though some faced challenges in meeting new people, as one resident shared,

“ I am a chatty person, smile and say hello but as a single woman I do feel less confident. I enjoy company, it is an effort meeting new people. ”  
– Resident, 55+

Residents spoke about the different ways they engage with others, from the types of social activities to the spaces where they connect and build community.

# RESIDENT VOICES: Exploring Lived Experiences

Nine interviews revealed unique interests, experiences, and connections shaping community life and design.

## What We Did

To gain deeper insights into residents' experiences, we conducted semi-structured interviews with nine residents (three from each of the three locations). Interviewees were selected based on their engagement with cultural probe activities, which highlighted strong experiences and attitudes related to the study themes. Interviews were conducted via phone and video calls and were designed to be conversational, allowing residents to reflect on their daily lives, community connections, and use of technology.

## How We Did It

The nine residents interviewed represented a diverse mix of ages, living arrangements, and engagement levels with their local communities. Some lived alone and had limited interactions, while others had regular contact with friends and family. They demonstrated varying degrees of comfort with technology and held different perspectives about how their communities could better support social interaction, independence, and well-being.

Residents emphasised the value of local groups and events in encouraging connection across ages and abilities. One shared, "Most of the things I do are in the village. There is a really good noticeboard there... I stick with local events. I do actually use the local Facebook to find out what's going on." Others highlighted inclusive spaces that bring people together: "Where we meet up with other people of my age group and older, sit down, have a meal, watch a movie, or sometimes we play a little bingo." These reflections show how vital accessible, well-promoted community resources are for social inclusion.

Views on technology varied widely. Some residents, with support, gained confidence using digital tools. As one noted, "A friend showed me how to pay the bill at a café using the phone – this was a big event for me... I'm OK with online banking now, via an app, I've got that down to a T." Others, however, expressed frustration and a sense of exclusion. One resident explained, referring to a device in their room, "It's like a remote. You just... it doesn't do what you want it to, and then it goes off, and then you just get annoyed with it." These contrasting experiences underscored the need for better access and tailored support.

Social connection and community care were seen as essential. Many described small check-ins and group activities as part of everyday life. "I've organised a knit and natter group – and there are about 12–14 of us who get together, and we have a really, really good time." As one person put it, "This is a great thing, a meetup in the morning, with no technology, having a chat, communicating. I love people. And I love getting people, everyone, together."

## What We Learned

The interviews revealed a diverse range of lived experiences, highlighting the challenges and aspirations of residents regarding social and physical connectivity, and the role of technology in their daily lives. These insights shaped the co-design workshops and refined key themes that guided the creation of relevant and innovative solutions. The development section examines how these themes informed the design of activities and prototypes.

“Where we meet up with other people of my age group and older, sit down, have a meal, watch a movie, or sometimes we play a little bingo.”

– Resident, 63

“Most of the things I do are in the village. There is a really good noticeboard there... I stick with local events. I do actually use the local Facebook to find out what's going on.”

– Resident, 77

“A friend showed me how to pay the bill at a café using the phone – this was a big event for me... I'm OK with online banking now, via an app, I've got that down to a T.”

– Resident, 70

“It's like a remote. You just... it doesn't do what you want it to, and then it goes off, and then you just get annoyed with it.”

– Resident, 62

“I've organised a knit and natter group – and there are about 12–14 of us who get together, and we have a really, really good time.”

– Resident, 77

“This is a great thing, a meetup in the morning, with no technology, having a chat, communicating. I love people. And I love getting people, everyone, together.”

– Resident, 71

# THE FUTURE OF AGEING: Co-designing Connectivity

At the International Longevity Centre's 2025 Future of Ageing, experts participated in a breakout session on community connectivity.

## What We Did

2025 marks the International Longevity Centre's tenth annual Future of Ageing conference, titled *Future of Ageing 2025: Planning for the Long Term*. The conference brought together policymakers, business leaders, and experts across the longevity space to have insightful discussions on long-term planning for long lives. These discussions allowed them to take stock and explore how the Government can move beyond the short-termism of previous governments to create a vision for the 100-year life, where we are healthier, happier, and more productive for longer.

The design research team held a breakout session, inviting policymakers, business leaders, and experts to explore future connectivity expectations and aspirations based on emerging themes. The goal of the session was to have teams design pitches for potential design and policy interventions, drawing on the materials presented as well as their own knowledge and expertise. This material was captured as a resource for a later Design Futures workshop, which would showcase possible futures for community connectivity.

## How We Did It

As key insights, questions, and challenges were being shared, a simple ice-breaker activity called 'Future-Thinking' was introduced. With eighteen attendees and two ILC staff participating, the group was organised into teams of five to explore ideas around people, place, and technology in later life. Each team received a flipbook featuring various technologies and settings, such as

cafés, supermarkets, wearable devices, and smart glasses, along with prompts to guide the activity. Teams selected one technology and one space, then drew or wrote their responses to two questions: How does this technology make you feel? And how do you imagine it being used in that space?

Following this activity, teams were given blank poster-pitch templates to help them develop future propositions on community connectivity. Equipped with inspirational images, paper, marker pens, scissors, glue sticks, and tape, participants were encouraged to write or draw directly onto the templates. These served as creative tools to represent new features or activities as their ideas took shape.

## What We Learned

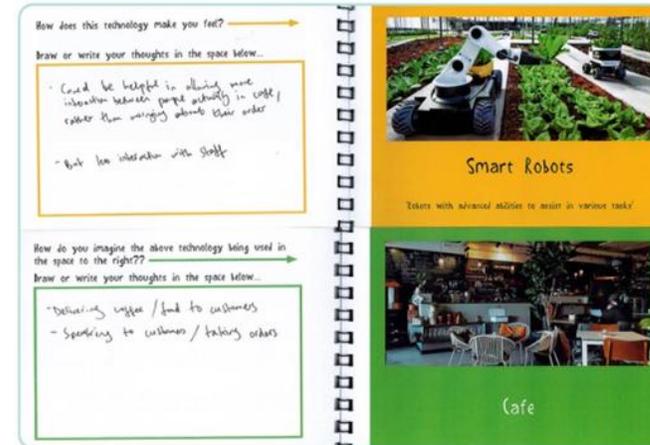
The exercise proved useful in identifying recurring themes and the needs of those being considered. It was also a good tool for engaging people and encouraging a spirit of collaboration. From the workshop, several themes were highlighted for future consideration.

During the session, experts provided feedback on preliminary design concepts. Insights from the workshop highlighted the need for stronger community integration within healthcare and recovery, addressing social isolation and promoting physical activity. Reducing stigma, such as discomfort around wearing medical bracelets, is crucial for encouraging participation. Enhancing social interaction in public spaces and leveraging GPs as proactive partners in future care can foster connection, improve engagement, and support holistic recovery.

## Themes

- Lack of Community in Healthcare and Recovery
- Social Isolation and Physical Inactivity
- People Feeling Stigmatised by Wearing Bracelets
- Social Connection and Interaction in Public Spaces
- General Practitioners for the Future

Future of Ageing Session Activity: Flipbook.



Future of Ageing Session Activity: Poster.



# CO-DESIGNING COMMUNITY: with Guinness Residents

Guinness residents and staff co-designed future community connections grounded in their experiences and future aspirations.

“ You'd have to appeal to their interests. It would be a lot different. Everybody's different. Everybody has a particular interest in a particular field...”

“ In some ways, I feel excluded in that I don't use technology like others do. But I would say because I'm OK and quite happy and content without, and because I can adapt, I don't feel excluded at all.”

“ Once upon a time, I would phone someone and get to speak to someone. Now I'm talking to a machine.”

“ I want to do things for myself for as long as I can.”

“ Face to face above all else... If I have to wait or book something, I'll do that instead, if it means I can talk to someone in person.”

“ 95% of what I do is in the village.”

“ The building has a very good social room, but it's not used at all.”

“ I think when it comes to community, all of those are going to be relevant for people at different times, different stages, and different events.”

## About Community, Social Life, and Connecting with Others

- In-person meetups are important.
- Routines are useful, but spontaneity plays a key role in daily life.
- Shared interests or activities are a good basis for in-person meetups.
- The local area can play a big part in residents' social life.
- Phone calls, texts, and video chats are the main ways to stay in touch.
- Some residents stay socially proactive, but living alone can be tough.

## About the Future Generally, It's Likely That

- The climate crisis is expected to worsen.
- Quality of life may continue to decline.
- Jobs, housing, and financial stability are becoming more insecure.
- Conflict and tensions are likely to grow as inequalities and challenges increase.
- Residents want to stay self-reliant but face growing challenges.
- Maintaining independence is key, though rising health and mobility needs may require more support over time.

## About Living at Guinness

- Residents have ideas for improving social connection, like better use of communal spaces.
- Shared WiFi in the communal room would be appreciated.
- It's hard to know who else lives in the building or whether everyone receives the support and care they need.
- Some feel their feedback isn't always heard by the 'higher-ups'.
- Changes to flats can be restricted.

## About Technology Use: Some Positives

- Technology is useful when it works well.
- The internet and apps are great for information and research.
- Security cameras enhance safety, but the resident communication system (Appello) has mixed benefits.
- Most residents don't feel excluded by technology and choose when to use it.
- Personal tech helps with reminders, saving information, banking, accessing content, and entertainment.

## In the Future, as a Result of Increasing Technology

- Robots, AI, and tech may take over jobs, dehumanise people, or cause us to gradually lose abilities and skills.
- Social media might limit future generations' communication skills.
- It is expected that progress will continue in the fields of medicine and surgery.
- New ideas to address the energy crisis could emerge in the future.
- Tech will free people from mundane tasks at home and work.

## About Technology Use: Some Negatives

- When tech fails, it's frustrating, and non-tech alternatives are preferred.
- Some residents worry about safety, lack of control, and unethical tech companies.
- Learning new tech takes time, effort, and support, so it needs to be worthwhile.
- Social media often harms social connections rather than helping them.
- In-person interactions and real shopping are preferred over tech-based ones.



Resident Workshop Activities: Community Cloud.



Resident Workshop Activities: Social Connectivity in the Future.

Resident Workshop Activities: Flipbook.

How does this technology make you feel? →

Draw or write your thoughts in the space below.

Great that manual, repetitive jobs, done by machine.  
(Already done for banking)  
Or



Smart Robots

Robots with advanced abilities to assist in various tasks.

How do you imagine the above technology being used in the space to the right?? →

Draw or write your thoughts in the space below.

Personal assistant to carry + lot up goods put in trolley with a screen to let you know how much you'd pay. People who worked there would have to find 16-hour jobs <sup>other</sup>

Only as smart as the programmer'



Supermarket

Resident Workshop Activities: Flipbook.

How does this technology make you feel? →

Draw or write your thoughts in the space below.

THIS WOULD BE GREAT BECAUSE I CAN'T DRIVE



Self-Driving Cars

(Autonomous vehicles)

Vehicles that can navigate without human input.

How do you imagine the above technology being used in the space to the right?? →

Draw or write your thoughts in the space below.

IT'S CAN TAKE ME TO AND FROM THE SUPERMARKET WITH MY SHOPPING.



Supermarket

# DESIGN FUTURES: Shaping Future Communities

Design Futures MDes students were engaged through a full day workshop to co-create ideas for future community connectivity.

## What We Did

In an era of turbulence for people and the planet, navigating the future is more critical than ever. In the Design Futures programme, students integrate futures thinking with creative and strategic design to address environmental and societal challenges. Through cross-disciplinary work, they envision preferable futures through design-led interventions grounded in research and understanding of complex systems. Students define future scenarios and engage communities with ethical, resilient proposals. The programme departs beyond business-as-usual by adopting long-term perspectives to imagine alternative futures that foster meaningful, lasting impact.

To generate design concepts, the design research team held a *Design Futuring* co-design workshop, inviting Design Futures MDes students to participate as future older adults. The workshop explored future expectations and aspirations around connectivity, from which key themes, design interventions, policy implications, and illustrative concepts will be developed. This process engaged students in creating concepts that envision potential futures of community connectivity.

## How We Did It

This co-design workshop, developed with Design Futures programme staff at the Royal College of Art, involved 12 students selected through a creative brief on ageing and communication. Drawing on research insights from Guinness residents, the students imagined and designed new ideas for community connectivity over the next decade.

The workshop followed two stages: Explore & Define, and Develop & Deliver, guiding students through a speculative design process informed by research.

As part of the Design Futures activity, students explored and created future scenarios under the guidance of the programme team and research team. Design tools such as the Three Future Frames (a tool used to explore and plan for different possible futures) and the STEEPV<sup>17</sup> Framework (a tool to frame complex external factors into themes of Social, Technological, Environmental, Economic, Political, Values) were combined with research insights from the project to create future scenarios. Through collaborative discussions, creative thinking, and rapid prototyping, they developed early design concepts that reflected a range of perspectives on possible future connectivity.

The first stage involved exploring future scenarios, reflecting on current environments, and focusing on specific objects, spaces, or experiences to redesign. Facilitators from the design research team and the Design Futures programme provided feedback and guidance to help further develop the students' ideas. In the second stage, students created visual or conceptual collages to communicate their concepts, concluding with a group presentation and critique to refine their work.

## What We Learned

The workshop encouraged students to explore shared themes and resident preferences in Guinness, inspiring community-focused design ideas such as communal libraries, intergenerational gardens, technology hubs, food and music gatherings, companion robots, and adaptable spaces.

Design Futures MDes Students, working with RCA Staff and John V Willshire (Smithery).



# 10 FUTURES: Later Life Community Connectivity Concepts

## Future Community Connectivity

The following segment describes a set of preferred futures for community connectivity, shaped by an exploration of the needs and challenges of staying connected in later life.

## Design Concepts

These futures are framed through three interrelated dimensions of environments: physical, social, and technological, which translate into design outputs such as objects, experiences, and spaces. Each of the ten Design Futures presented offer distinctive opportunities and insights for strengthening community ties and building meaningful connections.

Each concept is grounded in a set of guiding principles drawn from the research that may be considered individually or collectively. These principles reflect the community connectivity goals and aspirations shared by the participants.

The research methods used have informed these visions by focusing on the challenges and opportunities presented by emerging technologies. By centring technology through the perspectives of older adults and utilising design-led interventions, we examine what community connectivity might look like if co-designed with both current and future older adults.

The accompanying illustrations showcase ten distinct Design Futures, concepts designed to enhance community connectivity at the Guinness Partnership.

Illustration  
of Design  
Futures  
Concept.



1

## Connection Hubs

Libraries are becoming places where quiet presence leads to connection.

As access to information becomes instant, the library's role is shifting, now imagined as a calm, inclusive community hub. This shift invites diverse groups to come together through shared activities and everyday interactions, creating a welcoming space where everyone, from young to old, can engage.

A key component of this concept is a shared, handwritten calendar near communal seating, offering spontaneous sessions like teaching traditional skills of knitting,

storytelling, or tea chats. These simple opportunities help bridge generational gaps by encouraging participation without pressure. As people come and go, connections are made in quiet or lively ways, allowing for both shared learning and casual exchange.

- **Design for curiosity:** Use visuals and signage to engage interest.
- **Celebrate traditional, non-digital knowledge:** Encourage community-led sessions.
- **Encourage intergenerational exchange:** Share hands-on knowledge informally.
- **Support observation as participation:** Allow people to observe before engaging.



Illustration of Design Futures Concept.

## 2 Bartering of Microservice

Small acts of care can build lasting, intergenerational bonds.

A community service designed for mutual support can foster relationships through meaningful exchanges. A student might assist an older neighbour with errands in exchange for meals or shared wisdom, creating a low-pressure, reciprocal interaction that benefits both parties. The experience helps reframe assistance not as dependence, but as joyful exchange.

The design features shared residential spaces or community hubs, including digital and physical

notice boards where people can offer and request help, "Need groceries? Come by for dinner!" or "Can't lift parcels? I've got you." These subtle cues foster spontaneous, mutual support without obligation, valuing time and building community.

- **Reframe support as an exchange: Emphasise mutual benefit over obligation.**
- **Design for casual connection: Create relaxed spaces for spontaneous interactions.**
- **Use gentle tech prompts: Apps and notice boards to encourage participation.**
- **Enable meaningful contribution: Through interests and activities.**

Illustration of Design Futures Concept.



## 3 Nature & Tech Connect

Intergenerational relationships enrich lives, offering emotional support, lifelong learning, and connection through natural and technological means.

Community gardens are ideal spaces for merging nature with technology, where younger and older generations can connect. A grandchild might help their grandparent use a simple camera to document plants, while the grandparent shares their experience of keeping plants and gains confidence with new tools and digital storytelling.

In this design, the garden offers

hands-on experiences and quiet spots for reflection. With accessible technology like user-friendly cameras, intergenerational bonds are strengthened as people learn from one another, both through digital tools and wisdom connected to the natural world.

- **Design nature spaces for learning: Use plants and wildlife to inspire curiosity.**
- **Introduce intuitive tools: Accessible tech encourages joint exploration.**
- **Support shared roles: Everyone can teach and learn.**
- **Foster creativity: Create spaces for self-expression and collaborative discovery.**



Illustration of Design Futures Concept.

#### 4 Community Learning With Technology

Lifelong learning is essential for personal growth, confidence, and meaningful social connection, especially in a fast-evolving digital world.

This design envisions a community hub where older adults engage with technology through tailored intergenerational exchanges. A retired teacher may mentor a young tech consultant, who in turn teaches new digital skills, fostering mutual growth and empowerment.

Equipped with AI tutors and holographic displays, this space offers tailored learning experiences

for older adults, helping them build digital confidence. It also creates mentorship opportunities, reshaping the narrative around ageing and technology, and encouraging ongoing participation in a rapidly changing world.

- Empower older learners: AI and gamification build curiosity.
- Design for dual exchange: Encourage both teaching and learning between generations.
- Create intuitive learning spaces: Ensure ease of use and accessibility.
- Use technology as a connector: Promote collaboration through digital tools.



Illustration of Design Futures Concept.

#### 5 Knowledge Kiosk

Knowledge-sharing builds stronger communities, fostering a sense of purpose, pride, and connection across generations.

The community Knowledge Kiosk is a digital platform in public spaces where older adults and younger generations can exchange knowledge.

From gardening tips to local history, or latest trends to useful apps, these kiosks offer an easy way for community members to contribute and connect.

The kiosk's user-friendly interface considers contributions from older

adults, empowering them to share as easily as younger cohorts. This system encourages learning, recognition, and respect, helping bridge the generational divide while fostering ongoing engagement within the community.

- Elevate local wisdom: Centre older adults' lived experiences as valuable knowledge.
- Embed interaction in daily life: Position knowledge kiosks in familiar public spaces.
- Encourage mutual respect: Allow users to choose how to engage.
- Design for inclusivity: Ensure accessibility for all users, regardless of tech experience.



Illustration of Design Futures Concept.

6

## Generations Fest

Celebrating the shared joy of music, movies, and food fosters emotional connections, promotes intergenerational understanding, and strengthens community bonds.

The Generations Fest is a vibrant event where older adults share the music, films, and foods from their earlier years with younger generations, creating a multigenerational, multisensory celebration of culture.

Grandparents take centre stage as DJs and storytellers, offering personal memories tied to iconic music and films.

This event blends education and entertainment, mixing traditional and modern elements in a communal celebration that lets all ages learn cultural history playfully.

- **Engage through music:** Grandparents share stories and memories inspired by music.
- **Film and memory sharing:** Retro screenings spark dialogue.
- **Celebrate food traditions:** Dishes reflect personal and cultural histories.
- **Promote playful interaction:** Encourage joy through shared activities and experiences.

36

Illustration of Design Futures Concept.



7

## Companion Pods

Promoting respectful and mindful social interaction through the use of emotionally responsive Companion Pods in shared community spaces.

Companion Pods are a collection of soft, colour-changing robots designed to help people navigate social spaces by communicating comfort levels with simple cues, signaling whether they prefer solitude or social interaction.

By changing colour based on mood (e.g., red for solitude, green for engagement), these bots promote respectful social behaviour, to reduce pressure

and foster inclusivity. They allow individuals to enjoy public spaces with the comfort of knowing their preferences will be respected, whether that means enjoying quiet solitude or making new connections.

- **Mindful social interaction:** Pods support individuals express social availability.
- **Emotional expression without words:** Alternative visual and sensory emotional cues.
- **Tactile and accessible design:** Soft, inviting, and easy to use.
- **Encourage inclusivity:** Make spaces welcoming and respectful of everyone's needs.

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Illustration of Design Futures Concept.

## 8

### Mingling Pins

Connecting through shared hobbies encourages organic, meaningful social interaction.

Mingling Pins are simple badges worn by individuals to display their interests, such as "Lena – Loves Jazz" or "Tom – Avid Gardener."

These pins encourage spontaneous conversations and social connections in public spaces, offering a natural way to meet others.

In communities, the pins invite conversation and bonding over shared interests. The pins create a low-pressure social environment,

especially for older adults seeking in-person connection without digital interaction.

Designated zones and events support easy meetups, while the pins can be worn anywhere for spontaneous encounters.

- **Facilitating conversation:** Pins invite meaningful conversations.
- **Encouraging social interaction:** Spark easy, organic engagement through shared interests.
- **Inclusivity for older adults:** Break down social barriers, especially in small spaces.
- **Non-digital connection:** Encourage spontaneous in-person moments.

Illustration of Design Futures Concept.



## 9

### Harmonious Space

Creating multi-functional environments supports the diverse needs of ageing individuals, fostering autonomy and connection.

Harmonious Space is designed to offer both privacy and community in one flexible environment. The space features quiet pods for solitude and shared areas for collaboration, allowing people to engage in both work and social activities as they prefer.

With tech lending libraries and ergonomic aids, this space ensures that older adults can remain professionally active

while also having access to social support. The environment balances the need for independence and interaction, allowing users to engage at their own pace and comfort.

- **Flexibility:** Adaptable spaces for both quiet reflection and social interaction.
- **Accessibility:** Offer ergonomic design and tech support.
- **Connection and autonomy:** Allow for both private and shared experiences.
- **Support diverse needs:** Accommodate both workers and caregivers with flexibility.

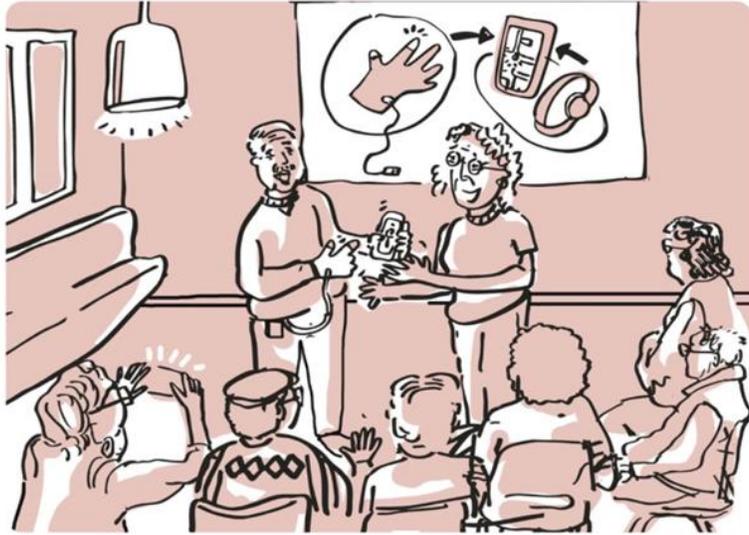


Illustration of Design Futures Concept.

## 10 Community 2030

Empowering older adults through peer-to-peer digital learning.

Community 2030 introduces wearable assistive devices that allow older adults to mentor their peers in technology use.

These devices, such as smart wristbands, help users guide others through tech challenges, fostering a collaborative learning environment.

The design centres on a supportive community hub where older adults with higher digital literacy assist their peers in navigating modern technology.

This peer-led model promotes empowerment, confidence, and connection, helping bridge the digital divide while creating a space of mutual support.

- **Peer-to-peer learning:** Enable collaborative, mentor-led digital education.
- **Inclusive design:** Ensure wearables are user-friendly.
- **Empowerment through technology:** Build individual confidence and capability.
- **Supportive environment:** Design a welcoming, non-judgmental space for learning.



1  
Connection Hubs



2  
Bartering of Microservice



3  
Nature & Tech Connect



4  
Community Learning With Technology



5  
Knowledge Kiosk



6  
Generations Fest



7  
Companion Pods



8  
Mingling Pins



9  
Harmonius Space



10  
Community 2030

# COMMUNITY CONNECTIVITY

Forum for the Future of  
Community Connectivity  
in Later Life

**11**  
June

**09.30 - 13.00**

RCA Rausing Research & Innovation Building  
15 Parkgate Road, London SW11 4NL



Royal College of Art

**THE HELEN  
HAMLYN CENTRE  
FOR DESIGN**



the  
**guinness**  
partnership



Funding for the  
future of ageing well  
VIVENSA FOUNDATION



NEEDS TO BE A PHYSICAL MECHANISM TO CREATE THIS

QUESTIONS GOES ON

HOW CAN WE RE-DESIGN FAILED HOUSING?

LOW-TECH

HI-TECH

WE ALL NEED A DIFFERENT HOOK

PANEL 2  
COMMUNITY CONNECTIVITY  
IN LATER LIFE

EVERY DESIGN PROJECT ENDS IN FAILURE

EVERY SYSTEM IS DESIGNED TO CREATE THE RESULTS IT GETS

WHERE DO YOU THINK YOU ARE GOING?

HOW DID YOU GET TO WHERE YOU ARE?

PASSIONS + CIVIC CONTRIBUTION NOT (ECONOMIC PURPOSE)

POTENTIAL VS BARRIERS CONNECTION TO AMBIENT SPACE BETWEEN BUILDINGS

THE CONCEPT OF NON-PLACE THEY CALLED THE OPEN SPACE 'THE PRISON'

AWAY FROM TREATMENT BE MODEL

WE KMT THESE TO HOUSING + COMMUN

JUST BECAUSE WE ALWAYS DONE THINGS ONE DOESN'T ME WE HAVE TO KEEP DOING IT

55+ ?!?



HOW DO WE DESIGN CITIES TO NOT

SHOPPING ONLINE

Live Scribe Illustration by Ben Connors.

# Thanks for listening.



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