LIVING CLOSER

The many faces of co-housing

"No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the Continent, a part of the main."

John Donne, English poet, 1624

London is an amazing place to live.

You have pretty much everything you could ask for within forty-five minutes. Fresh fruit and veg shops, pubs and doctor's offices are mostly within walking distance, there is an abundance of parks for five-asides, picnics and barbecues, and endless options for entertainment—from galleries and clubs to markets. Most of all, London offers endless possibilities: to be yourself, and to reach your potential.

But it can also be a tough place to live—jostling for space on busy roads choked with fumes, trying to strike a healthy work-life balance with long hours and commuting distances, or maintaining friendships with those who live in the same city, yet feel far away. There are more than 8 million of us—old and young, indigenous and foreign born—striving, doing and dreaming within the boundaries of the M25. But somehow many of us feel alone. Why is that?

I remember the first time I visited a Camphill community in Callan, Ireland in 2013. It was an impromptu visit, off the back of a talk I gave at the Craft Council there. I didn't know much about co-housing back then, let alone about the Camphill Community, where individuals with special needs live together in a supportive environment. Although my first visit was brief, I was struck by the deep personal bonds between the people living there, as well as their sense of generosity and caring towards one another. Seeing their connection and sense of belonging made me realise it was something I'd been longing for too, without even knowing; I couldn't help but wonder whether something like this could ever be possible in London.

This research started from the very personal desire of wanting to find a better way of living in London – perhaps finding something other than the standard market options for nuclear families that we're all familiar with. Inspired by people I met at Camphill, who I've continued to work with, I wanted to know more about what's out there, and more importantly, who is out there.

Camphill community—where the sphere of sharing can be extensive—may not be everyone's cup of tea. However, I'm sure many people, like me, are interested in living slightly closer together—socially, if not physically.

By introducing the eight individuals that we interviewed for this research, from all walks of life, we hope to demonstrate that co-housing is not something to be afraid of: it's not just for 'alternative' types, or simply a last resort for those who can't afford to buy on their own. Instead, it is as diverse as the individuals who live in it, and perhaps most usefully understood by learning about their motivations and lived experiences.

Je Ahn
Director, Studio Weave

WHY CO-HOUSING? WHY NOW?

Shared living, whether through public realm, workspace or housing, has long been of interest to our practice.

The original impetus for this work was a concern with why, as a society, we have generally moved away from shared living and towards individual homes—especially in cities such as London, where housing shortages, inflated prices, and increasing levels of loneliness, mean that shared living models are becoming increasingly relevant, and where alternative ideas for living more densely and sustainably are desperately needed. It was also borne of a curiosity to 'get under' the skin of a form of housing from the perspective of those who live there.

In 2014, we were awarded funding from RIBA to undertake a piece of research interrogating how, within co-housing developments, balance can be achieved between shared and private spheres (spaces, materials, facilities) and supported and independent modes of living (touching on social and psychological needs for community and belonging, autonomy, and privacy, for instance). Our original focus at the outset sought to generate insights as to how greater understanding of these variables might improve the spatial design of co-housing models.

Existing research

Early on, it became clear that a breadth of existing research, analysis and case studies had already been compiled by researchers around the globe.[1] Multiple case studies and vignettes existed, but seemed to focus on practical issues, mainly covering three areas: Need-based drivers of co-housing projects (ageing population, financial constraints, need for care); Architectural and spatial models/typologies (how to literally 'fit them in'); and Delivery mechanisms (procurement, finance, co-design and project management). Additionally, we found that co-housing, and spheres of sharing more generally, had been addressed primarily through spatial and architectural lenses.

There were many voices analysing co-housing, and a sense that the term generated a raft of perceptions and even biases, from being 'woolly' to being firmly middle class (or weird) which may be partly attributed to its limited coverage in press and research, or by the amplification of particular—even peculiar—case studies, rather than its depiction from the ground up perspectives of individuals involved.

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1   See Sargisson 2004, Tummers 2016, Jarvis 2015, Brenton 2013

Relevant shifts and trends

At the same time, we were becoming increasingly aware of cultural, technological and other shifts affecting the way we live, and questioning what impact this might have on housing and ideas of home. While we face many of the same structural challenges—such as chronic housing shortages—that gave rise to early forms of urban co-housing such as the self-build and co-operative movements of the 1970s, our lives are also profoundly different: from patterns of 'settlement,' to the way we work and socialise.

These are outlined briefly in this piece of work, and range from delayed 'entry to adulthood,' the rise of freelancing and related phenomenon of the 'global nomad,' to everyday reliance on technology to mediate real-life interactions; perhaps most profoundly, the degree to which social isolation and loneliness is now considered a serious epidemic in the UK.

These shifts are, to lesser and greater degrees, interconnected with forms of living closer together. A raft of new housing and 'lifestyle' models have emerged alongside more traditional co-housing co-operatives, including entrepreneur-driven modes of shared living catering to the hyper-mobile professionals, to less salubrious forms of living ('beds in sheds') which offer access to the networks and opportunities of the city. While it's clear that some of these modes have arisen of economic necessity—others are clearly arising from shifting notions of desirable ways to live.

This research

In essence, our fundamental interest has been to explore the qualitative angles of 'living closer together'—a gap recognised by social researchers—while also looking to consider 'traditional' co-housing alongside almshouses, warehouse living and the newer, emergent 'co-living' (the housing equivalent of co-working)—all of which involve people living in closer proximity within non-family members, negotiating similar challenges related to privacy and sharing, support and independence.

This research features qualitative research derived from eight interviews with individuals involved in London-based schemes where people are living closer together, including:

- **Supported Living / Extra Care** – Housing schemes explicitly catering to older or disabled persons, providing independent living with varying levels of on-site care;
- **Co-housing, Co-ops and Community Land Trusts** – A broad range of scheme types attracting residents of various ages and life-stages, often responding to factors such as affordability and exhibiting characteristics such as shared values or intentions at the outset
- **Live/Work** – Housing arrangements which largely cater to younger, potentially transient, residents looking to incorporate living and professional spheres and varying from informal and ad-hoc to more formal, centrally managed models offering co-working and hot-desking.

Interviewees range from the CEO of a charity aiming to build an almshouse for the 21st century, and paid 'community manager' of a co-living scheme, to a recent resident of one of London's oldest co-operative. Together, they look to provide the 'human face' of co-housing at its broadest, capturing the diversity of personalities, motivations and individual journeys.

The document itself is organised into three sections covering context, past and present, interviews and reflections.

- **Part 1** provides a brief overview of living closer together in the past, an introduction to the rise of co-housing in its current form and definition, a review of spheres of sharing (physical and social) and degrees of sharing within contemporary schemes, alongside a review of relevant trends spanning demographics, work, technology, well-being, cultural norms and 'taste.'
- **Part 2** consists of eight semi-structured interviews and portraits in long-form article format, which capture interviewees' personal stories and experiences—covering their personal and professional trajectory, role in relation to their group or scheme, and broader reflections on collective living, followed by an analysis of perceptions of co-housing, and points of comparison and contrast between the schemes themselves.
- **Part 3** is a reflection on the findings and significance of this work overall, highlighting key insights, challenges and lessons learned, and what co-housing might contribute to the growing debate around what a more diverse housing offer looks like.

As we deliberately chose to interview a small and diverse selection of individuals, we have avoided concluding with a single generalising statement, except to say that it's clear that individuals have a range of motivations—sometimes personal, sometimes professional—for becoming involved in co-housing, co-living and other forms of living closer together. It was also clear that, for our interviewees, co-housing was defined not by strict definition of ownership, tenure, or typology, but largely by shared ethos.

The interviews raised several key insights and challenges that co-housing must reckon with, including perceptions of middle class bias, balancing power (and responsibility) between 'original' and newer residents, enabling people to express their needs without fear of social stigma, or how to encourage 'everyday sociability' without feeling artificially manufactured—problems that come with negotiating all social relationships.

However, they also raised several deep and compelling examples of benefits: from generating feelings of empowerment and alleviating loneliness, to the potential to build social bonds through practical problem-solving.
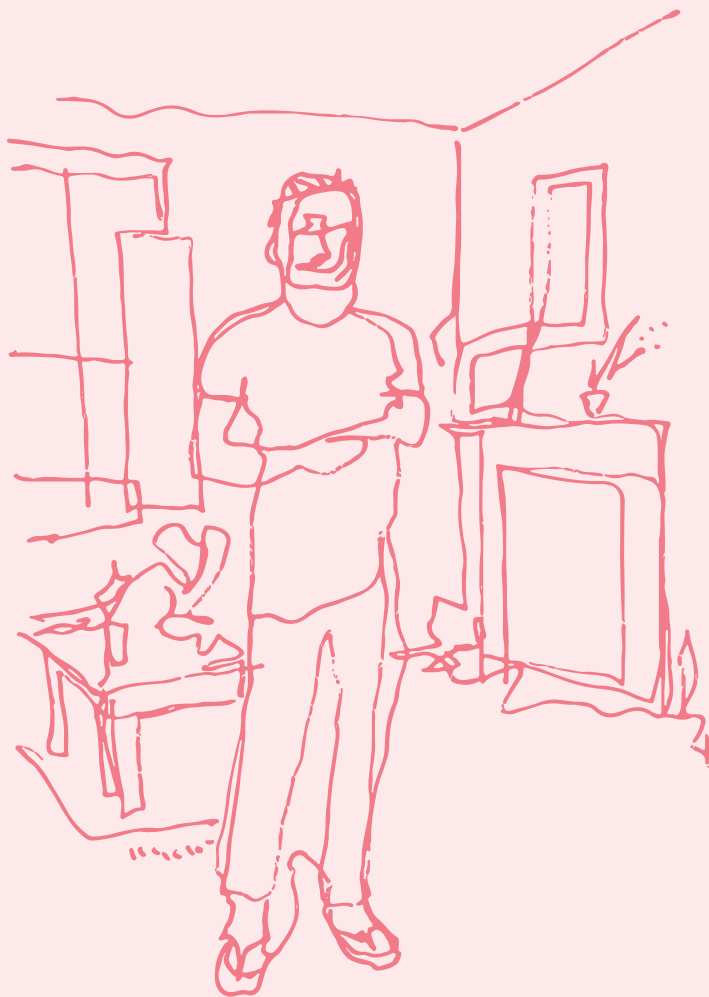
"When people are secure, then altruism is huge…
you could have the most generous person in the
world, but if they're in a non-secure situation
then they won't be in a position to share…"

Jamie Perera, Resident, Grand Union Co-op

PAST & PRESENT

Rundling, a common 12th century village form used by the Slavs, comprised of a central, circular village green owned in common with individually owned farmsteads radiating out like spokes of a wheel

LIVING CLOSER IN THE PAST

People's desire to live closer together is not particularly new. Communities across the globe have been living closely together for time immemorial. From Pythagoras' aspirations to build a community of strict vegetarians in Ancient Greece, to medieval times where, research suggests, homes were commonly gathering places for small groups of revolving residents rather than individual family units,[1] written history is riddled with examples of highly collaborative settlements offering new models for living together—often in response to deep desires for greater security and protection, as well as spiritual, economic or even sexual liberation.

These have taken a variety of forms, from monasteries, ashrams, communes, survivalist compounds and kibbutzim, to housing co-operatives. The 15th to 17th centuries produced a multitude of ethno-religious groups compelled to form smaller, collaborative living units for such reasons. From the Hutterites, Mennonites, and Amish originating from German and Dutch

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1   See the work of Roberta Gilchrist, Professor of Archaeology, University of Reading

Circulad (France) A traditional village built in concentric circles, typical of 11th and 12th century France

Fruitlands, the short-lived agrarian commune established in mid-19th century New England

speaking territories of Central Europe,[2] to England's 'Diggers,'[3] they sought refuge from religious persecution in smaller settlements, often sharing principles such as pacifism and commons ownership.[4]

The 19th century is sometimes referred to as the 'golden age of communities.'[5] In North America, for instance, this period generated more than 100 experimental communities—many short-lived—ranging from communes, utopias, and spiritual settlements to 'back to the land' movements seeking escape from newly industrialized society, and to establish their own models based on ideals relating to material consumption, connection to nature, equality of social relations and spiritual beliefs.

One (extreme) example was that of Fruitlands, a failed agrarian commune established in the 1840s and influenced by

Transcendentalist thought.[6] Renouncing the 'civilised' world and aspiring to self-sufficiency, the commune eschewed private property and trade, ultimately lasting less than a year.

Another was that of Melusina Fay Pierce's failed Co-operative Housekeeping Movement, which called for mothers and wives to share duties. This was part of the 'Grand Domestic Revolution' described by Dolores Hayden; the premise that women's economic independence was essential for gender equality, with domestic reorganisation becoming a means of increasing women's ability to partake in paid employment outside the home.[7]

Not all sharing arrangements were necessarily extreme, or based on radically alternative visions for society. Shared ownership was also a means to respond to structural disenfranchisement, in both

2   Various branches of Anabaptists, a Christian movement which traces its origins to the Radical Reformation in Europe

3   A branch of 'Radical' Protestants seeking economic equality through a form of agrarian Socialism

4   Common ownership refers to holding the assets of an organization, enterprise or community indivisibly rather than in the names of the individual members or groups of members, as common property.

5   Clay, Alexa. "Utopia Inc. Most utopian communities are, like most start-ups, short-lived. What makes the difference between failure and success?" Aeon 28 Feb. 2017 https://aeon.co/essays/like-start-ups-most-intentional-communities-fail-why

6   A philosophical movement which fundamentally believed that society and institutions had corrupted the purity of the individual. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transcendentalism

7   Pearson, Lynn and White, Patricia Architectural and Social History of Cooperative Living Palgrave Macmillan, 1988.

New Communities Inc. The first Community Land Trust, founded in rural Georgia, US, in 1969

Brotherhood of the Spirit, later Renaissance Community, Warwick Massachusetts, one of the largest and most enduring communes in the northeast United States

Tamera eco-village, Portugal

Image of Johnson's pasture commune, Guilford Vermont USA, 1969; Special Collections and University Archives, University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries

urban and rural contexts. New York's housing co-operative movement of the 1920s, for instance, instigated by Abraham Kazan, was a response to having grown up in appalling conditions of tenement housing. Similarly, New Communities Inc. (NCI)—a farm collective on 5,735 acres in Lee County, Georgia—was founded in 1969 to provide a safe haven for black farmers in a context of deep-seated institutional racism, becoming the world's first known Community Land Trust.[8]

The 20th century, like those before it, was peppered with numerous examples of communally-oriented settlements; it was also the century during which the concept of 'intentional community' was born—with groups coalescing for reasons beyond shared beliefs and practical resource sharing, such as commitment to self improvement, spiritual evolution or greater sustainability.

For example, founded in 1910, Degania, the first kibbutz in Israel, fused Zionism with Socialism, pioneering a form of income-sharing through a mixture of agriculture and industry in a model that still thrives today.[9] The Tamera commune, also still in existence, was founded by Psychoanalyst and Sociologist Dieter Duhm in Germany in 1978.[10] Inspired by Marxism and psychoanalysis, the commune aspired 'to dissolve the trauma

of human relationships' for its residents.

Others still were notable for lacking strong ideological underpinnings altogether. Many of the 'counter-cultural' communes established in the 1960s and 1970s, particularly in North America, were defined largely by the elevation of individual freedoms over shared doctrines or group interests.[11]

These examples illustrate some of the high-level drivers of people living closer together in the past: from the Utopian seeking fundamentally alternative forms of social organisation, or pragmatic responses to scarcity or systematic oppression, to the shared ethos and spiritual dimensions associated with 'intentional communities.'

Yet each were closely linked with the political, social, technological developments of their time. Whereas early agrarian revolts and collective farming movements were direct responses to legal developments allowing the enclosure and fencing off of common land, the rise of housing co-operatives, CLTs and communes across Europe and the United States largely occurred in parallel to—and in direct interaction with—growing social and political awareness seeking to redress social balances and norms.

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8   See NewCommunities Inc. http://www.newcommunitiesinc.com/

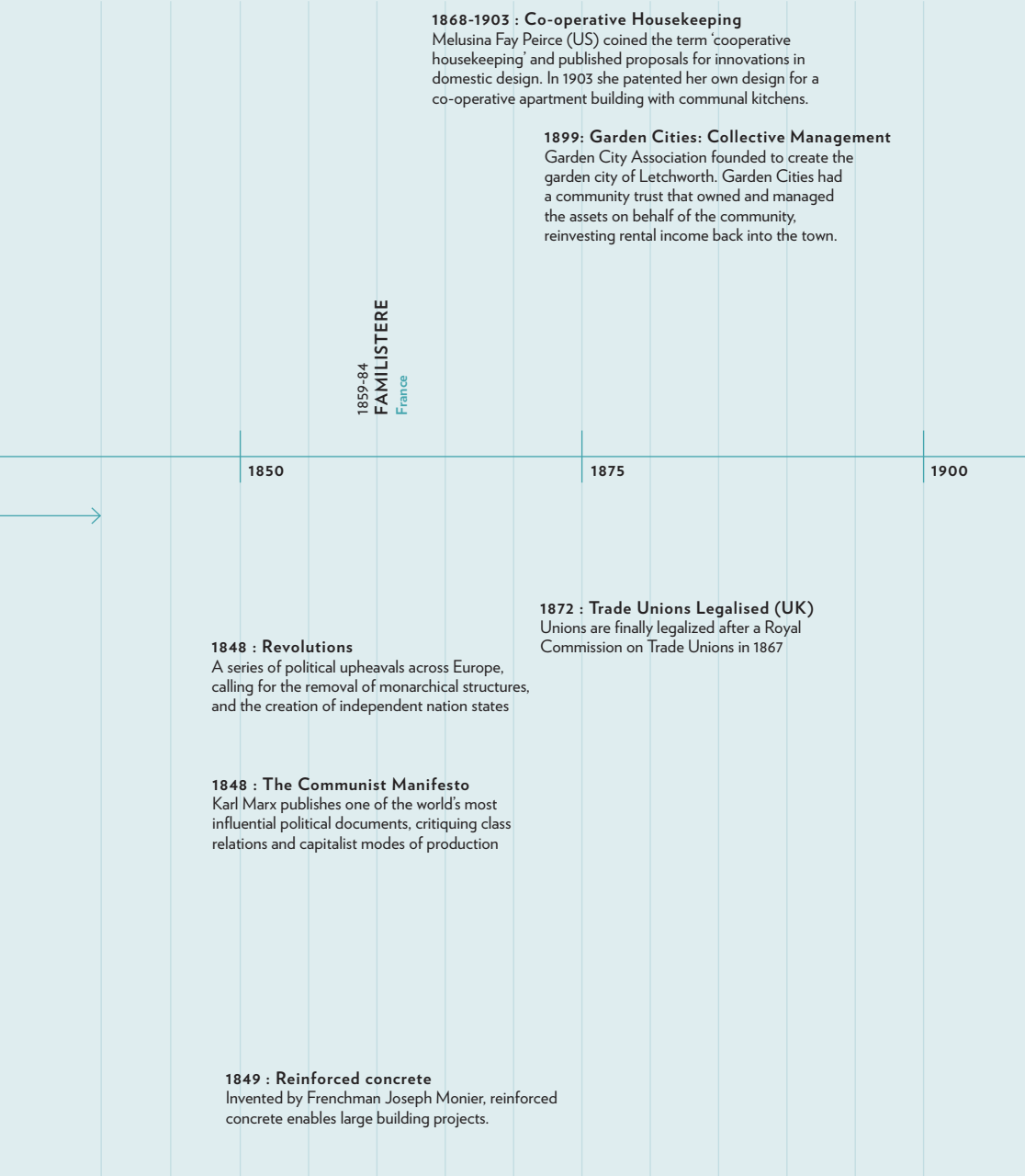9   There are 270 kibbutzim, housing 2% of Israel's population. Jones, R. "The Kibbutz Movement Adapts to a Capitalist Israel" The Wall Street Journal 13 Oct. 2017
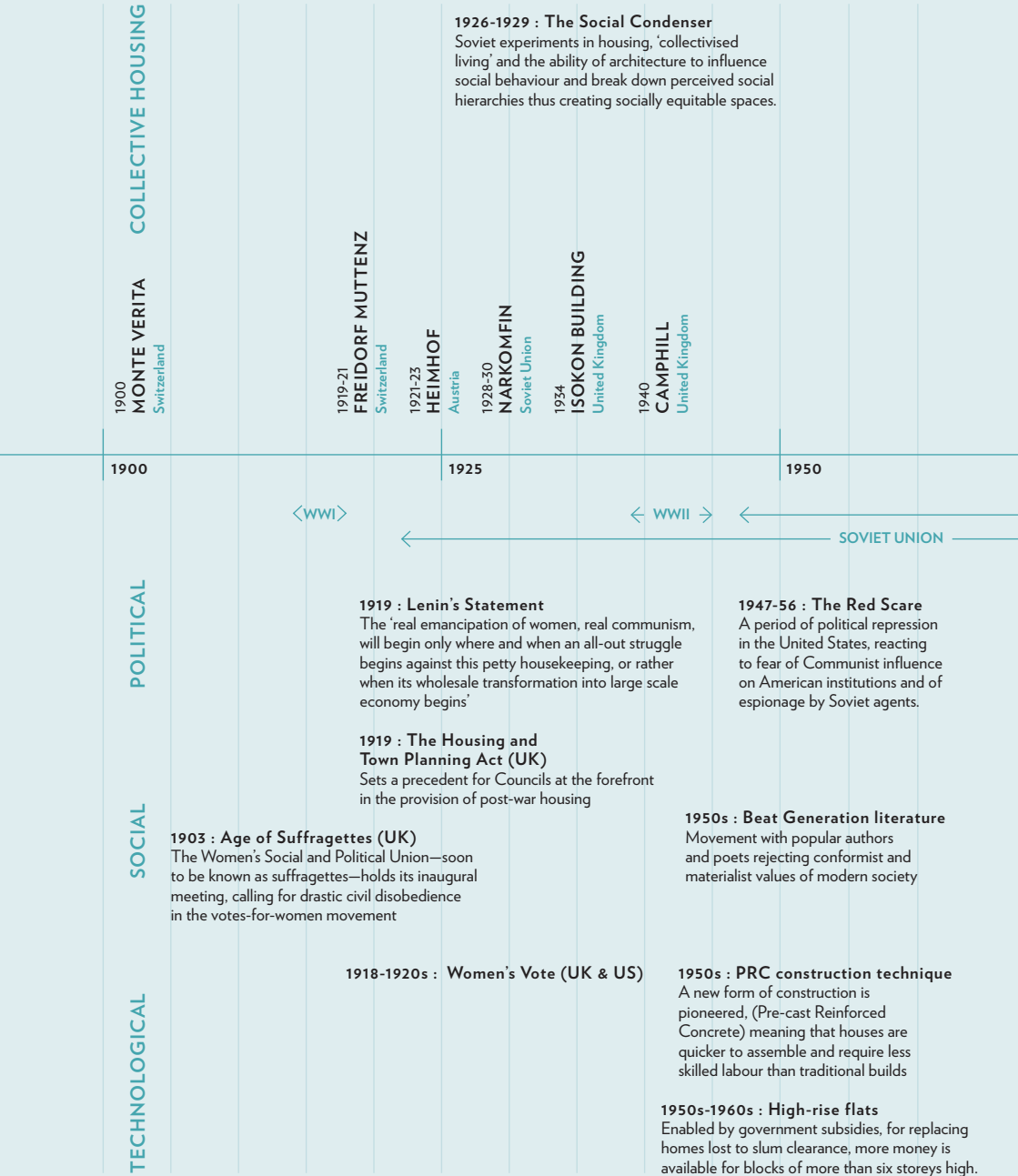
10   It was later re-founded in Portugal in 1995

11   Scanzoni, John. Designing Families Sage Publishing, 1999

COLLECTIVE HOUSING

1808–1837 : Phalanstere : Charles Fourier
Fourier calculated 1,620 to be the optimum number for people living and working together. This informed his concept for 'a Phalanstère', a building with meeting rooms, private rooms and gardens where groups of people could live communally.

1800
NEW LANARK
United Kingdom

1775	1800	1825

INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

POLITICAL

1799 : The Combination Act (UK)
Is passed, banning trade unions and collective bargaining by British workers

1773 : Enclosure Act (UK)
Act of the Parliament, passed during the reign of George III. The Act is still in force in the United Kingdom. It created a law that enabled the enclosure of common land, at the same time removing the right of commoners' access

1789–99 : French Revolution
Period of profound social and political upheaval overthrew the monarchy, established a republic

SOCIAL

TECHNOLOGICAL

1798–1849 : Exhibition of Products of French Industry
Organised in Paris, France, showcasing industrial innovation from is a public event organized in Paris, France, from, precursors to The Great Exhibition of 1851 in London

1868-1903 : Co-operative Housekeeping
Melusina Fay Peirce (US) coined the term 'cooperative housekeeping' and published proposals for innovations in domestic design. In 1903 she patented her own design for a co-operative apartment building with communal kitchens.

1899: Garden Cities: Collective Management
Garden City Association founded to create the garden city of Letchworth. Garden Cities had a community trust that owned and managed the assets on behalf of the community, reinvesting rental income back into the town.

1859-84 **FAMILISTERE** France

1850

1875

1900

1872 : Trade Unions Legalised (UK)
Unions are finally legalized after a Royal Commission on Trade Unions in 1867

1848 : Revolutions
A series of political upheavals across Europe, calling for the removal of monarchical structures, and the creation of independent nation states

1848 : The Communist Manifesto
Karl Marx publishes one of the world's most influential political documents, critiquing class relations and capitalist modes of production

1849 : Reinforced concrete
Invented by Frenchman Joseph Monier, reinforced concrete enables large building projects.

COLLECTIVE HOUSING

1926-1929 : The Social Condenser
Soviet experiments in housing, 'collectivised living' and the ability of architecture to influence social behaviour and break down perceived social hierarchies thus creating socially equitable spaces.

1900
MONTE VERITA
Switzerland

1919-21
FREIDORF MUTTENZ
Switzerland

1921-23
HEIMHOF
Austria

1928-30
NARKOMFIN
Soviet Union

1934
ISOKON BUILDING
United Kingdom

1940
CAMPHILL
United Kingdom

1900   **1925**   **1950**

⟨WWI⟩   ← WWII →   ←

SOVIET UNION

POLITICAL

1919 : Lenin's Statement
The 'real emancipation of women, real communism, will begin only where and when an all-out struggle begins against this petty housekeeping, or rather when its wholesale transformation into large scale economy begins'

1919 : The Housing and Town Planning Act (UK)
Sets a precedent for Councils at the forefront in the provision of post-war housing

1947-56 : The Red Scare
A period of political repression in the United States, reacting to fear of Communist influence on American institutions and of espionage by Soviet agents.

SOCIAL

1903 : Age of Suffragettes (UK)
The Women's Social and Political Union—soon to be known as suffragettes—holds its inaugural meeting, calling for drastic civil disobedience in the votes-for-women movement

1950s : Beat Generation literature
Movement with popular authors and poets rejecting conformist and materialist values of modern society

TECHNOLOGICAL

1918-1920s : Women's Vote (UK & US)

1950s : PRC construction technique
A new form of construction is pioneered, (Pre-cast Reinforced Concrete) meaning that houses are quicker to assemble and require less skilled labour than traditional builds

1950s-1960s : High-rise flats
Enabled by government subsidies, for replacing homes lost to slum clearance, more money is available for blocks of more than six storeys high.

1967 : Co- Housing
Bodil Graae writes a newspaper article titled "Children Should Have One Hundred Parents," spurring a group of families to form a community and develop the co-housing project Sættedammen in Denmark, which is the oldest known modern co-housing community.

1960s-1985 : Rise of Self Build
Walter Segal developed methods of standardisation to facilitate the delivery of economic self build projects.

1969 : Community Land Trust (CLT)
First CLT, New Communities Inc. was created in US. Anon-profit corporation to hold land in perpetual trust for the permanent use of rural communities."

2000: Movement inspires academics and housing development professionals in UK

1967 **KOMMUNE 1** Germany

1970–77 **CENTRAAL WONEN DE HILVERSUM MEENT** Netherlands

1979 **STACKEN** Sweden

2009 **AIR BNB LAUNCHED** 10,000 users 2,500 listings

2015 **OWCH** United Kingdom

1975

2000

COLD WAR
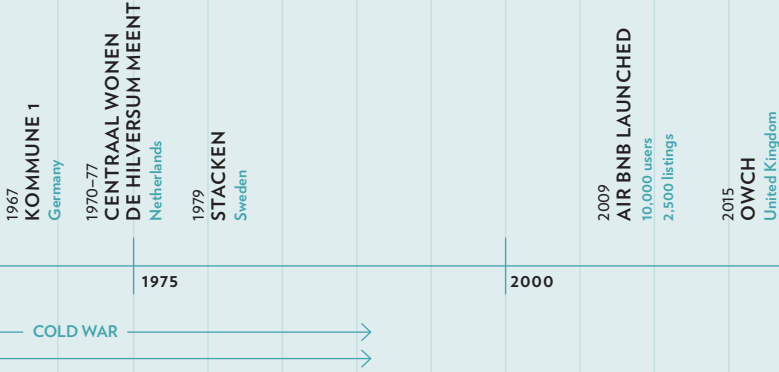
1989 : European Revolutions
Series of political upheavals across Europe, calling for the removal of monarchical structures, and the creation of independent nation states

1980 : 'Right to Buy' Housing Act
Better quality council properties are purchased by tenants, reducing the supply of family houses and altering the balance of council housing stock in the country.

2002 : Land Registrar Act (UK)
'Adverse possessors' of land or property are granted the right to apply to become new registered owners

1954-68 : Civil Rights Movement
The social movement calling for the end of legalised racial segregation and discrimination laws in the United States

2005 : The rise of co-working
The first 'co-working' spaces originate in San Francisco, Freelance individuals work in a shared environment, representing virtual work.

1967: Summer of love
A social phenomenon featuring gatherings of 'hippies' and counter cultural youth across the US and Europe

2015: 'Sharing Economy'
Enters the Oxford Dictionary, describing ideas where there is an efficient model of matching supply with demand

1960 : Advent of birth control pills

1993 : Advent of smart phones (Apps)

1969 : Knowledge Economy
Gains currency recognising the role of knowledge resources in a globalized economy, such as trade secrets and expertise are seen as critical as other economic resources.

Mid 1990s: The Internet
The Internet has had a revolutionary impact on culture, commerce, and technology, including the rise of near-instant communication by electronic mail, instant messaging

Image of shared yard space at
Saettedammen in Hilerod, Denmark

Image of Darvell, a Bruderhof community in Sussex in
1971; the Bruderhof Christian movement originated
in Germany in the 1920s and spread internationally,
to the UK and North and South America

Findhorn eco-village, Scotland

Sanford Co-operative, one of the UK's
oldest housing co-operatives

LIVING CLOSER IN THE UK

Various forms of collective living have a long history in the UK.

In addition to the 17th century Diggers, the UK had its own 'Co-operative Housekeeping Movement' in the mid 19th century comparable to North America's 'Grand Domestic Revolution,' which advocated for living arrangements where women could live communally, with their own rooms, but share meals and common spaces. Others of the same era were of a more radical nature. The Whiteway Community, a commune founded in Stroud, Gloucestershire in 1898, was based on the 'anarcho-naturism' movement, which espoused "...vegetarianism, open relationships, self-sufficiency, and eco-living alongside a broad rejection of industrialized society and government."[12]

Today, the UK is home to one of the world's longest surviving intentional communities: Scotland's Findhorn eco-village, an NGO founded in 1962 and dedicated to personal growth and development;[13] Sanford's, the UK's oldest purpose-built housing co-op founded in 1973 in Peckham, London; Darvell, the oldest and most populous Bruderhof settlement in Europe, which practices non-violence and common ownership;[14] the Camphill movement, founded in the 1930s near Aberdeen, Scotland (now international), providing residential communities, schools and support in education, employment, and daily living for adults and children with developmental disabilities.

THE RISE OF 'CO-HOUSING'

'Co-housing' as a formal and distinct concept is broadly recognised as having originated in Denmark.

An article published in 1967 by journalist Bodil Graae, which argued that families should share child-care duties, is widely attributed with having spurred fifty families to organize Sættedammen, the oldest known modern co-housing community, located in Hilerod, a provincial town 30 km outside of Copenhagen.[15]

This semi-urban communal living arrangement—on the fringes of a rapidly intensifying urban context with limited housing supply—was novel in that it self-consciously responded to growing calls for gender equality, and focused explicitly on providing childcare through the pooling of (multiple) household resources.

Reasons for joining were many, but they have been described by one co-founder as falling into three main categories: "those who just wanted to share a washing machine; those who just wanted to have free love (sex) with everyone; those who wanted to bring

12 Buck, Stephanie. "This 19th century British commune couldn't be bothered with revolution" Medium 16 June 2017

13 Findhorn includes an arts centre, shop, pottery, bakery, publishing company, printing company and other charitable organisations.

14 A Christian movement originating in Germany, seen as Anabaptist for its beliefs and practices

15 Leitart, Mathieu "Cohousing's relevance to degrowth theories" Journal of Cleaner Production 18.6 (2010)

up their family in a close community!"[16]— with the latter forming the majority.

From there, the co-housing concept was exported to the US by visiting American architects Kathryn McCamant and Charles Durrett, albeit with far more practical, rather than radical emphases, and the first co-housing project was completed in Davis, California, 25 years ago.[17] The Danish example also paved the way for similar arrangements in Swedish, Dutch, German and other European cities where residents were affected either by housing shortages, a lack of affordable homes, difficulty in accessing land, or simply a lack of options falling between social housing and private commercial housing.

In Germany, the baugruppe (or 'building group' in English) is "...a typical model of community-led housing which consists of a group of people who form a co-operative in order to design, finance and build one or several multi-storey buildings."[18] This model is popular across the country, in well-known schemes such as Vauban, the eco-village in Freiburg, and especially in Berlin, a city which has historically had high levels of renters, and where approximately 1,000 buildings and co-housing groups, including the award-winning Spreefeld development, have been developed over the last 40 years.

The first co-housing project in the Netherlands was built in the mid 1970s, and there are more than one hundred co-housing projects across the country today. In Dutch cities, such as Amsterdam, public land ownership and an overall larger percentage of social housing stock has created more fertile conditions for experimental or alternative housing projects,

Spreefeld, Germany
A 'baugruppen' project in Berlin offering 64 apartments in the centre of Berlin which integrate with the whole neighbourhood through community gardening, co-working, and a creche.

Vriburcht, Netherlands
A mixed development including 52 owner-occupied dwellings, workspaces, shared facilities for residents and open to wider community, such as a creche, a cafe, theatre and small harbour.

16   Cohabitas 25 Jul. 2017 https://cohabitas.com/news/view/128

17   Sargisson, Lucy Utopian Bodies and the Politics of Transgression London: Routledge, 2004

18   Pebord, Ines. "Co-Housing in Europe #3 : The case of Berlin" New Europe: Cities in Transition 2 Sept. 2016

La Borda, Barcelona
A co-operative co-housing model situated within a 9 hectare industrial complex known as Can Battlo. The development will provide 28 small apartments offset by generous spaces ranging from laundry room, a large kitchen, dining room, terrace and living room, event and guest space.

such as Vrijburcht, with the public sector taking a supportive role in providing land or funds. These tend to take the form of village-like communities, akin to Danish examples, rather than vertical buildings, as is more common in Germany and Sweden.[19]

In Spanish cities, where social housing is nearly non-existent, community groups have relied on co-operative arrangements to deliver homes, often dissolving the shared ownership into private ownership of the units upon completion. In Barcelona, community groups are partnering with the city government (providing long-

term land leases) to experiment with new owner-tenant co-housing models such as La Borda, where the co-op retains the right to purchase the unit if a tenant wishes to leave, and compensates the tenant accordingly.

All in all, co-housing represents a small minority of housing developments in these countries. While Germany is a clear leader in this sphere, with over 300 co-housing projects in Berlin alone,[20] and approximately 1% of the Danish population lives in co-housing schemes,[21] there are only 125 completed projects in the US, and 100 projects in the Netherlands.

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19   Ibid

20   Scanlon Kath and Mullins, David. "Co-housing in Berlin: What's different?" Collaborative Housing and Community Resilience Seminar Series 23 March 2015 https://collaborativehousing.net/2015/04/28/cohousing-in-berlin-whats-different

21   http://www.cohousing.org/node/1537

The following represent four distinct schemes which contributed unique spatial
and cultural aspects that have informed or influenced co-housing today.
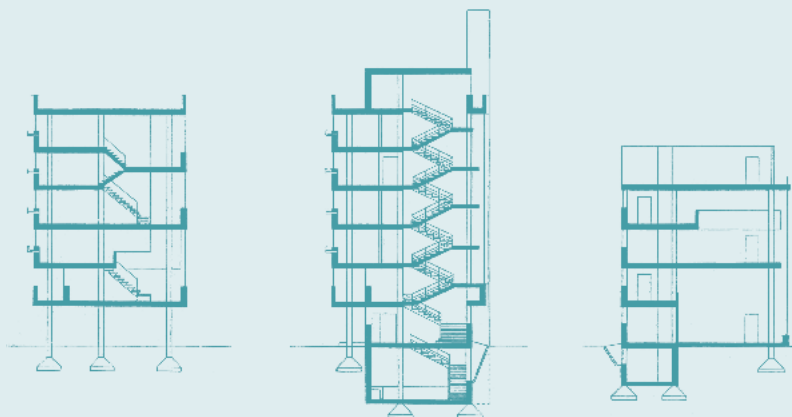
NARKOMFIN
Moscow, Russia 1928–30

Architect: Moisei Ginzburg and Ignaty Milinis
Scale: 54 units (5 storeys)
Tenure: Owned

What it is
'The Social Condenser'- Narkomfin is a
prominent example of an experimental
Soviet building programme which
attempted to restructure daily life,
using architecture as a means to forge
new norms of collective habitation

Unique characteristics
While the architect provided a range
of different flat typologies within the
building to suit different family or social
needs and creating a network of service
spaces/communal facilities, flats were
intended principally for resting and

were therefore designed with minimal
facilities for cooking and eating, to
encourage use of the collective facilities.
The design of interlocking split-level flats
resulted in five inhabited floors, but with
only two access corridors (on second
and fifth level). This meant that the front
doors were more concentrated along fewer
circulation spaces, increasing the potential
for chance encounters and socialising.
Featuring canteens and 'sleeping
cells,' this early example illustrates a
philosophy of trying to push for a sharing
of nearly everything in daily life.
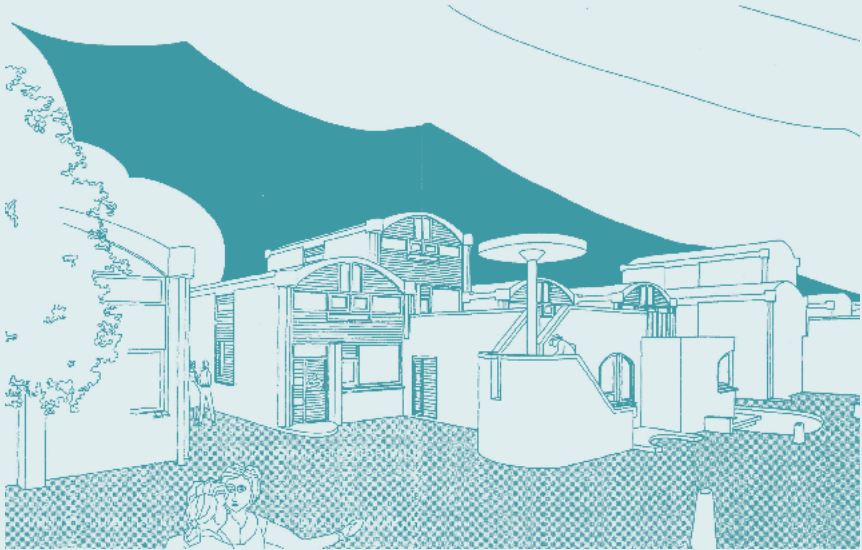
CENTRAAL WONEN DE HILVERSUM MEENT
Hilversum, Netherlands 1970–77

Architect: Leo de Jonge and Pieter Weeda
Scale: 50 units
Tenure: Rental

What it is
An example where 50 households organised to build collaborative housing development in Hilversum, a small city near Amsterdam. The group wanted to make housing affordable to all of society.

Unique characteristics
The development introduced the idea of smaller clusters of households within a wider development. Housing units were arranged into clusters of four or five, with a small communal kitchen/ dining facility, communal garden and storage for laundry provided for each.

The clusters were laid out along two public, pedestrianised streets that open out and connect to the surrounding neighbourhood in order to interface directly with the local community, with the communal kitchens located facing onto pedestrian streets to enhance the connection between the different clusters on site and to informally participate in public daily life. The development was also co-designed by architects and future residents, which allowed for a level of customisation of the dwellings and created a diversity of sizes and internal layouts.
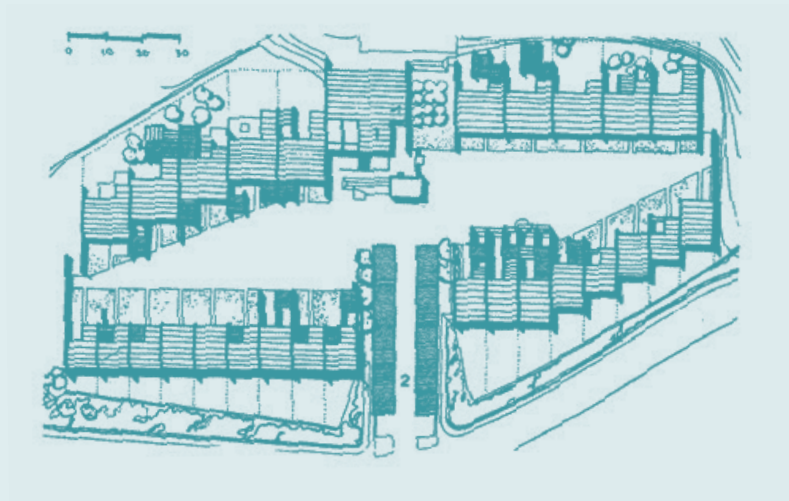
SAETTEDAMMEN
Hillerød, Denmark 1969–72

Architect: Theo Bjerg
Scale: 27 units
Tenure: Owned

What it is
Saettedammen is considered the first 'co-housing' development in the world and its spatial layout and structure has inspired the development of future typologies.

Unique characteristics
The development is designed as two rows of autonomous private dwellings centred around a communal green space. Crucially, the development introduced the idea of a separate common house, accommodating communal facilities, as the conceptual 'heart of the community.' Further to this, access and parking was located at the periphery of the site, allowing the central green space to be reserved for play and recreation. The houses themselves were built using a modular design, allowing the interior walls to be moved around according to living needs.
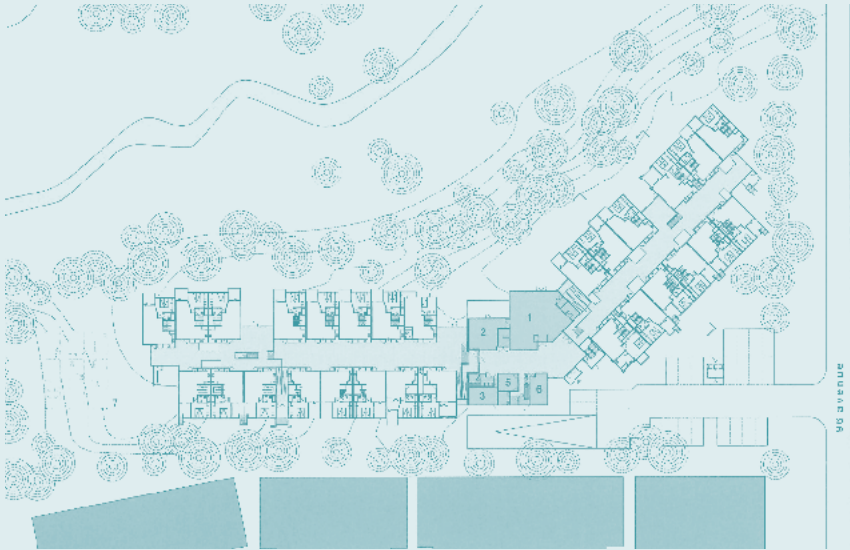
WINDSONG CO-HOUSING COMMUNITY
Langley, Canada 1994–98

Architect: Davidson, Yuen, Simpson Architects
Scale: 34 units
Tenure: Owned

What it is
Windsong is a co-housing development delivered in Canada in the 1990s. Driven by a desire to maximise the use of common spaces year round and save energy, the scheme features a novel spatial (and social) concept of a residential community 'living under one roof.'

Unique characteristics
Windsong is characterised by two covered communal 'streets' that meet at a central 'cluster' of collective utilities ranging from a kitchen/dining area, laundry room, washrooms and workshop, for instance. The streets, which are customised by residents through the placement of furniture and planting are double height glazed spaces, allowing them to be used as sheltered meeting space, play area and effectively extensions to the individual units on either side. The majority of the dwellings, each of which has a personalised colour for the facade) face onto this shared street, contributing to a sense of sheltered community, even insularity.

LILAC, Leeds
Low Impact Living Affordable Community: a pioneer of co-housing design principles

"Co-housing is part of a wider movement looking for practices to mediate local identity and globalization, self-reliance and state-provision and introducing pluri-value instead of monetary-based models."
(Tummers, 2016)

UK 2000s: INCREASING RECOGNITION OF CO-HOUSING

Co-housing in the UK is still relatively young.

The UK's first 'co-housing' development was completed in 2004,[22] and there have been a limited number of completed schemes in the period since; nineteen co-housing developments have been completed within the last decade, with a further fifty projects in various stages of preparation. This upward trend is partially based, suggests Matthew Smith, Senior Lecturer in Real Estate at Birmingham City University, on social media enabling people to find like-minded individuals.[23]

The UK Cohousing Network, established in 2007 following the first UK Co-housing Conference, operates a Directory of live projects, categorised in over 10 'types' on the basis of identity and affiliations (LGBT, Vegetarians, Eco, Senior, Intergenerational), development type (self-build, new build, refurb, retro-fit) to tenancy and ownership structures (CLT, Co-operative).

In November 2017, London hosted the first ever National Community-Led Housing Conference,[24] with topics covering crowd-funding and raising community shares, options for development finance, appraising procurement routes, finding or buying a site, ongoing management, group decision-making and engaging the community, working with Councils, eco-build, and communicating stories.

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22 Springhill in Stroud, a 34 unit suburban development which in 2004 was considered the 'first new build cohousing scheme to be completed in the UK'

23 Powley Tanya and Moore, Elaine "Communal living for 'the posh': co-housing catches on in the UK" Financial Times 23 Apr. 2013

24 The UK Co-housing Network was established to provide advocacy advice, case studies and networking to those interested in pursuing this brand of community-led housing https://cohousing.org.uk/

CO-HOUSING LEXICON

Words and phrases collected from articles, websites and
literature commonly used in reference to co-housing:

ETHOS & VALUES
Sustainability
Energy efficiency
People over profit
'Commons'
Collective
Spatial and social innovation
Participatory
Slow living
Resident-led
Community-led
Self-build
Self-organised

BEHAVIOUR
Collaboration over competition
Consensus decision making
Conscious self-definition
Community-building

BENEFITS
Sense of Community
Intentionality / Purpose
Unique social and organizational structure
Autonomy
Mutual support
Shared resources/ meals/ facilities/ lives

DEFINITIONS AND CURRENT RESEARCH

So what, exactly, is co-housing?

The UK Cohousing Network defines co-housing as "intentional communities, created and run by their residents"—a definition which is quite broad. Existing research has analysed a wide array of housing arrangements without necessarily distilling a single set of qualities distinct to co-housing alone. However, literature reviews suggests that there are roughly four 'lenses' through which it is commonly understood. These include:

1. Shared purpose or intention;
2. Spatial arrangement or design (resident-led);
3. Process of design and delivery;
4. Expectations around lifestyle and behaviour amongst those moving in.

1: Shared purpose or intention

"Groups of people who have chosen to live together for some common purpose beyond that of tradition, personal relationship or family ties." (Sargisson 2004)

Intentional communities—"groups of people living together with some shared resources on the basis of explicit common values"—include eco-villages, Co-housing, CLTs, co-ops and a range of other community types. Common among these is an element of purpose or intention at the outset. Helen Jarvis, a scholar of Co-housing, suggests that such "shared visions are the 'glue' binding collaborative community relations."[25] For some, these consist of a developed vision for alternative way of life outside mainstream society. For others, these can consist of more general principles—such as personal conduct.

In practice, the variety of UK co-housing schemes exhibit a wide range of values held in common, from the environmental sustainability of LILAC (Low Impact Living Affordable Community) in Leeds, to ageing with autonomy and mutual support of OWCH (Older Women's Co-housing group).

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25 Jarvis Helen. "Towards a deeper understanding of the social architecture of co-housing: evidence from the UK, USA and Australia" Urban Research & Practice 8:1 (2015)

2: Spatial arrangement and design

"Includes both the provision of private and common facilities...design is used to encourage social interaction" (UK Cohousing Network)

All conceptions of co-housing seem to share a presumption of shared spaces within their physical designs, and the majority of UK academic literature comes from the architecture and design perspectives,[26] with much attention focused on how spatial design delivers on social, environmental and economic sustainability ambitions within schemes. As the UK Cohousing Network asserts, "most Co-housing communities have a common house."[27] A recent ESRC action research programme[28] focused on strengthening the links between UK and international co-housing networks included a theme on design, interrogating how design can respond to ecological concerns, foster contact between residents and incorporate technical innovations.

3: Process of design and delivery

"A well-designed, pedestrian-oriented community without significant resident participation in the planning may be "cohousing-inspired," but it is not a cohousing community." (Belk 2006)

Numerous academic articles, as well as advocacy networks, see the involvement of future residents and members in co-design processes as essential to Co-housing,[29] though this is not a 'hard and fast' rule. The reasons for this range from contributing to autonomy of future residents, to boosting capacity by helping them acquire conflict resolution skills and processes, to generating stewardship.[30]

Co-housing schemes have varying degrees of resident-involvement, often being developer led—either by Housing Associations or even for-profit developers. One recent example of this is Nightingale Housing in Australia. This not-for-profit operates similarly to a developer, managing

26 Tummers, Lidewij "The re-emergence of self-managed co-housing in Europe: A critical review of co-housing research" Urban Studies 53:10 (2015): 2023-2040

27 UK Co-housing Network https://cohousing.org.uk/about/about-cohousing/

28 Led by LSE London, UKCN and funded by European Social Research Council, the knowledge exchange involved six seminars culminating in the joint report 'Cohousing: Shared Futures' presented in Parliament on the 22 June 2016.

29 Belk, Charles. "Cohousing Communities: A Sustainable Approach To Housing Development" Diss. UC Davis 2006

30 Brenton, Maria. "Potential Benefits Of Cohousing For Older People: A Literature Review" Elder Woman Sep.2010

demand, design and construction while also connecting directly with owner-occupiers (eliminating the need for a marketing budget); it also works with future residents to hone designs in advance of construction. Nightingale's landmark scheme, 'The Commons,' offers residents their own vegetable patch alongside a shared rooftop garden (with beehive), shared laundry, ground floor yoga studio and no parking spaces.[31]

However, not all schemes involve deep levels of co-design with future residents, and some may even recruit them after the design phase entirely. This varies from scheme to scheme, but represents a portion of the Baugruppen in Berlin which offer more community-oriented lifestyle, where residents can actually be recruited after the co-design phase (only working with the architect to customise their personal units). In the Netherlands, one senior co-housing project involved a Housing Association helping older tenants of existing apartment blocks to modify their homes and develop mutual support networks without leaving.[32]

4: Expectations around lifestyle and behaviour

"Ran and controlled entirely by members of the group working together, it is based on mutual support, self-governance and active participation." (Brenton 2013)

There seem to be two types of expectation for residents, related to lifestyle and behaviour: level of resident involvement (e.g. in management) and level of sharing between them (e.g. spaces and objects).

Most definitions include some element of resident-led management, or that residents are actively involved in governance, steering groups, sub-committees, etc. Literature also suggests there are expectations around sharing resources, facilities, and (social) mutual support, such as occasional shared meals, babysitting, etc., though it is a choice how often and to what degree members want to engage, as most units have sufficient private space.

31 Stead, Naomi. "Affordable, sustainable, high-quality urban housing? It's not an impossible dream" The Conversation 23 April 2016

32 Brenton, Maria "Senior cohousing communities—an alternative approach for the UK?" London: Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2013)

Spheres of sharing

Spheres of sharing relate to the different spaces and daily routines that generate intimacy, with certain activities and spaces closer to our common conception of what is 'private.' For example, sharing meals on a daily basis gets closer to the innermost privacy of a household than sharing a washing machine or a guest bedroom.

In conventional homes, there is very little overlap between the intimate household spheres, relating to daily activities, rituals and interaction. Within shared living schemes, however, there is often a greater need (and breadth of variables) to negotiate a balance between intimacy and privacy.

The most 'formal' and intimate spheres of sharing are around daily communal meals, as food needs to be bought and cooked for the right amount of people, requiring coordination and effort, while more informal or chance encounters, such as in the communal laundry room, are also vital to building a sense of community, and even to building friendships, but require less intimate contact.
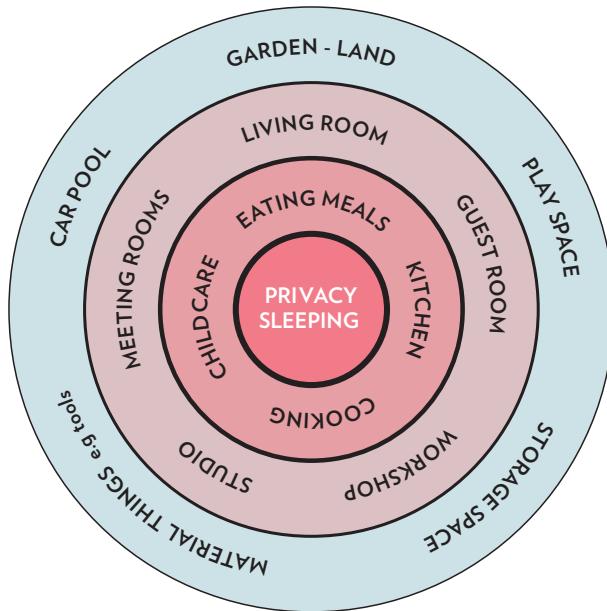
Different co-housing communities illustrate varying appetites for (and potential combinations of) sharing suited to those involved, relating to physical spaces as well as social activities or support. The diagrams below provide examples of differing spheres of sharing across the co-housing schemes selected earlier.
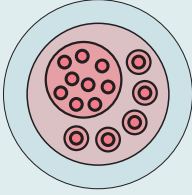
NARKOMFIN
Moscow, Russia 1928–30

Collective facilities with private 'sleeping cells'

Shared amenities
Laundry, gymnasium, library, central kitchen/dining room (a kindergarten was designed but never built)

Eating
Shared meals every day
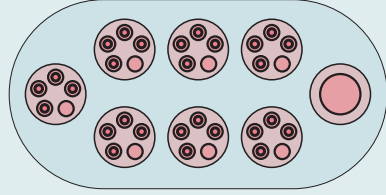
CENTRAAL WONEN DE HILVERSUM MEENT
Hilversum, Netherlands 1970–77

Interconnected clusters - Private dwellings clustered into small groups with some shared facilities

Shared amenities
Each cluster of 4–5 units shares a garden, kitchen/dining/living room and a laundry room. The whole community shares a common house, a library, a sauna, a workshop, gym, guestrooms, youth centre and garden.

Eating
Varies between clusters, from two to five times per week
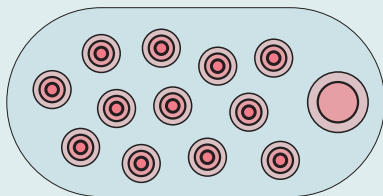
SAETTEDAMMEN
Hillerød, Denmark 1969–72

Individual residential units with common facilities in a separate unit shared by all residents

Shared amenities
A common house with large kitchen/dining area, laundry room, children's play room, shared garden/play space.

Eating
Each family cooks and clears up one meal in the communal dining room per month. Residents eat together two or three times per week (once a week minimum).
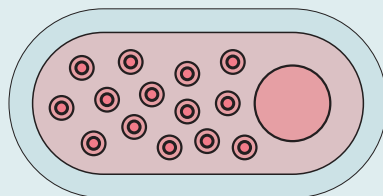
WINDSONG CO-HOUSING COMMUNITY
Langley, Canada 1994–98

Covered shared circulation, and individual residential units under a single roof

Shared amenities
A kitchen, laundry room, children's play room, guest room, studio, vegetable garden, parking garage.

Eating
Potluck meals are held six times per week, which residents sign up for. Formal meals prepared by the cooking teams occur less often and are usually themed.

The following pages explore levels of shared activities and resources in a selection of case studies across rural, suburban and urban contexts in Europe and the United States.

Info: A52
Location: Berlin, Germany
No. homes / site area: 10units / 0.014 ha
Shared amenities: Guest Flat, Roof Garden
Tenure: Cooperatively owned freehold
Eating: None

URBAN

SUBURBAN

RURAL

MOST PRIVATE / LEAST COMMUNALITY

MOST
PRIVATE

MOST
SHARING

Info: Copper Lane
Location: London, UK
No. homes / site area: 6 units / 0.09 ha
Shared amenities: Common hall (beneath central courtyard)—workshop and laundry, gardens
Tenure: Cooperatively owned freehold & common parts, individual leaseholds
Eating: None

Info: Jernstøberiet
Location: Roskilde, Denmark
No. homes / site area: 21 units / 0.85 ha
Shared amenities: Common house/hall, kitchen/dining area, garden and decking area, storage area, central common hall
Tenure: Owner
Eating: No formal meal rota, but occasionally eat together

URBAN

SUBURBAN

RURAL

MORE SHARING / HIGHER COMMUNALITY

Info: Gartenhof BIGyard
Location: Berlin, Germany
No. homes / site area: 45units / 0.465 ha
Shared amenities: Garden, rooftop terrace, summer kitchen, sauna, four visitors' apartments
Tenure: Cooperatively owned freehold
Eating: None

Info: LILAC
Location: Leeds, UK
No. homes / site area: 20 units / 0.7 ha
Shared amenities: Common house, central allotment, shared garden, two small car parks, three bike sheds, list of shared values
Tenure: Mutual home ownership scheme
Eating: Twice a week

Info: Thundercliffe Grange
Location: Rotherham, UK
No. homes / site area: 12 units / 8.1 ha
Shared amenities: Parkland & woodland, kitchen garden, ornamental gardens, GF of main building provides communal workshop, dining room and laundry
Tenure: Cooperatively owned freehold
Eating: ad hoc meals six communal social events during the year

URBAN

SUBURBAN

RURAL

MORE PRIVATE / LOWER COMMUNALITY

MOST
PRIVATE

MOST
SHARING

Info: Swans Market
Location: California, USA
No. homes / site area: 20 units / 0.12ha
Shared amenities: Guest room, bathrooms, workshop, yoga/kid's room, laundry room, exercise room, common house with kitchen
Tenure: Owner and rental
Eating: 3 times a week and are attended on a voluntary basis.

Info: Springhill
Location: Stroud, UK
No. homes / site area: 34 units / 0.8 ha
Shared amenities: 3-storey common house with kitchen and community-based social activities
Tenure: Freehold owned by Cohousing Company Ltd (all residents directors) Individual leaseholds per house / flat, rental
Eating: 3 times a week

Info: Lammas Eco village
Location: Whitland, UK
No. homes / site area: 9 plots each with 5 acres of land and a share in the common woodland.
Shared amenities: Common house/community hub, green energy, vegetable garden, education facilities—promoting research into low impact living, seasonal shop and seasonal cafe
Tenure: Owned
Eating: Ad hoc meals

URBAN

SUBURBAN

RURAL

MORE SHARING / HIGHER COMMUNALITY

URBAN

Info: Fardknappen
Location: Stockholm, Sweden
No. homes / site area: 43 units
Shared amenities: Large modern kitchen, a dining room and lounge, craft room, laundry room, sauna
Tenure: Rental
Eating: 4-5 times a week, rota of cooking teams

SUBURBAN

Info: Windsong Cohousing
Location: Langley, Canada
No. homes / site area: 32 units / 2.3ha
Shared amenities: Common house, guest room, teen room, workshop, forested land and gardens.
Tenure:
Eating: 6 times a week there are potluck meals that you sign up for. Formal meals prepared by the cooking teams occur less often and are usually themed.

RURAL

Info: Threshold Centre
Location: Gillingham, UK
No. homes / site area: 14 units
Shared amenities: Common house, green energy, laundry, market garden, education facilities, guest accommodation, car pool, workspaces
Tenure: mixed: owned, rented, co-owned (social housing), rented rooms, daily meditation
Eating: Twice a week

MORE PRIVATE / LOWER COMMUNALITY

MOST
PRIVATE

MOST
SHARING

Info: Woon Kollektief Purmerend
Location: Purmerend, Netherlands
No. homes / site area: 71 units
Shared amenities: Common house, shared clustered kitchen, central covered hallway, shared garden, laundry room, child daycare centre, music room, multipurpose room.
Tenure: Rental and owner
Eating: Varies by cluster

URBAN

Info: Stacken
Location: Gothenburg, Sweden
No. homes / site area: 33 units / 0.06ha
Shared amenities: Dining room, Kitchen, Dishwashing, Day care playroom, toys and quiet room, Changing room, Crafts rooms, teen and music room
Eating: 5 times a week, attended on a voluntary basis.
Tenure: rental

SUBURBAN

Info: Lancaster
Location: Halton, UK
No. homes / site area: 41 units / 2.5 ha
Shared amenities: Common house, food store, children's room & play areas, guest bedrooms, laundry, communal land / orchard, guest bedroom, workspaces
Tenure: mixed: owned, co-owned, rented
Eating: 5 meals per week

RURAL

MORE SHARING / HIGHER COMMUNALITY

Info: Bo90
Location: Copenhagen, Denmark
No. homes / site area: 17units /
Shared amenities: Common house, storage space, kitchen/dining, garden and playground
Tenure: Rental cooperative
Eating: meals occur every week night and are attended on a voluntary basis.

Info: Centraal Wonen De Hilversum Meent
Location: Hilversum, Netherlands
No. homes / site area: 50 units (10 'clusters')
Shared amenities: Common house, meeting area with café, gym, sauna, guest rooms, workshop, youth centre, garden
Tenure: Rented
Eating: varies between clusters from 5 nights to two nights a week.

Info: Aadalen 1&2
Location: Randers, Denmark
No. homes / site area: 15 + 17 units / ha
Shared amenities: Common house, laundry/pantry/furnace, guest room/workshop, teen flats, covered street
Tenure: co-operative ownership
Eating: 5 days a week (6 tag system on monthly rota 16+ - no rebate)

URBAN

SUBURBAN

RURAL

MORE PRIVATE / LOWER COMMUNALITY

Info: Jerngarden
Location: Aarhus, Denmark
No. homes / site area: 8 units / ha
Shared amenities: Common house, TV/teen room, storage, laundry, pantry,
Tenure: privately owned + community right to refusal
Eating: 6 days a week (shop by 4pm, meal by 6pm)

URBAN

Info: Drivhuset
Location: Randers, Denmark
No. homes / site area: 18 units / 1.5 ha
Shared amenities: Common house, TV/guest room, storage, laundry, pantry, community trade
Tenure: co-operative ownership
Eating: 5/6 days a week (3/6 tag system on monthly rota - no rebate)

SUBURBAN

Info: Camphill, Ballytobin
Location: Callan, Ireland
No. homes / site area: six house communities, which all include people with special needs, who live in an extended 'family'
Shared amenities: Kitchen, dining room, food, living room, garden, animals, finances
Tenure: Rented
Eating: Everyday

RURAL

MOST SHARING / HIGHEST COMMUNALITY

Sharing in general can be understood as consisting of two types: the first around tangible, practical resource sharing, such as pooling material items or services (tools, cars, storage space, energy production etc.) or providing support (e.g. caring for children, the elderly or people with special needs); the second is around the less tangible: sense of togetherness or closeness, desire for involvement in each-other's lives.

The preceding diagram, populated with case studies collected over the course of this research, suggests few notable aspects linking context to levels of sharing. Broadly, urban areas produced schemes with the highest levels of spatial privacy and lowest levels of shared activity. Schemes in the UK generally had lower levels of shared activity in comparison to their European counterparts. Schemes with broadest forms of sharing beyond average amenities—meals, pets and finances, for example—tended to emerge from rural and suburban contexts.

View of OWCH gardens facing onto public space. The development contains a mix of semi-private gardens and terraces as well as communal gardens and house for shared meals and events, which all residents are welcome to attend without having to be explicitly invited.

SHIFTING TRENDS

Just as historic examples of collective living arose in response to wider pressures or ideologies of their time, there are a number of contemporary social and economic trends worth reflecting on, due to their potential influence on preferences or ideals around housing and 'home.'

We're living longer and becoming more diverse

On average, we are living longer. Life expectancies have risen to their highest ever level in England, for example, provoking questions of how we will provide care in an increasingly elderly society. According to new research, there will be an anticipated 25% increase in over 60s needing care between 2015 and 2025, adding substantial burden to the already stretched NHS and social care budgets.[33] Research and advocacy is calling for greater autonomy and dignity for seniors, rather than treating age as an illness.[34] This, in addition to the geographical distribution of traditional family models, means that greater attention is required around providing homes with a balance of autonomy and care for older people.

In addition to growing older, we are becoming an increasingly diverse society, composed of people from all walks of life—with different ages, cultural practices,

Imani Housing Co-op which provides permanent housing primarily for the African and Caribbean Community members in Wandsworth

nationalities and religions—particularly in London, where 37% of Londoners are currently born outside the UK.[35] While some forms of co-living are emerging to cater to culturally distinct segments of society, there is a challenge of how we handle ageing with together with others we don't necessarily choose, or who 'don't look like us.' The Government's 2016 Casey Review even suggested that social segregation is intensifying, rather than diminishing in the UK.[36]

We're classifying ourselves differently, and becoming more unequal

Demographic and economic changes are leading to a re-think of traditional social class distinctions, no longer exclusively linked to job and income. A survey of 160,000 people

33   Boseley, Sarah. "NHS faces staggering increase in cost of elderly care, academics warn." The Guardian 24 May 2017

34   See Handler, Sophie. "Ageing, Care and the Practice of Urban Curating" Care and Design: Bodies, Buildings, Cities Eds Charlotte Bates, Rob Imrie and Kim Kullman), Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd

35   UK Office for National Statistics International Migration Bulletin (2015)

36   UK Ministry of Housing, Communities, and Local Government (2015) The Casey Review: A review into opportunity and integration 5 December 2015

provoked seven new classes—based on their various economic (asset-base), social and cultural capital—showing that it is now possible to be rich from the perspective of cultural capital (education, networks), while being economically or 'asset poor.'[37]

Costs of living are rising, as are levels of inequality. In London, the income of someone in a household in the top 10% earning bracket earns eight times higher than someone in the bottom 10%.[38] There is an increasing recognition of the negative impacts of being asset poor, with some researchers associating income inequality with "…increased mistrust and increased anxiety."[39]

'The job for life' seems a thing of the past

Increasingly, we're seeing higher levels of freelancing, portfolio careers and uncertain employment. There are an estimated £1.4 million freelancers across the UK, representing a growth of 10% over the last decade.[40] Some estimates suggesting that up to 30% of UK jobs could potentially be lost

> **Self-employment in the UK increased from 3.8 million in 2008 to 4.6 million in 2015, a continuation of a trend started in the early 2000s.**
> *Office for National Statistics*

to automation by the early 2030s and 65% of primary school children working in jobs that do not currently exist.[41]

This presents both strengths and vulnerabilities: while it has introduced crushing uncertainty and financial constraint to the economically marginal employed on zero-hour contracts, it has also introduced the 'global nomad'—a new type of (often technically skilled and hyper-mobile) freelancer, liberated to work from anywhere.

People are finding new ways to transact and socialise

Airbnb and Uber, the first poster children of the 'sharing economy' in the early 2000s provided the technological infrastructure allowing people to list and book accommodation, or drive or hail a ride. The idea that you could share someone else's personalised space—or a ride—was and is still a straight forward transaction for services we're accustomed to paying for. Years later, a host of Apps, from Deliveroo to Zipcar and TaskRabbit, have widened the scope of services catered for, providing pickup and delivery of cooked meals,

37 "The Great British Class Survey - Results"BBC 3 April 2013

38 "Inequality: the gap between the richest and poorest in London." London: Trust for London data 2017

39 Buttrick, Nicholas, Heintzelman, Samantha and Oishi, Shigehiro. "Inequality and well-being." Current Opinion in Psychology18.5 (2017)

40 Jenkins, Kayte. "Exploring the UK workforce in 2016" IPSE Feb. 2017

41 "Will Robots Steal our jobs? The potential impact of automation on the UK and other major economies." PwC UK Economic Outlook March 2017

BorrowMyDoggy: connecting dog
owners with (vetted) dog lovers
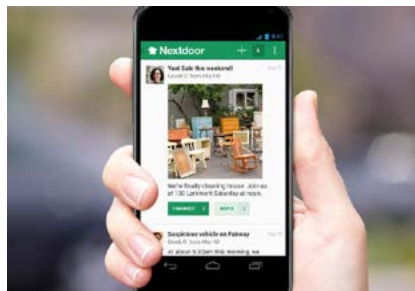
Next Door: an App for connecting with neighbours

laundry and completion of odd jobs.

Increasingly, Apps are also mediating new real-life connections and helping people forge bonds in new ways. For example, Next Door, where forums are formed by those who share similar postcodes, with neighbours speaking to each other about anything from bake sales, babysitting needs to advice on recycling household goods. BorrowMyDoggy links dog owners with (vetted) dog lovers to share responsibility for caring for their pet on a regular basis, while Tinder not only allows you access to a potentially global pool of potential romantic partners, but to determine whether you already have friends or acquaintances in common.

The examples above are only a few, of many Apps and services, which illustrate a growing appetite for convenience-related services, reliance on third party platforms to verify

and mediate real-life interactions as well as to transcend local boundaries to connect with broader communities of interest.

We're growing increasingly aware of what's good for us

Loneliness is now widely considered an 'epidemic' in the UK—particularly for older and younger members of the population. The Mental Health Foundation reports that nearly 60 percent of 18-34 year olds feel lonely often or sometimes.[42] Lonely people are more likely to suffer from depression and unproductivity, take more sick leave, become unhealthy (mentally and physically); social isolation is also a key trigger for instances of repeat substance abuse. In older people, social isolation has detrimental effects on health, with adverse health impacts comparable to smoking, obesity, lack of exercise and

> **In January 2018, the UK Government announced the world's first 'Minister of Loneliness,' a post designed to combat "the sad reality of Modern life" for many people.**

42   Griffin Jo. "The Loneliness Report" The Mental Health Foundation 2010

Image of typical street life portrayed in Willmott and Young's Family and Kinship in East London

high blood pressure, as well as increasing cognitive decline, typified by mental health conditions such as depression and dementia.[43]

At the same time, research is beginning to evidence some of the key factors that make people feel good: experiencing positive relationships, having some control over one's life and having a sense of purpose.[44]

By all accounts, one of the key ingredients in well-being—and topical to communal living—is that of meaningful, sustained relationships. In "The Village Effect" psychologist Susan Pinker describes the strong ties that are forged by crossing paths repeatedly with a limited number of people every day—150 in the 'typical' village.[45] These face to face relationships are integral to our health; her research posits that regular social contact and interaction produces oxytocin and vasopressin—chemicals which help to counter stress and help the body repair.

These findings are substantial, as the type of settlement patterns once typical of inner London—such as those depicted in Michael Young and Peter Willmott's famous study, Family and Kinship in East London (1957) are, for various reasons, becoming increasingly rare.

Traditional patterns of settlement have been disrupted

A lack of affordable homes, due to land values and limited supply, together with levels of student debt, is partly contributing to what is perceived as a delayed 'entry to adulthood' for many, traditionally signified by home ownership.[46]

There are a variety of parallel trends that may or may not play a role in altered patterns of settlement: that individuals are choosing experience over ownership in a context of rising costs of living; that individuals are 'setting down' later in life— the average age for marriage in 1974 was 28.8 for males, 26.2 for females in 1974, as compared with 37 years and 34 years old in 2014.[47] Non-traditional relationships are also becoming increasingly normal, with one of 2017's top Google search trends being "what does it mean to be poly-amorous?"

43   Landeiro, Filipa et al. "Reducing social isolation and loneliness in older people: a systematic review protocol." BMJOpen 2017; 7:e013778

44   See Harvard Study of Adult Development http://www.adultdevelopmentstudy.org/

45   Anthony, Andrew. "The Village Effect by Susan Pinker review—the science of friendship" The Guardian 22 Mar. 2015.

46   In 1991, 67% of the 25 to 34 age group were homeowners. By 2011/12, this had declined to 43%. Office for National Statistics "Housing and Home Ownership in the UK" UK Perspective Series (2015)

47   Office for National Statistics "Marriages in England and Wales 2014" People, population and community (2017)

'Adolescence now lasts from 10 to 24'
Headline, BBC, 9 January 2018

Image of Estate life, Thamesmead circa 1969
Photo courtesy of JR James Archive, Flickr

The number of young adults continuing to live in the family home has increased by 300,000 since 2001.[48] However, it's not just young adults with statistics showing that the number of people aged between 45-54 looking for shared accommodation rose 300% between 2009 and 2014, versus those aged 35-44 seeing a 186% increase over the same period.[49]

The numerous articles voicing the indignity of house sharing in later life illustrates the cultural prevalence of embedding housing as a core part of personal narratives of development.

Cultural norms around 'home' are changing

In parallel to 'settling' later, our domestic tastes and preferences have shifted enormously over the past 100 years. A brief review of real estate marketing, for example, which both influences and reflects everyday ideals around domestic life, lifestyle, and even relationships, gives some indication of how tastes in housing have been shaped over the last century.

Since the advent of 'flat living,' early promotional material celebrated new forms of clean, serviced and bright modern

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48   Carvel, John. "Young Adults Delay Leaving Family Home" The Guardian 15 Apr. 2009

49   Cohabitas "Co-living in the UK: moving beyond generation rent" 8 Feb. 2018

View of Roam's coliving complex in Bali, one of many coliving schemes emerging across the globe

Sample advertisement by Notting Hill Housing Group in 2017 for new flats in the Royal Docks, Borough of Newham

Coffin housing, Hong Kong: an extreme example of condensed living for those seeking to access the opportunities of the city

living—a 'step up' from the back-to-back Victorian terraced houses. Many early flats in Britain catered primarily to the middle classes; as utilities became increasingly accessible in the 1950s and 1960s, the flat was sold as a symbol of modernity—a brighter and more efficient way of living.

As the Utopian visions of the 1960s waned, marketing in the 1970s focused on the family, catering to the baby boomer generation. Themes of exclusivity and privacy began to dominate in the 1980s—concepts which remain strong to this day, and contemporary marketing seems increasingly abstract and emotive, referencing amenities outside the home, including neighbourhood status (and who else might be there) as key selling points, peddling symbolic—if not outright—luxury or exclusivity related to status and 'place.'

New housing 'offers' are emerging

Finally, we're seeing a broader range of housing models which speak to many of the trends above, from those addressing loneliness, later entry to adulthood, desire for more 'autonomous' living for older demographics, to

membership style accomodation for the geographically and professionally mobile.

Organisations like Cohabitas are advocating for, and providing support to over 40s who wish to house share or co-live, while companies such as Roam—where members pay a monthly subscription of $1800 USD to live in any Roam property around the world[50] are developing in order to cater for those "80% of customers are demanding new consumption models including subscribing, sharing, and leasing—anything except actually buying a product outright."

Airbnb and its equivalents allow occupants to share rooms or flats with strangers for periods of time to 'fill the gap' in rents or mortgage or to simply earn extra cash; a range of articles have revealed more informal (and less salubrious) forms of housing being provided in subdivided boats[51] or back yards[52]—by different time of day in some cases—while elements of student halls of residence[53] have been borrowed and tailored to meet the comfort and social requirements of young professionals and the retirement aged.

50   Locations currently include London, Buenos Aires and Bali

51   See Forbes, Sam. "My Life in London's Houseboat Slums" The Guardian 23 Feb. 2014

52   See Crerar, Pippa. "'Tens of thousands' of people living in beds in sheds across the capital, report shows" The Evening Standard 20 Dec. 2017

53   Spittles, David. "London's new live-work flats: 'co-living' is the capital's new property trend as shared spaces slash costs" The Evening Standard 16 Mar. 2016

AT HOME IN BRITAIN

Designing the House of Tomorrow at the RIBA (July 2016)

The exhibition showcased ideas for future housing design taking the cottage, terrace and flat typologies as starting points to reflect the way we live and work in the 21st century. As part of the exhibition, Studio Weave explored advertising surrounding flat-living and how the language used to sell the "flat" lifestyle has evolved to respond to society and lifestyles over time.

Advertisements, like paintings, can be understood as texts, the products of individuals and of different societies and cultures. In order to make sense of paintings, an understanding of what they depict and the ideas they carry requires an understanding of how they fit in to the wider world and culture that produced them, and to which they refer.

Chris Wharton, Advertising as Culture
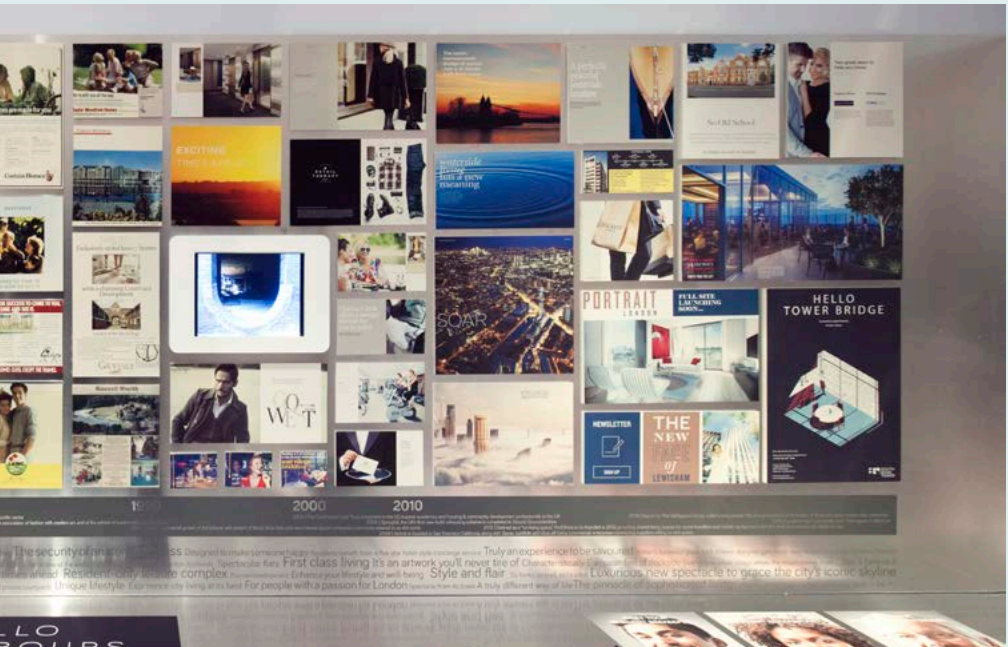
Selling the Dream:
Advertising as arbiter of taste

The language and role of advertising has huge potential to influence our notion of ideal lifestyles, homes and relationships. Since the advent of 'flat living', lifestyle aspirations have been sold to the consumer; early promotional material for social housing estates celebrated new forms of clean, serviced and bright modern living—a 'step up' from the back-to-back Victorian terraced houses—while later, more contemporary language introduced images of 'luxury', 'views' and 'location' that have now become ubiquitous.

What if—in 2025—advertisements featured a series of choices instead of a final product; for how we might collectively invest in shared facilities, how much or how little space we might share with others, or how we can involve ourselves in how our homes are maintained? These imagined promotional materials for new developments explore some possible facets of sharing and involvement.

←——— 1970s ————————————————————————— 1980s ———→

The iconic Hammersmith Bridge at sunset. Just a 12 minute walk from home.

A perfectly peaceful *waterside location*

HACKETT LONDON

SOAR

FROM A NIGHT ON THE TOWN OR QUICK CHAT & CHILL AT THE BAR SIMPLY TAKE THE LIFT

NOW LAUNCHED REGISTER YOUR INTEREST

HELLO TOWER BRIDGE

Luxurious apartments. Iconic views.

SOUTH BANK TOWER
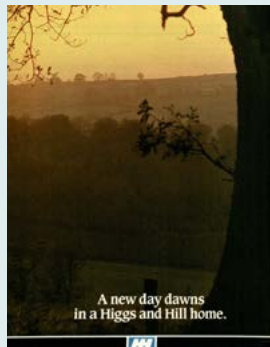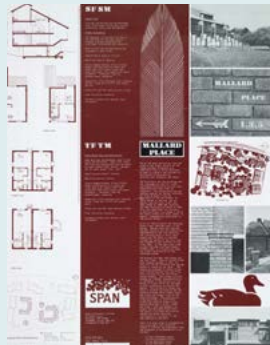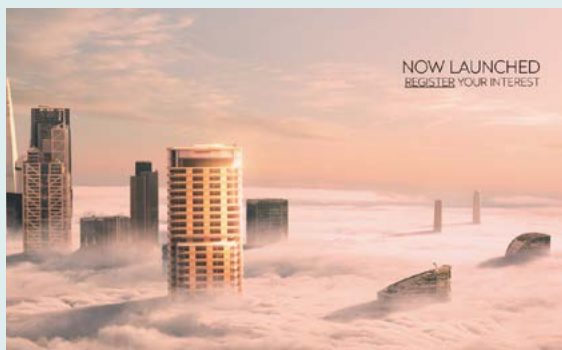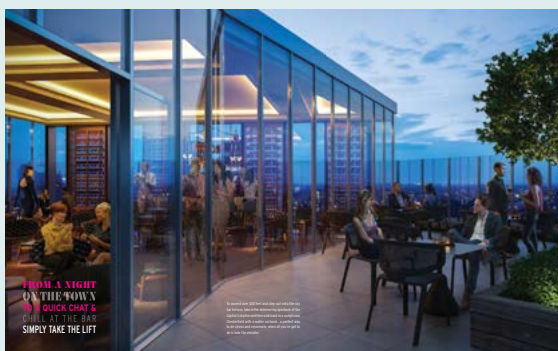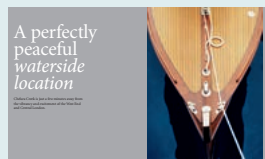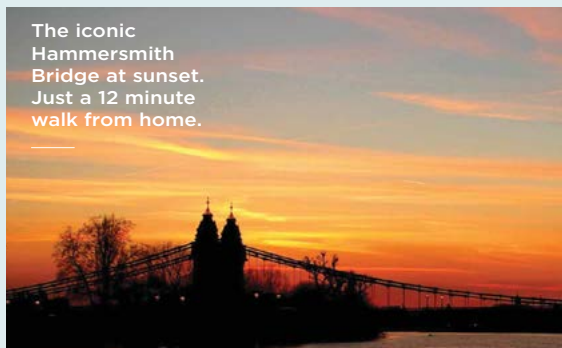
←——— **2010s** ————————————————————————— **PRESENT**

SUMMARY

It is clear that people across Europe and in the United States are drawn to live closer for a variety of reasons. With a few notable exceptions, case studies appear to suggest that European co-housing schemes often feature greater levels of shared everyday activities, whereas UK examples tend to focus on pragmatic sharing of resources, or joint procurement has a means of securing (more affordable) individual homes, with this intensifying in urban areas.

One of the primary reflections of this brief review has been around the fundamental ambiguities that exist (within literature review and amongst interviewees) between co-housing, co-operatives, community land trusts and other 'non-traditional' forms of community-led housing involving closer degrees of collaboration around design, procurement, management, legal ownership, and group culture. In fact, co-housing, encompassing multiple purchasing, delivery and ownership structures, is perhaps the least defined of all community-led housing types.

Another has been the raft of associations (and biases) that come with the phrase. Like it or not, co-housing (and community-led housing) are phrases which seem to be associated with being middle class, 'wooly,' and even marginal, which may be partly attributed to its current coverage in press, by the amplification of particularly 'alternative' case studies, rather than its depiction from the ground up perspectives of those involved.

Until now, co-housing research has tended to focus on the physical, with 'supported' and 'independent' considerations of co-housing (the social and psychological) often presented as issues to be resolved through spatial design. It also excludes newer (or slightly less grassroots-driven) forms of living closer together which have emerged, such as 'co-living'—a commercial variant of co-housing—which has gained traction off the back of co-working, 'informal' warehouse living, or almhouses—all of which involve people living in closer proximity within non-family members, negotiating similar challenges related to privacy and sharing, support and independence.

All in all a gap remains, as social researcher Helen Jarvis suggests, in "...our understanding of the social phenomena of mutuality and collaboration in practice." This gap in the research is particularly interesting, as it's clear that while some forms of living closer together have arisen from economic necessity while others have clearly emerged from shifting notions of desirable ways to live.

In short, we can't ignore the rise of housing forms where the social and cultural import of 'home' is limited, where dwellings are simply the means from which to access wider opportunities that the city presents, and where greater reliance on technology—for problem-solving, socialising, convenience and mediating trust—is now a reality.
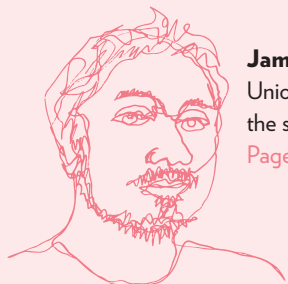
Jamie Perera from the Grand Union Housing Co-op found the space to flourish.
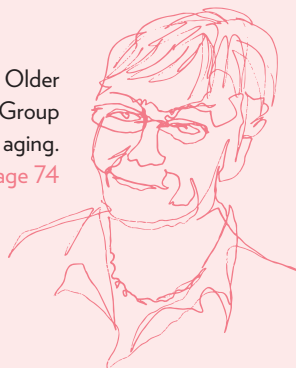
Maria Brenton from the Older Women's Co-Housing Group challenges our attitudes to aging.

Candy Wall from the Manor House Warehouse Complex highlights the benefits of community.
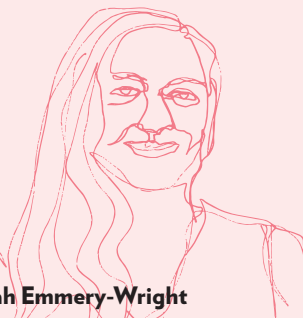
Calum Green & Hannah Emmery-Wright from the St Clements CLT talk about how to build a sustainable self-governing community.

Ed Thomas of the Collective discusses living as a form or service.

STORIES OF PIONEERS

Martyn Craddock of the United Saint Saviours Charity shares his plan for an almshouse for the 21st century.
Page 112

Kareem Dayes of the Rural Urban Synthesis Society discusses the pragmatic concerns around setting up a co-housing project.
Page 124

Tessa Dresser, Charlotte Balazs & Hedi Argent of the Older Women's Co-Housing Group ventured farther to live within a close-knit community.
Page 134

INTERVIEW METHODOLOGY

The selection of interviewees was based on the desire to secure insights from a range of individual circumstances and roles within co-housing, from residents to professional practitioners, internal and external to particular schemes.

The interviews focus less on building types and delivery mechanisms, and more on the individuals involved in these diverse schemes. As such, they look to provide the 'human face' of co-housing: capturing the diversity of personalities, journeys, roles and needs, as well as generating deeper understanding of what motivates individuals to initiate or join co-housing developments—and what it is they feel they stand to gain.

Interview content

The interviews were semi-structured, with prepared questions leading to open-ended conversation, and focused on:

- Awareness and personal definitions of 'co-housing'
- Associations with the phrases 'shared' and 'private' largely in relation to spaces, equipment and objects within their respective schemes and experience and 'supported' and 'independent' in relation to social and psychological interactions, dynamics and balance within their respective schemes
- Personal trajectories and motivations for becoming involved with co-housing
- Reflections and insights related to their experiences, covering group formation, negotiation of shared principles and protocols, and nuances of life inside the scheme.

Role types and definitions

The interviewees represent a range of roles spanning researchers, scheme 'enablers' project founders and initiators, short-term and long-term residents, to those involved with campaigning, organizing or providing the leadership necessary to deliver new forms of housing. The scope of these roles and definitions, are broadly divided into two main categories: 'External' and 'Internal,' depending on their role in relation to eventual inhabitation of the scheme—with the caveat that there are circumstances where individuals span more than one category or transition from one to another.

External: In the delivery of a housing project, those who will not necessarily live within the scheme, but work on its behalf to facilitate set-up and delivery.

Leader/coordinator: One or more individuals who drive the development and coordination process of a scheme, but will not ultimately benefit from living in it.

Enablers/Facilitator: Refers to professionals with specific expertise to offer, such as architects, designers, developers, and lawyers, as well as those with a solid grasp of co-living—such as researchers, policy advocates, or those who have long-standing experience able to act in the capacity of advisor

Service provider: Individuals involved with key operational or management aspects of a scheme or development, but remain non-resident.

Internal: Refers to a spectrum of individuals who can be considered, past, current or future residents of a co-living scheme.

Project Initiator: People or organizations who are instrumental in starting a project, and are (often) lead in coordinating the rest of delivery. In many, but not all, cases these individuals plan to live in the delivered living arrangement

Leader/Coordinator: Leader of the development process; potentially acting in the capacity of chair of the core group.

Active Participant: Refers to individuals actively involved in facets of the development, governance and management processes e.g. forming Steering Group around Leaders/Coordinators

Core Resident: Long-term dwellers within a scheme or project who may not take part in Steering Group activities, but are actively involved and invested in the community

Passive Resident: Refers to those who have a more passive relationship with the scheme or community, such as recent or short-term residents
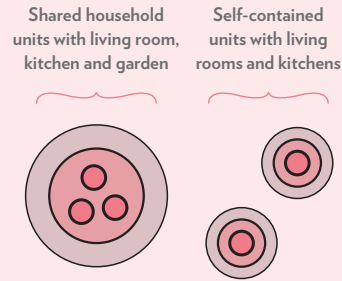
Scheme selection

The study focused on London-based schemes only. While housing in London is shaped by high land values, as well as high levels ethnic diversity and international visitors and residents, the schemes nonetheless represent a broad range of models and characteristics. They were broadly categorized and selected to maintain a balance of perspectives from three main development types:

Supported Living / Extra Care – Housing schemes explicitly catering to older or disabled persons, providing independent living with varying levels of on-site care

Co-housing, Co-ops and Community Land Trusts – A broad range of scheme types attracting residents of various ages and life-stages, often responding to factors such as affordability and often exhibiting characteristics such as shared values or intentions at the outset

Live/Work – Housing arrangements which largely cater to younger, potentially transient, residents looking to incorporate living and professional spheres and varying from informal and ad-hoc to more formal, centrally managed models offering co-working and hot-desking.

The schemes eventually selected span warehouse living, self-branded 'Co-living' schemes, almshouses 're-imagined for the 21st century,' developer-enabled Community Land Trusts as well as more familiar small-scale co-housing schemes. These were considered on the basis that they cater to a range of lifestyle choices, life stages and explicit missions, reflecting perspectives from a broad scope of living situations, both established and emergent.
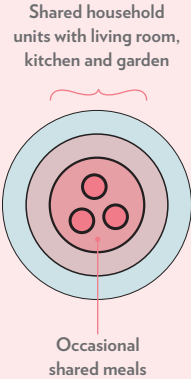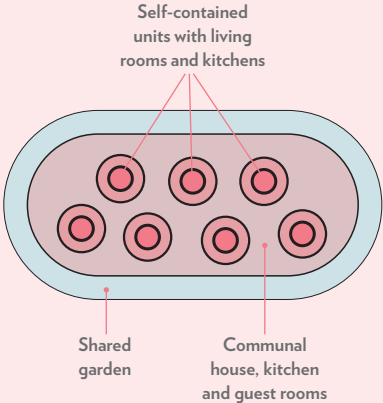
Shared household units with living room, kitchen and garden

Self-contained units with living rooms and kitchens

Grand Union Housing Co-Op	
Structure	Industrial and Provident Society
Shared amenities	Independent room units with shared laundry facilities, kitchen corridors and garden
Dedicated roles	Governance

Self-contained units with living rooms and kitchens

Shared household units with living room, kitchen and garden

Shared garden

Communal house, kitchen and guest rooms

Occasional shared meals

| Older Women's Co-Housing Group	
Structure	Industrial and Provident Society
Shared amenities	Common house, garden, garden shed, laundry room
Dedicated roles	Project Enabler (time-bound)

Manor House Warehouses	
Structure	Private Limited Company
Shared amenities	Independent rooms units within shared household comprised of common bathroom, living room, laundry and kitchen
Dedicated roles	None

'Two-dios': personal
bedrooms with kitchen
shared with one other unit

Shared
garden

Laundry,
lounges

Gym, co-working
space, terrace,
car-share

St Clements CLT	
Structure	Industrial and Provident Society
Shared amenities	Independent housing units with shared 'community space' and community café
Dedicated roles	Membership/Stewardship Manager
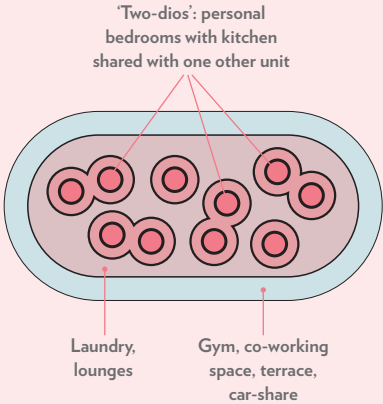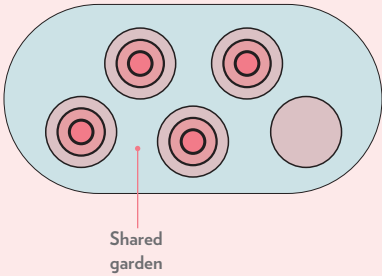
The Collective	
Structure	Private Limited Company
Shared amenities	Shared living room, lounges, kitchen, laundry, roof terrace, zipcar
Dedicated roles	Community Team

Self-contained
units with living
rooms and kitchens

Shared
garden

Corridors,
laundry, atrium
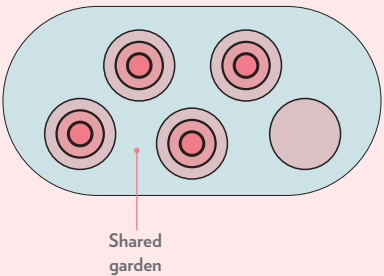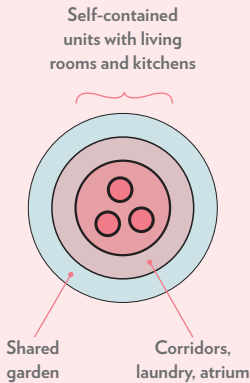
Shared
garden

United Saint Saviours Charity

Structure	Private Limited Company
Shared amenities	Independent housing units with shared laundry facilities, corridors and atrium/reception and garden
Dedicated roles	On-site pastoral care (paid)

Rural Urban Synthesis

Structure	Industrial and Provident Society
Shared amenities	Independent housing units with shared outdoor spaces and a scheme 'HQ' used for the organisation and to host visitors
Dedicated roles	None

JAMIE PERERA

Grand Union Housing Co-op

Age	39 years old
Profession	Electronic music composer
Role	Passive resident of five years
Scheme	Grand Union Housing Co-op, a housing co-operative estsblished in Tower Hamlets in the 1970s and comprised of 127 units

Jamie is an electronic music composer who has been living in an East London housing co-operative for the past 5 years. Having previously lived in a range of accommodation types, including as a Property Guardian, Jamie's membership at Grand Union marked the beginning of a period of stability and flourishing in his professional and personal life. His interview touched on broad and fundamental questions around our collective relationship to work, freedom and self-actualisation.

With their green, blue, red and black front doors, the Victorian terraces peppered along Bishop's Way, Waterloo Gardens and Sewardstone Road of Bethnal Green look like those on any other street in London.

The difference is that they belong to Grand Union, one of 150 housing co-operatives in the capital.

A co-operative is a group of autonomous people who jointly own and democratically control their organisation—whether a business or a group of homes. While there are many different legal structures of co-operatives in the UK, they all share the seven same core principles.[1]

Grand Union, which recently celebrated its 40th anniversary, has a history rooted in 'people power,' its origins in the protest of a controversial extension of Hackney Road in 1965, which proposed to demolish this triangular block of housing, sparking massive public protests. Despite the eventual halting of the roadworks, the houses that stood in its way were still earmarked for demolition, due to their disrepair, but not before groups of students, teachers and artists began squatting in them. Putting up with toilets that had been blocked with concrete, and broken or boarded up windows, the squatters, through a weekly levy, were able to undertake the gradual improvement of the buildings, eventually registering themselves as a Fully Mutual Friendly Society in order to negotiate with the Greater London Corporation (now GLA), while negotiating in parallel with the workmen employed to remove their windows and floorboards.

The co-op continued to grow over the 1970s. Today, its properties now house 127 people.

Behind one unassuming red door is the home of Jamie Perera and his three house mates who call Grand Union home. Though they now work, respectively, in publishing, human rights and 'the City,' the group of music appreciators met while working at the Spitz, a (now defunct) music venue on Commercial Road in Spitalfields. Theirs is one of the few co-op houses that has remained whole, while others have been gradually divided into flats. Jamie leads the way down a corridor which looks like that of any normal house-share: populated by a stack of unopened mail, 5 bikes leaned against the wall, and bunting decorations left-over from a recent house party.

With long dark hair arranged in a youthful messy bun, Jamie has an open and inquisitive manner—the sort of person who "thinks it's important to question things" or to "do things properly"—evident in the fact that he has prepared coffee to accompany our breakfast croissants in the Turkish-Israeli way—to reduce the amount of water one wastes when washing up a cafetiere. We settle into conversation around his personal circumstances, how he came to feel a 'natural fit' with the principles of the co-operative housing movement, and eventually found his 'way in' to Grand Union itself.

Jamie's trajectory reads like that of many young Londoners

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[1]   (1) Voluntary and open membership; (2) Democratic Member control; (3) Member's economic participation; (4) Autonomy and independence; (5) Education, training and information; (6) Cooperation among Co-operatives; and (7) Concern for the community.

"The more affordable alternative housing options often come at another price—such as lack of tenancy rights—or living in constant fear of eviction. There is quite a lot of pressure on us to own a place, just so we don't have to pay ludicrously unfair rent...also a lot of pressure on us to just work to live "

finding their feet in the city.

Raised in Leyton, he began working at a music publishing company in Soho after graduation, but soon found that the health of his bank balance was inversely proportional to his well-being. Realising that the music industry was "not full of the people that I really wanted to be with" he left what had promised to be reputable career and began managing the bar at the Spitz, in Commercial Street. "I ended up managing the music venue," Jamie says, a move he refers to as a period of "deconstruction" and "reconstruction" of his life, and during which he forged a new career for himself in musical composition.

Like many in his situation, that period of professional flux was accompanied by a number of residential locations and living arrangements in house-shares, warehouses, and periods of ad-hoc Property Guardianship. While more affordable, his decision to act as a Property Guardian meant constant moving and uncertainty around how long he would be in one place. "The more affordable alternative housing options," he observes, "often come at another price—such as lack of tenancy rights—or living in constant fear of eviction." The pressure to earn enough just to pay the rent is one of the reasons driving people's desire for home ownership, he feels, reflecting that "There is quite a lot of pressure on us to own a place, just so we don't have to pay ludicrously unfair rent…Also, a lot of pressure on us to just work to live."

For Jamie, finding Grand Union after years of moving was like a breath of fresh air—a welcome period of certainty following years of flux.

The opportunity came through 'fortuitous friendships' (colleagues at the Spitz) already living at the house. Having been a regular guest, he secured a spot as a permanent member when it became available—a huge stroke of luck, he acknowledges, noting that many aren't as fortunate.

He is also clearly enormously grateful for this change of circumstance, feeling it is no coincidence that he finally found his professional footing after having landed secure, affordable housing. While conceding that "different people require different amounts of different sorts of freedom," Jamie is absolutely clear on the benefits that this living arrangement brought

"My life has completely flourished since being here. It's difficult to describe the mental shift you get when you don't have that [financial] pressure."

him personally, particularly in providing him with the mental freedom to progress with his practice. "If you think about it, I'm 39," he says, "I've spent so long being like 'what the hell?'...My life has completely flourished since being here," he continues, "...it's difficult to describe the mental shift you get when you don't have that pressure."

Many of Jamie's compositions integrate sound, statistics and data to deal with hard-hitting topics and themes about the way we live. His Climate Symphony, for instance, takes datasets such as carbon dioxide levels or weather-related events (such as floods in Pakistan) and associates a different instrument with each of these—for instance a piano that pulses in correlation with rising CO_2 levels over the last 50 years, or a drumbeat signifying frequency of flooding, layering up a chronological pattern of intensity which reflects how our world is changing.

Housing is also clearly a topic which inspires him—particularly around the shift in perspective (and unlocking of people's potential) that are possible if pressures are alleviated.

"When people are secure, then altruism is huge," he says, "... You could have the most generous person in the world, but if they're in a non-secure situation then they won't be in a position to share..." Affordable housing in London is a possibility, he suggests, providing it's managed by an organisation that has made the profit motive secondary,

referring to the difference in what a 'normal' rent would cost on his street, compared to what he and his fellow co-op members pay.

The Grand Union is clearly an organisation with principles that chime with his own. As a general model, the co-op has clearly chosen "people over profit," he asserts, and living with others who share this set of values is part of the appeal. "There is a level of comfort in knowing you are working in the same direction," Jamie explains, "and that is unique to this sort of co-housing situation."

His admiration for original residents and their 'can do' is also clear in the way he describes them as 'trailblazers'—with 'fighting spirits' evident in the way they respond to practical everyday challenges, such as those related to the organising of recent Anniversary celebrations. "There was a point where the [planning] application to close the road was going through a lot of red tape," Jamie chuckles, "and I remember looking across this room at a lot of old ladies saying 'Well, if we don't get it, we'll just close off the road—that's what we've always done!'"

The organisation itself is 'very human', he continues, noting a recent act of kindness, where, having noticed a new door at street-level in one of the walls of a house on Waterloo Gardens, he later learned "... that one of the residents in the house was diagnosed with cancer and so the co-op put a new wall in there so that this resident could access the garden more easily." For Jamie, the warmth of this gesture is a refreshing

> **"When people are secure, then altruism is huge...you could have the most generous person in the world, but if they're in a non-secure situation then they won't be in a position to share..."**

"There was a point where the application to close of the road was going through a lot of red tape, and I remember looking across this room at a lot of old ladies saying 'Well, if we don't get it, we'll just close off the road—that's what we've always done!'"

counter to normal London standards. "I've been quite lucky in terms of the streets I've lived on," he says, "but most people don't know their next door neighbour in London and I think that's a problem."

At the same time, he is keen to stress that there are no rules in terms of 'being a community' and how people should congregate together. "[Residents] don't seem to 'do' very much, Jamie says, "but when something needs to be done, people muck in and get it done—I've never seen anything like it."

In terms of day to day living, his experience has been very much like other house-shares—albeit more mature. While there are personality clashes—like anywhere—what matters, he suggests, is "that they're in an environment where people can voice their concerns"—or, in other words, that they've outgrown worrying about 'who drunk who's milk.'

Overall, the co-op appears to be a blend of formal and informal structures and processes. There are 3 full-time paid members of staff at the co-op, which Jamie views as being "an interesting recognition that there is a natural corruption that can happen with human beings" and necessary to ensuring non-bias. There is an annual general meeting (AGM), monthly management committee and different subcommittees that people can join depending on their interest, as well as official eligibility criteria—though Jamie's own entry clearly indicates that this can be a somewhat flexible or informal process, too.

Beyond the interpersonal principles, Jamie is clearly excited by the wider ambitions and principles of the co-op movement, which he describes as "...working towards the expansion of the opportunity of this sort of housing solution for other people." A commitment to working towards the improvement of the co-op is a condition of individual membership, he explains, though admits in the same breath that "...this isn't always necessarily enforced."

Jamie is still finding his feet as a member of the co-op, in terms of navigating how to participate. After joining, he wasn't entirely sure what was 'expected of him' and noticed a "drop off in my participation straight after joining," largely because nothing was asked of him. As he is still relatively 'new' and learning about the organisation, he is optimistic that his involvement with the co-op will grow, and he will become more familiar with the organisation and its mission, through the London Co-operative Network, to help other groups to establish and grow.

In the meantime, Grand Union has what Jamie views as a strong 'starting point'—"a reasonably cohesive community of people who are autonomous, self-managing, with people who organise us now." He also hopes that a more proactive—perhaps digital—approach to connecting residents and unlocking hidden assets will arise. " I'm a great fan of shared networks," he offers, "...it would be nice to use technology to start adding vibrancy to the networks and structures we already have in place." The hope is, he elaborates, that by using technology, the pool of three babysitters for a neighbour's child might blossom into 120. Only time will tell.

MARIA BRENTON

Older Women's Co-Housing Group

Age	70 years old
Profession	Social Researcher and Co-Housing specialist
Role	Project Enabler and Initiator
Scheme	Older Women's Co-Housing Group, completed in 2016, London's first all women senior co-housing development in the London Borough of Barnet provides 25 units for women over fifty

A professional social researcher specialising in co-housing, Maria's Rowntree Foundation funded research on collaborative ways of ageing led to OWCH, the UK's first senior co-housing development for women, whom she continued to support throughout their 18 year project delivery period. Maria's interest in the subject is driven largely by a mission to improve societal attitudes to ageing as well as collective (and institutional) treatment of the elderly. Her interview highlighted an ongoing concern for structural imbalances in our society and a passion for providing individuals with the ability to live with dignity in the face of institutional deficiencies.

The roses outside Maria's Brenton's terraced home in Fulham are visible from a distance as you approach. Upon getting closer, there are indications that this house belongs to a strong character, such as the embossed coin set in the door frame next to the bell—Marianne, on an old franc—a symbol for liberty and rationalism. Indeed it does.

At 70 years old, Maria is a leading authority on senior co-housing in the UK, the lead Director for the UK Co-Housing Network on Senior Co-Housing and a woman whose passion forged the way for OWCH—London's first Senior Co-housing Group for women. She opens the door with a strong handshake and feisty laugh, as she tells our photographer, jokingly, that her cat fled as "he doesn't like men."

Having only arrived in London in 2002 at the age of 55, when the Rowntree foundation gave her a grant to move here to support OWCH, her West Country lilt is still intact. It arises as we settle into conversation spanning topics she has considered for decades, ranging from societal attitudes, institutional structures and shortcomings to the psychological needs—particularly around autonomy and sharing—of individuals within co-housing developments.

Prior to her involvement with the co-housing movement, Maria enjoyed a 20 year career as social sciences researcher at both the University of Wales and of Bristol. It was later in life, she says, that co-housing became a topic of interest: particularly how older people could retain their independence, a term defined, for Maria, as 'being in charge,' as opposed to 'being infantilized.'

It's no surprise, considering her role as co-founder of OWCH, that her interest in independent living has been closely linked with women's issues.

This is partly derived from personal experience—she shares the words of a co-founding member of OWCH (since passed away) who expressed "We've been told all our lives what to do by men, and we do not intend to put up with it in our old age"—along with her own memories of living in more socially conservative times, when purchasing a Hi-Fi stereo required a man's signature.

"I feel we are in a very ageist society, and that anyone who gets in touch with the care system is patronised, and old people internalise this infantilisation—a socially constructed dependency."

More broadly, her interest grew up around the personal observation of how, in the western world, "It's often women who are left alone in our old age." With longer life expectancies, and imbalances in the age profiles of married couples (as well as a trend towards divorce) women are often growing old together as individuals. They are also more likely to collaborate, she suggests.

Despite this, she's quick to emphasize that her ideals for equality are not limited to women—they extend to anyone who can be considered 'structurally oppressed'—ncluding those suffering from what she calls 'institutional abuse:' instances where individuals, whether in care, or in employment of large institutions, can become lost in the system. It's a comment she punctuates with the example of having spent 43 years as the partner of a wheelchair user, and having worked within the NHS, which she eventually left, due, she says, to its practice of "kicking its employees around."

Supported by a grant from the Rowntree Foundation, Maria travelled to different countries across the world, visiting the 'snow birds' of Arizona (women who migrate from colder Northern parts of the US to 'winter' in southern RV parks) to more traditional co-housing in Holland and Denmark. One of the conditions of her grant was to report her findings to a group of interested women back home; Maria brought this group together from networks she knew across London, such as the "older feminist network, growing old gracefully, older lesbian network." What Maria had to say inspired these women so much that, at the pub following the workshop, the group decided to do something about it,

sowing the seeds which blossomed into the eventual group of OWCH co-founders.

This group went through many different iterations in the 18 years it took to deliver New Ground, with only one of the founding members moving in to the site and "hundreds, maybe thousands" of women being involved at various points," Maria says.

With the grant from the Rowntree Foundation, Maria became the "Social Enabler" for the group. She chose to keep the project separate from her personal housing plans, explaining, "If I had an interest, I would serve them less well." Her support included, for example, helping to organise a rented space for monthly meetings, when the group grew too large for the members to meet at home. She attended meetings, inputting her research, and became instrumental to the women's aspiration to find a way to allow women without equity to be provided for in the scheme. As the Housing Corporation told them they could not be a Housing Association, she found and invited Housing for Women, a small pre-existing Housing Association, to become landlord for a portion of socially rented flats. Unfortunately, Housing for Women was not also a developer, so Maria then assisted OWCH in contacting developers who could lead delivery of the scheme, eventually going through eight.

All told, each developer represented what felt like a process of fruitless engagement and setbacks, with nearly all developers losing interest eventually, Maria says, "because they didn't have the long term view which was needed, so if things didn't work out well they moved on." For Maria, severe delays arose from the fact that Housing Associations were so unused "to sitting around the table

in equal partnership with their end users."

Even once they found Hanover, the Housing Association development partner who identified their eventual High Barnet site, there were still setbacks. While Hanover had forward-funded the scheme, Barnet Council planners had objected to an 'older person's development' in their borough, due to concerns on extra strain on their care provision, causing further delays still.

Maria was instrumental in determining the scale of the development on the site selected, informed directly through her research regarding optimum scheme sizes in Holland, as well as helping design processes and protocols for smooth operations when they move in, such as dealing with instances of illness and death.

Completed in 2016, the scheme now contains 17 leaseholder owned flats and 8 socially rented flats, and is largely celebrated as a trailblazer in community-led development. It was delivered through a co-design process with PTE, the schemes architect which, she recalls, was a huge bolster to the group's spirits, contributing to a sense "that this was their project" alongside forging deep social ties between group members as future neighbours.

It also took 18 years to complete. Maria recalls conversations with Hanover around the slow pace of their movement, specifically asking "Do you think you could move a bit more urgently? We're getting old." With dwindling Housing Grants over the course of the project, no public funds were eventually available to draw down in support of social rental units. More significantly, in 2005, one of the co-founders, Madeleine Levius, died, long before she was able to

see, let alone move into, the final scheme.

Unfortunately, the lengthy process and its frustrations were also a portent of the challenges Maria would face with Woodside, her own co-housing project that was being progressed in parallel to the OWCH scheme.

Alerted to the forthcoming sale of a mental asylum in Muswell Hill, Maria's own co-housing group had also engaged Hanover around whether they might provide a co-housing development on the site, which was being offered to the community at-cost. Negotiations with the Housing Association proved much trickier this time around, and what began as an aspiration to deliver thirty units and a common house dwindled to six units, following viability negotiations. Even after the final six had been offered 'final prices' by Hanover in 2015, they were told four months later there had been a miscommunication and final prices would be 35% higher than previously committed.

This is the first time throughout the conversation that strain appears on Maria's face, recalling the frustration and disappointment of Woodside, which was "definitely not 'at cost,' and not even affordable"- and contributed to the feeling of having had "...five years taken from my life that will never be returned." Despite the emotional burden, Maria managed to keep a lid on her frustrations in order to avoid interfering with the completion of the OWCH scheme.

As the conversation progresses, it's clear that Maria's interest in these housing developments is part of a much wider narrative and set of challenges she perceives around how our society treats older people, and how we largely ignore the ageing process

altogether—views captured in her 1998 book 'We're in Charge' on how perceptions impact social views on the possibilities of alternative housing for older people.

One of her primary concerns—for both old and young—is around the levels of isolation in the contemporary world. "I think there is a lot of individualistic isolationism in British culture," she says. "We're not natural 'groupies' and it's very much endemic in our culture to have individual front doors we can shut. We aren't natural sharers…. it's the whole 'my house is my castle.'"

That norm, she believes, contributes to high levels of loneliness, and self-neglect. She is also clearly fascinated—and slightly piqued—by what she describes as "…society's infantilization of our grandparents, to the degree that they are left feeling 'done to' and that they should feel grateful for it."

For Maria, there has been a widespread failure to face up to the scale of older people living in inappropriate housing, as well as the scale of care needs. While recognising that massive progress has been achieved over the last years in terms of disabled access, she asserts that collective ethos and step change—which comes from society—is still needed when it comes to translating this progress into housing rights for older people.

The fact that older people's housing and rights hasn't been culturally prioritised, she believes, has reinforced poor institutional practice. Additionally, she observes, budgetary pressures have mounted on Local Authorities, impacting general levels of social care available while they have "their heads in the sand" failing to prepare for the increase in elderly over the next decade.

For Maria, institutions also contribute to troubling paternalistic treatment of older people, a view informed both by her own direct research (her role as a researcher has meant that she has been invited to visit and advise on almshouses) as well by personal friendships. "Shirley always said," Maria shares wryly of her friend and founding member of OWCH, "…that she had 'this absolute horror of ending up in a day centre tossing a ball around and singing 'Pack up your troubles in an old kit bag.'"

There is an innate challenge, she believes, in providing support for the type of vulnerability which comes naturally with age, and avoiding the temptation to pool all types of compound vulnerability types together. Housing groups should not be composed of strictly 'the needy,' Maria asserts, as groups formed out of need alone "because they are old, frail, whatever" will have more difficulties working together as community, and maintaining an environment that calls for shared responsibility.

Shared responsibility, or "involving people right from the beginning and giving them a decisive voice in their housing," Maria explains, is one of the aims of OWCH.

> **"I think there is a lot of individualistic isolationism in British culture. We're not natural 'groupies' and it's very much endemic in our culture to have individual front doors we can shut. We aren't natural sharers…. it's the whole 'my house is my castle.'"**

"I was just disappearing home after a meeting and I saw Jane (a resident) and her little dog, Bertie. I was hungry, and she and two neighbours were off for fish and chips, so we ended up all three of us going out for dinner. I think this shows well how the design works."

Autonomy, and self-managing, she believes, "are something that people can be trained in," drawing on examples from the Netherlands, where residents retro-fit their properties, learning from other nearby co-housing networks to solve similar challenges.

While Maria hopes that OWCH will ideally inspire others to do things differently, she is also somewhat disheartened by the uniqueness of OWCH—highlighting that in the Netherlands the proximity of similar developments are vital to stimulating new shared communities, as those wishing to set up only need to travel an hour to a group they can learn from. On the other hand, she is broadly encouraged by the hundreds and thousands of individuals and organisations who have started to come 'out of the woodwork' and written to OWCH in an attempt to join their community or learn from them.

One of the aspects of OWCH (and all functional communities) which Maria considers successful is that it offers mutual support, or 'looking after each other.' The first resident to fall ill at OWCH, she offers by way of example, led to a "10 day rota of people coming with hot meals"—a type of support that has developed over the last 18 years when, although not yet co-located,

OWCH members "...would have travelled across London to bring each other a hot meal." This is different from formal care, she is quick to point out. While OWCH members look out for each other, with some levels of formality in place, such as processes in case of death or severe illness, they do not do 'care work' itself, aspiring instead to be an "...effective pressure group to make sure social services do as they should do."

Maria also acknowledges that the development is not without its challenges—including adapting or developing new behaviours in advanced age—a process, she says, whereby the residents have to "navigate around each other's preferences," such as leaving blinds open (or not), what to plant in the garden, or balancing needs for privacy with expectations of socialising.

Yet despite these minor challenges, the development offers much to be inspired about, she suggests, such as happy accidents, like sharing an unexpected meal. "I was just disappearing home after a meeting and I saw Jane (a resident) and her little dog, Bertie" Maria says. "I was hungry, and she and two neighbours were off for fish and chips, so we ended up all three of us going out for dinner. I think this shows well how the design works."

CANDY WALL

Manor House Warehouse Complex

Age	**36 years old**
Profession	**In-house graphic designer for an architecture studio**
Role	**Previous Core Resident**
Scheme	**Manor House Warehouse Complex**, a series of informal shared living environments in the warehouse district, **London Borough of Haringey**

   For several years, Candy managed a large household unit within the Manor House warehouse complex, one of several North London warehouse communities stretching from Manor House to South Tottenham. Her interview highlighted the importance of everyday 'sociability' that help strangers come to form a household and feel part of a wider community in the warehouse communities, including family-like support for other's hobbies, and shared household rituals to build bonds; it also raised some of the more subtle social tensions associated with shared living, such as being unable to complain, or to own 'nice things.'

Candy Wall's workplace is an architectural office located on the 3rd floor of the Waterhouse Building on Orsman Road, Dalston. A graphic designer producing exhibition design, Candy has agreed to share her thoughts on her time living in (and managing) a large household unit in the Manor House warehouse complex, one of several North London warehouse communities stretching from Manor House to South Tottenham.

Manor House is not a typical neighbourhood, spatially speaking. Despite its connectivity (8 minutes to Kings Cross on the Piccadilly Line), one of its key attributes is actually the lack of a discernible centre. Instead, the area feels somewhat defined by its adjacencies— Finsbury Park and the vertical neighbourhood of Green Lanes to the west, with its largely Turkish population, restaurants and "Haringey Ladder" of terraced houses populated by young professional families; the leafy residential streets of predominantly Jewish Stamford Hill to the east, and the larger blocks of estates and brand new high rise apartments of Woodberry Down bordering the reservoirs to the south. The "Harringey Warehouse District" sits nestled at the centre of these elements—a hodgepodge of brick and tin sheds of varying ages, with names such as Omega, Arena, FedX and Catwalk Place. Known for accommodating Haringey's smaller textile factories, Greek and Turkish dressmakers, sewers, packers and button makers, it is now largely home to an estimated 1,000 residents of different ages and professions.

Though 36 years old, her freckles and slender build give Candy the look of someone much younger, and she lends the impression of being a quietly reserved person. So it is of some surprise when she reveals, settling in her seat, that she came to living in the warehouses as a way of "setting back in to London life" after a year of global travels.

In 2010, Wall had been travelling internationally and living in hostels, meeting new people, and gaining new experiences. Living in the warehouses was a way for her to ease herself back into the city in a way that retained some of the spirit of her time away. It was also intended as a temporary stay—6 months, maximum—while she got back on her feet and established herself in
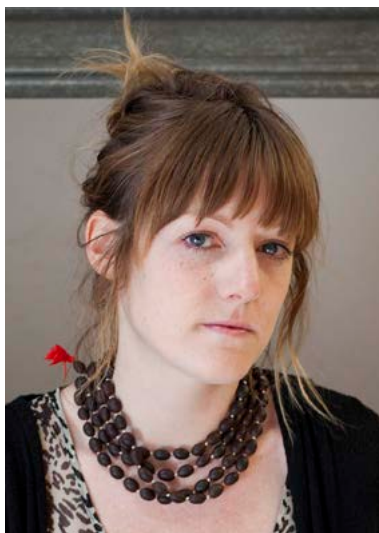
"It was completely organic, complete strangers just finding our way of doing what worked"

graphic design. Above all, it was pragmatic for both residents and the landlord: nearly all the units offered affordable studio space—'not in your bedroom'—as part of the requirement to fulfil the live-work loophole.

It was an adventurous move. Candy found herself moving into a newly refurbished warehouse unit with 10 other people she had never met—ranging from bar managers, school teachers, and graphic designers to events and music tour managers—an unexpectedly delightful experience and a reason for staying far longer than the 6 months initially planned. "This was the first time you just kind of landed somewhere and essentially the people you live with were chosen by the guy who was building the property," she tells me, with a trace of that initial excitement in her voice "... it was just such an incredible mix of people that I would never normally hang out with or meet—that's what made the experience so interesting and lovely. That's what made me stay longer in the end...had it been a whole load of people just like me, I probably wouldn't have stayed so long."

Candy's was one of the first in a new generation of warehouse living setups where entrepreneurial residents began taking on leases for wider property in the area, subdividing them without actually living there themselves. As a result, the group was left to its own devices. "It was completely organic, Candy says of the 'settling in' period, "...complete strangers just finding our way of doing what worked."

This meant organising group dinners, with everyone contributing food or money, and gradually befriending their neighbouring units, including some of the longer standing residents, whose units backed onto the same shared green space, and who showed through their actions that the green was welcome to be used for barbecues open to multiple warehouses, creating an atmosphere that Candy describes as a "mini festival every evening."

It also meant developing little house rituals; ways of connecting and supporting each other to feel integrated as a group. "I started doing a cookery club," Candy tells me, "where if you weren't that confident at cooking, we would all cook together; somebody else suggested a kind of art gallery space, where everyone in the house had to swap the display, so it would stay for a week, and we had props which we had to use... and each person would take turns, and they'd do it at night so you'd wake up the next day and there would be this new display that got weirder and weirder" (she grins). They also informed each other about gigs, performances or exhibits being hosted by members of the house or of the wider warehouse area. "That kind of thing happened a lot", she reflects, slowly nodding, "that kind of ...encouragement."

Gradually, many of the original 11 filtered out, but Candy felt the pull to remain. "Everything was there," she says shrugging, "friendships, my studio, all the social events... it was so social in the evenings, whether you planned to be social or not—it was just automatically there in your front room... so the idea that perhaps going to share with a couple of young professionals who have their own lives and are never around was just not appealing anymore really..."

She took on more responsibilities, becoming the house manager, collecting

rent, paying utilities, taking care of pests on behalf of the leaseholder, along with carrying on the activities she'd learned were effective at encouraging group activity and bonding. It is particularly touching to imagine this soft spoken person orchestrating dinners for new house mates ("Normally, I'd encourage fancy dress just to break the ice for them, and make it feel a bit more relaxed…") along with the family-like gatherings—roast dinners on Sundays and Christmas, and group outings on Bonfire night.

Connections within and between units were supported by Facebook. The house Facebook page "…didn't get used that much," says Candy, "…it would be things like 'I've left my keys at home, is anyone in?', 'it's my birthday this weekend, we're going to be noisy' or 'I'm hosting a group meal, who wants to be in' while the Manor House one was anything from finding out what was happening that night—parties and such, to selling stuff, to 'we're having a clear out, there's loads of free stuff on the street' to gigs, artist services, people looking for places to live, people advertising places to live."
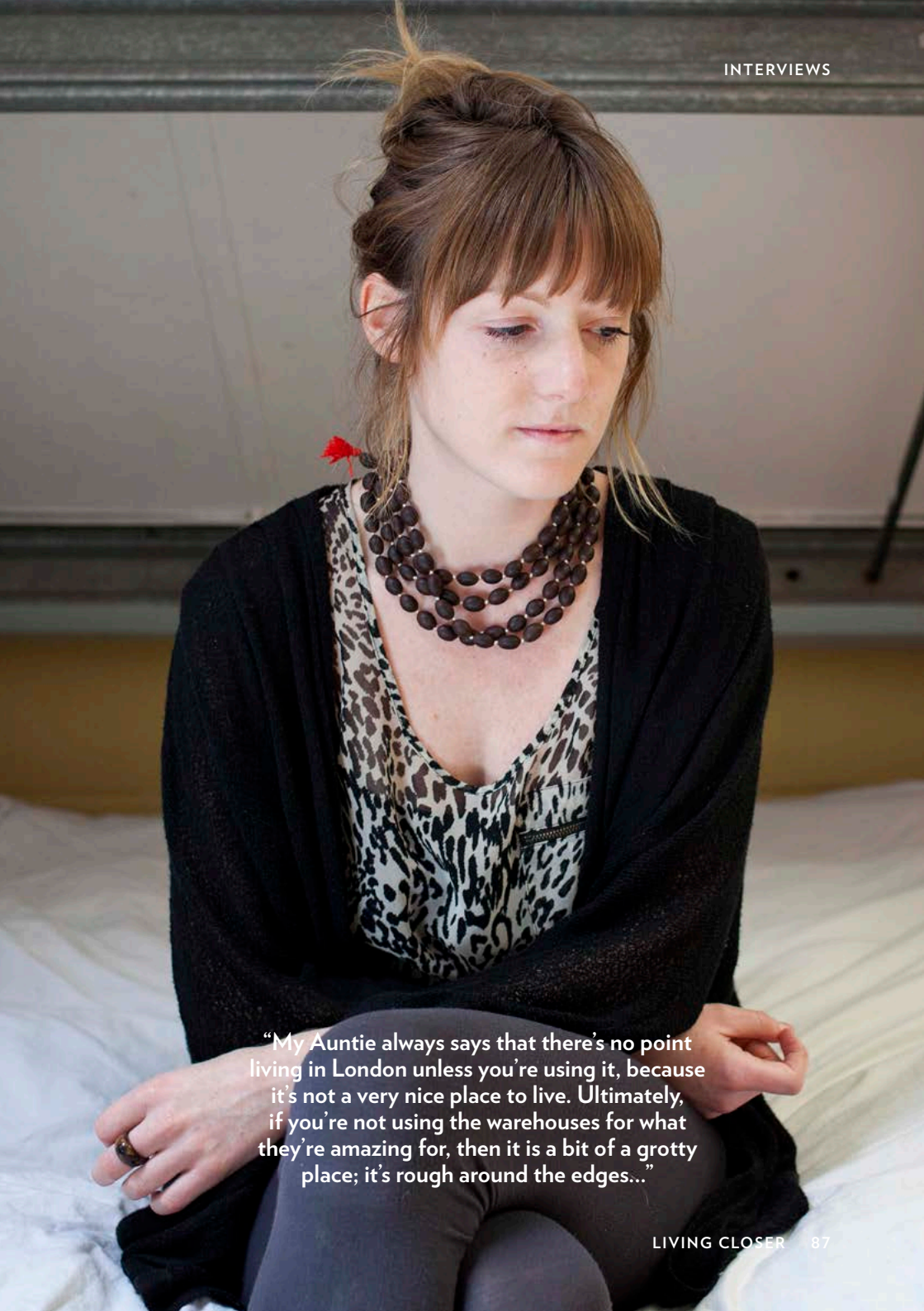
Our discussion also gives the impression that informal sociability was just as much a given in this lifestyle as organised activities. As well as the "huge" open plan living and dining area, there were unspoken 'rules' about behaviour. "We didn't have any televisions," Candy offers as an example, "to avoid that separation, that …cutting off of communications. We had a big projector for film nights and stuff, but we never had TV, we always had music on, to encourage that environment of talking and that was a deliberate, conscious decision."

Theirs was a traditional two storey brick warehouse with an apex roof—with open plan kitchen, living room and a few bedrooms on the ground floor and lofty bedrooms and some studios upstairs. Complaining was also off-limits, she says. "It was a given that you would be living near people who would want to stay up and drink…not necessarily a huge party, but if they wanted to hang out and listen to music it was kind of a given that you had to be OK. If you weren't, you probably shouldn't be living there."

As she speaks, a gradual awareness creeps in, of the dangers of generalising the experiences of one household as typical of the whole; of glossing over the difficulties this type of living presents, in terms of balancing the social, psychological and practical needs of individuals across the varying warehouse 'types.'

She's quick to point out that all the units had their own scale, flavour and ways of working. The quality of household units, and their environment, she reflects, often came down to whether anyone was either formally or informally managing. Some grew organically from a single leaseholder with cheap and stable space for a period of time, who built in extra bedrooms to house friends in order to cover the rent—not tight management but an informal network of friends living together, including the leaseholder. "Generally," she says, "people who had been there the longest were the ones who had taken the leases on themselves, and they made nicer homes. There was one [unit] a couple of doors down with six people which was really sought after; it was really old school—the 'Eco one.' If a room came up there, they'd have weeks of interviews…" On the other end of the spectrum, people were

"My Auntie always says that there's no point living in London unless you're using it, because it's not a very nice place to live. Ultimately, if you're not using the warehouses for what they're amazing for, then it is a bit of a grotty place; it's rough around the edges…"

living in tents inside open plan warehouses with minimal light, air circulation.

A tension between stability and transience comes up in our conversation on multiple occasions.

"The very nature of having 12 people means that people are going to be moving, whether it's because they don't like it there or not, or something's come up: they've got a new job, they've fallen in love, they've found a really cheap room in Green Lanes... stuff happens to people all the time, and when there's 12 of you, that's kind of multiplied..." she explains.

By this time, the landlord had realised how much money was being made, and many leases which had initially been 8-10 years lengths, were being renewed for 3 year periods, and then a single year at a time, with rent hikes accompanying each contract renewal and passed on to residents. By 2014—the year she left—people were being charged £750 a month; a lot of money for what she describes as 'a room inside a room' with no fresh air or daylight.

Asked whether the rising rents were a deciding factor in her eventual decision to leave, she pauses before answering "I'd been there a long time. I tend to do three year cycles of anything, and there was a couple of other things changing... I was starting to get irritated with people and angry about stuff which normally wouldn't bother me. The pros outweighed the cons for so long:

> "Of course, round there I didn't need to make myself go out because it was all on my doorstep. A lot of my friends ended up hiring spaces as music studios so then a lot of my friends were always around and popping in, so that was another big factor in not leaving for a long time"

not so much the parties but the things you're involved with—people's projects, people's art projects..." She trails off.

"My Auntie always says that there's no point living in London unless you're using it, because it's not a very nice place to live. Ultimately, if you're not using the warehouses for what they're amazing for, then it is a bit of a grotty place; it's rough around the edges..."

It was also the little things. "To come home and not be able to cook, food going missing, I guess that's the sort of thing that in the end, no matter how lovely and social it is, people get tired of, along with sharing everything with everyone all of the time." This, compounded by the feeling it was never OK to complain— "because we're slightly hippy and everyone is supposed to be cool"—seem to have been the final breaking points.

She continues, with a tinge of nostalgia, "Also, it's sort of like, how can you outdo the year before? How can you beat what happened... all the incredible stuff that happened the year before...because everyone eventually moves on..."

It's now been three years since Candy moved out, and, after travelling again and a period living in India, came back and "Got a grown up job and a flat in Hackney Central."

When asked about the transition from large household to living on her own, it is clear she has struggled with enjoying more material comfort ("It was odd, but I guess

the idea of having nice things became quite appealing") while experiencing a quite profound loss of everyday sociability. "I'd never lived on my own before, literally not talking to anyone, apart from the people you work with, and going home for the evening..." An image flashes in the mind of Candy heading home to a quiet flat on a bustling street, having spent the day in this sleek and subdued office. "Of course, round there I didn't need to make myself go out because it was all on my doorstep. A lot of my friends ended up hiring spaces as music studios and they were always around and popping in, so that was another big factor in not leaving for a long time...You could have no plans for the evening, but any number of friends would just pop in for a tea and a catch up: the drop in factor was amazing."

When asked whether she still keeps in touch or visits the warehouses, her face lights up. "Pancake Day" she says, "I'm always there, every year. I was there a couple of weeks ago for a party, she says, 'Neon Apocalypse.' It was a post-election party because we were all worried about the results." In fact, she never un-friended herself from the warehouse Facebook page, and uses it all the time to find out about gatherings, such as the upcoming summer street festival in Fountayne Road (Tottenham) which hosts open studios, street stages and performances on the day and warehouse parties at night or to rent her flat for periods while she's away.

Despite the challenges around transience and balancing respect, it's clear she's still upbeat about the possibilities of collective living. "It's definitely sustainable, with the right conditions, she asserts, nodding, "The key is to take the irritations out of the equation." Small things, like being able to have your own (nice) things. "Perhaps if it was more like a hostel," she says, "with open bits and stations where you could keep nice things locked away—without creating a divide."

CALUM GREEN
HANNAH EMMERY-WRIGHT

St Clements Community Land Trust

Age	**27 years old**
Profession	**Co-Director and Memberships/Stewardship Manager at campaigning organisations and London-based Community Land Trust**
Role	**Leader and Service Provider**
Scheme	**St Clements CLT, London's first urban CLT providing 23 affordable homes in perpetuity to individuals and families in Tower Hamlets**

Calum and Hannah are two young professionals working within the spheres of campaigning and housing delivery. Having studied architecture, Calum's interest in housing stems from student days, which saw him grow increasingly involved with direct action, campaigning and organising to deliver London's first urban CLT, while Hannah's background in international development and politics, together with volunteering abroad, led to a genuine interest in grassroots development. Their interview emphasised processes and mechanisms for securing affordable housing in perpetuity, including the importance of building resident capacity, shared and transparent decision-making processes, and avoiding what they call 'service provider to service user' dynamics with members and local residents.

On the first floor of a house on a quiet street of houses and warehouses, London Community Land Trust's Poplar office has a quietly peaceful and domestic atmosphere; sunshine streams through a window house plants sit on a spacious desk, a couch, coffee table and patterned wool on the floor make up a cozy corner of the room. Seated around the desk, Calum and Hannah are here to discuss their involvement with St. Clements—London's first Community Land Trust—based in Mile End, East London.

Community Land Trusts, as defined by the National Community Land Trust Network, are a form of community-led housing, set up and run by ordinary people to develop and manage homes as well as other assets, and with the explicit purpose of ensuring genuinely affordable local housing in perpetuity. St Clements, a Grade 2 listed ex-psychiatric hospital and workhouse, first rose to popular awareness in the lead up to the 2012 Olympics, surrounding negotiations between Citizens UK and London's Olympic bid team (now London Legacy Development Corporation) campaigning

"The idea that any project could not be social was bizarre to me, but also the lack of agency and power of architects to affect how a building was delivered was increasingly frustrating."

for the provision of permanently affordable homes as a legacy of the Games.

In 2007 Citizens UK established East London Community Land Trust, an independent non-profit membership organisation, with a unanimous vote by members in 2009 selecting the St. Clements site, owned by the Greater London Authority, as the focus of a prolonged campaign to establish an urban Community Land Trust.

While the East London CLT group lost in an ensuing open bid for the development of the site, the GLA asked the successful developer, Linden Homes, to work with them to deliver a portion of CLT homes and community space on the site. The development will provide 252 new homes, with 58 for 'social rent' and 23 for the CLT.

Hannah and Calum respectively hold the posts of Memberships/Stewardship Manager and Co-Director for London Community Land Trust, recently renamed following engagement with a further 5 potential sites across London. A first impression is how young they seem, both aged 27, to be holding

the posts. How did they find themselves working in the sphere of housing, and with the CLT movement in particular?

Calum responds first, revealing a background in Architecture and frustration with its formal education that drew him to the idea of direct action. "I was studying architecture, doing my Part 1 at Sheffield," he says, "and very frustrated that we weren't able to talk about how much the homes cost that we were designing, where they would go, or who would get to live there," he says. Instead, he and fellow students were pushed to consider design from a physical perspective only. A personal tipping point occurred when he was challenged by a tutor for proposing designs that were deemed 'too social.' "The idea that any project could *not* be social was bizarre to me," he says, looking somewhat bemused at the recollection, "but also the

lack of agency and power of architects to affect how a building was delivered was increasingly frustrating." At the time, he was becoming more involved in environmental movements, attending protests and marches, and trying, by his own admission, to break into power stations. "I was enjoying the idea of trying to achieve change through relationships with others," he reflects, "a lot more than I was enjoying drawing with a nought point nought one pencil."

This combined interest and growing restlessness led Calum to discover the East London Community Land Trust, after which he promptly made contact and offered his services. "I found my predecessor and said that I would build a 1:200 model of St Clements for him if he would employ me for a month to walk around Mile End and get people's thoughts on what should happen

there," he says. That, in turn, led to taking two years out to be employed on a part-time basis with Citizens UK, joining its board and working closely with advisors to bring the St Clements into being; he later finished his Part II (the second of three stages of formal architectural training) at the Cass .

He's now been with London CLT and Citizens UK for six years, and as co-Director of London CLT has the remit of helping the organisation shift from a single to multiple sites (there are potential sites identified in Peckham, Sydenham, Shirley, Ilford and Streatham Hill) as well as working to professionalise a number of the organisation's functions.

While perhaps with a less direct background and entrepreneurial approach, Hannah's path to London CLT was no less driven by a sense of mission and purpose. A student of International Development and Politics, she found herself interested in grassroots development, and how communities can work together to create sustainable change. "I did the 'standard' things, she says, slightly mocking herself, "you know, went to Ghana and Nepal volunteering... the things that young people do..."

Having whetted her appetite in issues of international and community-led development in particular, Hannah completed a Masters degree in the subject and moved to London to look for work in the sector, where openings were seemingly few. "The opportunities that came my way ended up being around start-up social enterprises," she says. This took her down some varied paths. "I worked in the criminal justice centre for a couple of years, managing

a start-up," she says, "and I think that kind of business experience and practical knowledge of how you set up an organisation from scratch to make change was really where my interest ended up laying." When that start-up came to an end, Hannah was on the look-out for a job before being signposted to London CLT by a friend in housing. "I'm very sociable," she says, "I like networking and meeting people and I happened to have a friend in the National Housing Federation that put me in touch with one of (London CLT's) board members, who put me in touch with Calum, and there happened to be a job."

At the interview, it was the organisation's emphasis on community development which proved a good fit for both parties. "During my interview I was asked some ridiculously open-ended question about how I would affect sustainable community development..."—'not by me, I hasten to add!' Calum protests, laughing—"...and I said 'Firstly, that's a very unfair question, but you would go about it by getting to know the community in which you're working, understand their needs and how they would like to approach [being involved].' Apparently that was the right answer."

She's now been in the role of Membership and Stewardship Manager for one and half years, responsible for allocating the portion of CLT homes on-site, as well as building relationships with and between residents and wider CLT members around current projects and issues surrounding the development, including getting the first 23 CLT residents moved in (10 of the 23 were in at the time of writing).

This has involved problem solving and dealing with snags to do with the

development (flooring, fire door gaps) and "talking to mortgage providers to try to help them to understand our strange resale price covenant" as well as arranging public meetings and events, sometimes over shared meals, "...to consult residents and see what they want to do in the new development." The meetings are, she says, regular points where everyone meets together to build relationships and take ownerships of different things. "We ask residents if they're interested in giving testimony at events...It's kind of about building up their skill-set as well," she adds. The role is highly social, and Hannah clearly relishes the prospect of having played a role helping CLT members secure homes and develop relationships. "One of the biggest victories we've had since I've been here is walking on-site and seeing our residents know each other and interact and help each other out. I'll be walking down the corridor and someone will invite me in for a cup of tea... it's a really tangible thing. And I'm on the Whatsapp group ... when people are locked out

they're like 'Ahh can someone let me in!'

As the conversation unfolds, it becomes increasingly clear that for Calum and Hannah, beyond general neighbourliness, the idea of community itself is fundamentally associated with organising, capacity-building, and decision-making processes. This is unsurprising in some ways, given the 'listening campaign' origins of St Clements, working closely with local residents to articulate their concern and organising themselves to do something about it.

Calum and Hannah describe the system devised for allocating the housing to CLT members, once the campaign had been successful and negotiations confirmed the final number of CLT homes on-site. "It was the decision very early on," Calum offers, "that we weren't going to pull names out of a hat; we wanted to have a policy and a process in place that we were happy to own, and back, rather than divorce ourselves from the responsibility."

A prerequisite for eligibility, Hannah explains, "was that you had to sign up to be

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a member, as every member has a share in the organisation, and you're 'buying into' what we're about. Having a share means that you're eligible to vote at our AGM, you can stand for the board, you can attend the AGM—that's the main vehicle for decision making. On the board, there's a third dedicated to local residents, and stakeholders, so we involve the residents and people in the community in the decision-making process because that's what it's about."

The process for determining eligibility, developed following a survey of 192 CLT members, resulted in five key criteria: Connection (minimum of five years' connection to Tower Hamlets); Involvement (belonging to and participating in the local community); Finance (priced out of the open housing market yet able to afford a London CLT home); Housing Need (more suitable than current accommodation); Supportive of the CLT and its ideals.

"Community involvement was really important," Hannah says, "they had to be able to indicate that were they to be uprooted it would be difficult for them because of their support networks, or the support they give to other people is in this borough. And we wanted people that would want to engage with the CLT. But it was all weighted so housing need and local involvement was a priority." Despite best efforts, the online application was arduous, so the team ran workshops and tried to support people along the way. "Something like 700 looked to apply, we had 300 do the preliminary eligibility test and 108 people submitted applications. We tried to have a process that was as funnelled as possible so that people didn't waste time if they weren't going to be eligible and so

that, from our perspective, we could handle having to read through applications."

This attention to fairness, due process and capacity-building is reflected in Hannah's work on a daily basis. She provides a current example, involving five residents who have yet to be allocated units: "We wanted to give people a choice in which units they choose, according to their preferences, and they all picked the same unit; we didn't feel able to arbitrarily divvy it up—some people wanted to pick out of a hat—so I've been calling around trying to figure out which approach residents would prefer, in terms of the housing being allocated so they feel it's fair. With this round of units, we didn't have to, but we want to involve residents as much as possible in the process."

This has been one of the key challenges throughout the whole process so far, Calum reflects, shifting people's mentality about their own personal role and agency. "When allocations were finally made," he volunteers, "it was only people who saw us as a statutory provider who were upset and pushed back about not getting a home. Those who understood it as a community project were very understanding if they weren't successful, whereas those who applied off the cuff almost approached it like they were talking to the Council..." "And we were just two people sitting at a kitchen table reading through applications!" Hannah breaks in. "I think when people treat you as a service provider, sometimes your instinct is to behave like one", he continues. "Often people say 'you should do this, or we want you to do this or that' it takes quite a lot of effort to turn around and respond 'No, you should do it.' You have to constantly remind yourself

that it's a relational organisation, where you're trying to get people to understand they have the agency to get these homes built, so long as they're organised, and can build relationships with friends and colleagues and others to get things done."

It is also clear, from what they say, that their community engagement is strategic and targeted, not simply part of an altruistic mission to build local bonds. Calum speaks about identifying the characters you need to engage at particular moments, for example, "If you're trying to pull together a plan that you want to get past planning at some point, you need to engage people who might be part of that area, who might either support or more often oppose local planning applications, whereas now we might spend more time trying to engage people who understand how to activate that space and are used to engaging … so they surface, but you also try to pick them out, engage them, build a relationship with them as well!" Hannah, too, discusses the need to harness the strengths of key individuals who can contribute their knowledge and social capital at critical points within the CLT's journey, for example, in setting up a Cultural Heritage committee in response to the opportunity to pitch for Heritage Lottery Fund bid to transform an on-site bungalow into a community space. Described by Hannah as an 'informal collection of people' she steered the composition so

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that its core consists of residents including two influential local artists, a curator at the Whitechapel Gallery, and another who runs Stour Space, a community-minded exhibition, event, performance and studio space in Hackney Wick.

So now that the first tranche of CLT residents have moved into their homes, what are the aspirations for the 'life of the development' for both CLT and non-CLT residents?

"That's something we're discussing at the moment, in a strategic and organisational sense," Hannah says. "We had a Membership and Stewardship sub-committee meeting the other day and residents and other board members are talking about what it means to be a resident at St Clements now and what it will mean in the future. That's something that needs to be owned by the residents, but the idea is that at some point we can extract ourselves a little bit more and there will be an active, engaged group of residents that will want to campaign for more housing or want to set up babysitting groups or run one of the [community spaces] themselves."

Calum, however, is keen to distinguish the CLT model from other forms of co-housing at this point, in terms of its key drivers. "Whereas a lot of community-led housing projects are primarily about the way you want to live your life, St Clements has always been primarily about getting affordable homes

built in a way that is led and driven by the people that live in a place. How they live once they're in is very important to us—as are the design of the building, and a whole range of aspects...management, etc. These things are all important, but secondary."

Again, he offers an example of how the community will be galvanised through governance of the land and buildings. "The site will be run by a resident management company," he says, "which will have representation from all the different tenures, and the freehold is going to be given over to a Community Foundation that will also have representation from all the different tenures. So the management and ultimate ownership of the land—the governance structure of those, are a collaboration of between all the different people on the site. Beyond this, he says, "...the hope is that the CLT residents form a 'core' to activate the rest of the people in St Clements and surrounding streets

through a dense set of relationships that will ripple out and people will get involved."

The conversation turns to the prospect of Calum and Hannah campaigning on behalf of others, and whether they see it that way. "I'm not sure I would want anyone to campaign for any things they aren't affected by," Calum responds. "Otherwise it's an altruistic thing, almost a 'settlement premise' 'Oh I'll come and help the needy people' whereas the great thing about working in Housing is that even if you own your own home, your kid probably doesn't. I think if you aren't affected by the issue, it affects the power dynamic of any campaign work."

Is it possible that Calum and Hannah could eventually benefit from the affordable housing they're campaigning for? Hannah, the child of missionaries, isn't sure where she'll ultimately end up, and seems quite comfortable with this. Calum, however, a current resident of Peckham and with

roots in South London (the site of the next London CLT) responds that while he would be eligible and would love to live in a CLT home, he doesn't think he would get the points. For the time being, he's happy living with friends, and suggests that even if he weren't, the option of renting privately would remain a possibility. "It's not as nice as buying, but at this point it's a housing preference, not a need…. though maybe in 10 years' time it will become increasingly ironic and painful," he says chuckling. Reflecting on that possibility, he ventures that it could even be nice to purchase one of the private (market rate) homes on a new development, like St. Clements. But if not for the affordability, what would living in a CLT home mean for him?

For all of Calum's emphasis on delivery and governance mechanisms it's clear that the process of organising and agitating is linked closely to his ideals on what a good place to live looks like, including the relationships and networks with others. "I'm not sure if it's something about Irish people, but my partner seems to have this incredible network of people who will support her at certain moments," he says, "and there's something to be said about having that network of people. It often comes from being from a certain background, from your country of origin, or it can be because you lived on the same estate together, it's

something that I just don't think terraced housing does in quite the same way. And I like the idea of those sorts of relationships."

Does he long for a more cooperative housing model offering closer everyday contact, even shared rooms or meals? He laughs, shaking his head "I want the ability to shut my door, I don't want the obligation of having dinner on a certain day of the week or anything like that…but I do think moments of coming together collectively around things you can't solve individually is something that I'd like to have as part of my life. At the minute, I do it all hours for the day (for work) but I could imagine, particularly when you've got a family, that it will become increasingly important. I'm hoping that [Community Land Trusts] will be able to do that better than most people and be the best example of it, so others will want to buy into it in some way."

The prospect, then, of a CLT in Lewisham, is an exciting one. Led by London CLT, local members will be in charge of the design and construction processes. "They will have to deal with all the pragmatic difficulty around financial viability, rather than lobbying and dealing with a development partner who negotiates all those risks," Calum says, "…as someone who did architecture, the opportunity to lead as client, rather than as a housing provider, is exciting."

> **"I don't want the obligation of having dinner on a certain day of the week…but I do think moments of coming together collectively around things you can't solve individually is something that I'd like to have as part of my life."**

ED THOMAS

The Collective

Age	27 years old
Profession	Community Manager and housing entrepreneur within a London-based commercial co-living development
Role	Service Provider
Scheme	The Collective, a commercial co-living scheme of 550 flats for predominantly single urban professionals completed in 2016 in the London Borough of Brent

Ed is a housing entrepreneur. Raised in a village near family and friends, he is a believer in the benefits of real-life connections and intentional communities. Having spent time in the cities of Paris and San Francisco, where he first became acquainted with 'co-living,' Ed associates living closer together with convenience, lifestyle, professional progression and achievement. Borrowing from start-up terminology, he outlines how living 'as a form of service' is capable of building confidence and social networks while battling loneliness in big cities like London.

The Collective is made up of two silver volumes which pierce the skyline of Willesden Green's quirky mix of low rise terraced housing and railway depots. The building acts as the first landmark in what will become Old Oak Common, a new name and urban centre planned for the area falling between Harlesden and East Acton.

Its foyer is an impressive double height room, scattered with velvet and leather sofas, lending it the feel of a hip new hotel. Perched around one cluster of chairs is a group of residents discussing LGBTQ rights in Brazil—a timely illustration of what The Collective has become known for: curating a community of engaged international professionals in what is thought of as one of the loneliest cities in the world.

The development is London's first 'at scale' co-living development incorporating 550 flats, a gym, supermarket, restaurant, roof terrace and other communal spaces. Described by one journalist as "a cross between a Silicon Valley start-up, a worker's soviet and the Polyphonic Spree," it has not been without controversy—with detractors criticising high rental prices and narrow demographics on one side, and proponents hailing it as a modern and necessary response to social trends and unmet needs on the other.

The development is run by a dedicated 'Community Team' who look after the residents, or 'members,' a term used interchangeably by Ed, Manager and leader of this team—a role he co-created together with CEO Reza Merchant, in order to figure out "ways to make the experience more community focused."

Ed is a personable and confident person, who clearly puts those around him at ease. As a spokesperson for the development, with multiple interviews under his belt, he speaks earnestly, with conviction and enthusiasm, while providing a tour of the space, sharing the roots of his interest in communities and housing,

"I grew up in a little village, with my close friends living nearby... I think that's what really inspired me to get involved in housing and building communities to some extent."

loneliness, and what it means to pursue a shared living experience. "I grew up in a little village, with my close friends living nearby," he offers, on the roots of his interest in co-living, "so I think that's what really inspired me to get involved in housing and building communities to some extent."

Having studied geography at Bristol University, followed by International Relations in Paris, Ed eventually found himself a transplant in the city of San Francisco, working as a digital marketer, and becoming acquainted with his first 'co-living' experience during the first four months—though it was more of a 'hack-house,' he clarifies, or "...a house-share occupied by like-minded people—both personally and professional speaking."

Co-living, he offers, is a slightly different combination of factors: "a shared living experience, where you've been intentional about [living together]...it has community at its core and it incorporates the building and amazing shared spaces, as well as convenience." His understanding blurs the lines between home and working life; a development that San Francisco seems to be leading on, both in terms of developing working models and associated land-use classes, as well as normalising through pop culture, such as HBO series Silicon Valley.

Soon after settling in San Francisco, Ed moved on to another co-living arrangement run by Campus, the "...first company", he explains, "that tried to turn 'co-living' into a business and operate at scale." Campus has since gone bust, but at its height, he relays, ran 34 houses offering organized events, fully stocked fridges, professional cleaning and, in the words of its ex-CEO "...real-life connections in a planned community."

It's clear that the San Francisco experience has indelibly shaped Ed's life trajectory, shaping both friendships as well as professional opportunities that have opened up as a result of his time there. He speaks warmly of a global network of friends whom "he learned more from than working." He's proud of their successes, sharing the achievement of an 'amazingly intelligent' friend from that period, a Harvard graduate who is now re-purposing old age homes in Austin, Texas, into co-living spaces—a project called "Assisted Chilling"—a pun on the US phrase for supported living arrangements for the elderly. This kind of refurbishment makes sense, he suggests, considering the existing layout, but doesn't compare to the design autonomy of the Collective's purpose built approach, though he concedes that "...the downside is it takes 3 years and a lot of capital."

These relationships and experiences whetted his appetite to become increasingly active in projects involving, in his own words, "the way that people were going to live in the future" and to put his particular brand of commercial and 'community' acumen to use.

On returning to London, he became excited by seeing shipping containers being used as affordable construction modules, and discovered Pop Brixton—a temporary development in South London offering a mix of workspace, retail and event space. Further digging revealed it was co-owned by the Collective, which had launched the Old Oak development just 6 months before.

Following up, he was able to convince the team of his ability to add value to their operations on the basis of his 'on the ground experience' of what works and lessons learned. It worked. One is reminded of a method actor taking on a new role, as Ed describes how he and the team moved into the scheme for the first nine months to oversee how it was working and continually make minor adjustments. "You don't build a

"You don't build a community overnight; it's not like we can just switch it on, and it's all there."

community overnight," he explains, "it's not like we can just switch it on, and it's all there."

Ed is also part of the gateway process, determining if the development is 'appropriate' for prospective members. The application consists of a tour and interviews where resident can expect be asked questions around why they're looking for the co-living experience, what they can bring, and what they're hoping to get out of it. The living situation, Ed concedes, doesn't work for everyone. He mentions 'a small handful' who find it not for them "because very rarely would we let anyone in without being interviewed."

So who does 'belong' in The Collective? In Ed's estimation, there are two main characteristics of residents who take to the concept: those with natural curiosity, or those who find themselves at a particular stage of their life. He refers to the first category as 'early adopters'—"people with openness and a desire to explore new ideas—the ones who are the first on a new App." The second category are those Ed describes as being at an 'inflection point in their lives... whether they are getting divorced as a 40 year old, just moved out of university as a 21 year old or are starting a job in London for the first time as a 30 year old."

Although they don't directly discriminate against anyone, it does tend to invite extroverts, or at least people who are less likely to spend all their time in their room. "If people felt their room was the only part which was their home then this wouldn't be the right place for them," Ed suggests, "because they wouldn't be able to take advantage of everything else."

Ed offers a sophisticated picture of co-living experience—covering values, the induction process, space changes and agency, alongside wider dialogue and points of contention.

"There's been push-back from journalists, planners, property developers, researchers," he says. And while he believes that these can largely be put down to the fact that any new venture, especially in housing, will cause controversy, he also has some well-prepared responses to issues such as affordability (the Collective offers a room rate of £850 per calendar month). "We cover Council Tax, room cleaning, linen change, all events, drinks... and we're doing a social accelerator at the moment," he says. Given London's rental market, this represents value for money, he believes, as well as price points that some of the more exclusive American models aren't even attempting. Considering the market they are targeting, Ed asks, what is better—that these individuals pay the same amount in rent for a 'shell in central London' or that they get a room with a lifestyle? "People love it here," he adds, shrugging, "so I don't think there is a right or wrong."

The remainder of the conversation touches on the nuts and bolts of operations, the offer and ethos, throughout which terms like 'convenience' 'community', and 'values' regularly crop up.

Ed highlights convenience as a distinct aspect of the model and ethos of The Collective, casting back to his San Francisco days, having had to figure out how to set up internet in another country, along with other practicalities, and acknowledging how this can be a daunting task. "People move in," he suggests, in part "because they don't have to worry about setting up

internet, they don't have to worry about organizing a cleaner, they don't have to worry about going to IKEA to furnish the place: everything is taken care of." In many rental situations, he adds, "you get screwed over by agents, by landlords, and hidden bills...And it can take ages to fix things."

Ed's references are peppered with software analogies, and he refers to The Collective as 'living as a service' comparable with Dropbox, the key difference being that "... with a Dropbox subscription you access updates, 24/7 support and a terabyte of storage, while in co-living you get events, you get updates, you get support."

Perhaps more profoundly, Ed positions The Collective as providing not only a new housing offer to single young professionals, but also a solution to "deep societal problem of loneliness" alongside shifting behaviours around family and work dynamics.

In practice, he says, this translates into tools and protocols focused on actively building connections between residents. Once people join, for instance, the Community Team host an induction to 'facilitate connections,' which includes a new resident event, and adding new residents to the Facebook group. They've also tried to encourage interest-based groups, with the team curating "...different groups for specific purposes." They're in the process of building a resident App, for instance, aimed at making it easier to find others with common interests, and which Ed jokes, will enable everyone to identify "... all Danes who can code in Ruby on Rails."

The Collective also funds and administers a pot of money for 'community-led initiatives,' where residents vote on what should be spent on, and which recently resulted in residents voting to redesign the

roof terrace. "This, gives people a voice," Ed asserts. His team also supports residents to put on their own events, helping to organise and finance them as "...it's a great way to build community and participation."

Encouraging residents to host events and generate ideas 'makes common business sense,' Ed says, shrugging. "If [someone] can feel a sense of ownership over this place then that is a massive selling point." About half of The Collectives events are currently run by members themselves, he continues "...which means the experiences are tailored around what people want." It also lessens the workload for Ed's team.

So what are the downsides to 'community' in a development like The Collective?

Ed remarks on a marked lack of conflict amongst residents to date— possibly, he offers, due to the scale of the development—where anonymity or a lack of relationships makes it hard to be irritated or, at least, to take it out on others. Addressing this tension around scale of the development and the relationships between residents is the first moment in the conversation where a moment of uncertainty flickers across his face. "Is 500 people an unsustainable number of people to live with? Maybe it's just too many, and can be overwhelming at times... just the thought of having that many people around you..." He trails off, before quickly recovering, suggesting that on the upside, with 500 people, there's a wider pool of

people who might have things you can ask for: "You can always ask on Facebook 'Hey, the last zip-car is gone, can I use yours?'"

He's keen to underscore that while The Collective is ultimately interested in operating a commercially profitable model, it is equally interested in improving the lives of its 550 residents, which it proposes to do by adopting (and adapting) formal values, as well as monitoring the outputs and outcomes of the development.

The Collective's values, he suggests, convey a much broader sense of ethos, and expectations of how people should treat one another within the development. They range from respect, being kind, trustworthy, and looking out for each other, to compromise. The team is currently looking to iterate these, together with residents, into "a sort of Manifesto" that incoming residents will sign up to.

For now, he says, they are experimenting with a number of changes to the space and programming based on user feedback. "Feedback is a really essential part of our operation" Ed explains, "in order to understand what we're doing well, and less well." The feedback process, a topic of several articles Ed has published on Medium, uses aspects of Apple's corporate culture, such as monthly 'town hall' sessions to learn what residents think. Through feedback, the team learned that residents felt there was an absence of "living room style spaces," which has led to a project to create one. They

> "Is 500 people an unsustainable number of people to live with? Maybe it's just too many, and can be overwhelming at times... But you can always ask on Facebook 'Hey, the last zip-car is gone, can I use yours?'"

also learned that people want to customize their space; Ed is confident that moving forward, they'll "figure out ways to enable people to do that while making sure that we can give that 'consistent experience.'"

The team is also trying to gather additional data to inform a wider understanding of the links between well-being and this 'novel way of living' more broadly. "We have a team of researchers specifically working with universities to better understand outcomes related to [co-living]" he says, which they hope will not only improve their service, but demonstrate tangible social benefits to public sector partners like the Greater London Authority, and ultimately "...show that we do really care about it, because I can tell you we definitely do."

Ultimately, Ed seems inspired by what he does, with an outlook on success and progress clearly influenced by his own professional trajectory. One of the perks he most values, is the opportunity to make a profound impact on people's life choices and new paths, including playing a role in the professional success of others. Despite many of the 'unique aspects' of the collective living experience here actually echoing university style living, Ed strongly believes that those who live here are pushed "outside their comfort zone"—an experience which encourages them to "...apply for jobs that they wouldn't normally get—and get them." He puts this down to improved self image

and greater confidence of those who perceive themselves as having 'taken the plunge' in living here. "Even for those who may not utilize the support, knowing they have it and the sense of belonging that provides can equip them with the confidence to try new things," he continues, listing several successful start-ups emerging from The Collective, and referring to a 'happily ever after' tale of two single residents, who moved out a couple.

So what's next for Ed and The Collective?

Having successfully delivered their first 'at-scale' co-living development, they will be moving on, taking lessons learned to a second model in Stratford. "There will be more thought around the rooms in upcoming development," Ed suggests, as the rooms in the Old Oak location are deemed too small for long-term living, resulting in the fact that people are likely, by his own estimation, to call this home for 3-5 years. Meanwhile, they've also been contacted by "multi-family developers and older people homes all the time who come and want to look into [evolving the model]." Ed is keen to rule nothing out. As for co-living, his message remains clear—for many people this way of curated community works, and meets a need that's been there for some time. "There is a big shift taking place," he says, "around people looking to live in more communal ways. London is a lonely city; if they move into a place like this, they'll realise it doesn't have to be."

"We have a team of researchers specifically working with universities to better understand outcomes related to [co-living]—show that we do really care about it, because I can tell you we definitely do."

MARTYN CRADDOCK

United Saint Saviours Charity

Age	47 years old
Profession	Chief Executive of a historic housing charity
Role	Leader / Coordinator
Scheme	United Saint Saviours, a charity that operates 75 almshouses in Southwark, and is leading plans for a flagship '21st century almshouse' development

Martyn is the Chief Executive of a housing charity providing affordable housing to lower-income older Southwark residents. Martyn's interview focused on the pragmatic aspects of the almshouse model of living, rather than his own lifelong mission related to it. Nonetheless, the interview highlighted an ongoing concern for the visibility and dignity older people in society, questions around how to balance autonomy with duty of care, from an institutional perspective, and touched on the finer details and assumptions that impact on the quality of life for older residents living in close quarters.

One of the oldest place-based charities in London, United St. Saviours has enviable land holdings in central London, ranging from a small number of almshouse properties to pubs and shops in Borough Market. An Act of Parliament in 1541 established the charity as a Corporation of Wardens with the remit of administering all Parish affairs, from managing St. Saviour's Church (now Southwark Cathedral) and the area's almshouses and poorhouses, to registering deaths and burials and managing bequests from wealthy benefactors.

Today, the charity, overseen by the Charity Commission, is separate to the church. Located on the third floor of an unassuming building on Union Street, Southwark, it is governed by a number of Trustees who retain historic titles such as "Bell Warden," "College Warden" and "Rector's Warden" while continuing to provide almshouses for lower income and older Southwark residents

– currently 75 homes spread across two sites.

Almshouses are a charitable form of housing for older people, typically on lower incomes within a defined geographical area. Although there is a long history of almshouses in the UK (documented as early as the 11th century) the phrase may be less recognised than the physical forms typically associated with these developments - often low-rise brick or stone cottages placed in a horseshoe arrangement around a shared common green.

This historical background and introduction is provided courtesy of Martyn Craddock, Chief Executive of the charity, as he talks over several of its artefacts he has unearthed for an impromptu show and tell session, including United St. Saviour's earliest and subsequent seals, ceremonial garb, and a leather-bound ledger book containing the cursive scrawls of wardens in post from the 18th century until the 1950s.
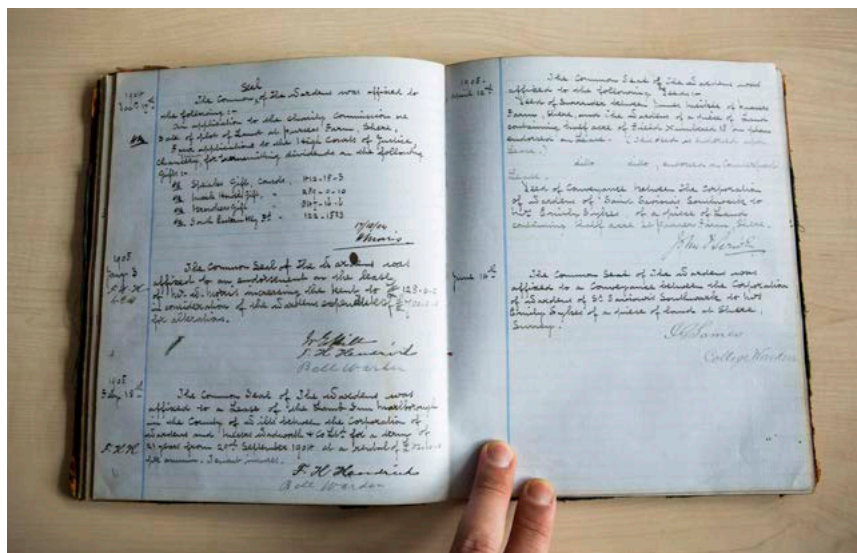
Martyn is 47 years old, stocky, cheerful, with large blue eyes and a grin frequently flashed. He seems, in many ways, an unlikely candidate to have become the Chief Executive of a housing charity, especially after revealing he had a previous life as a chef at Marks & Spencer's where he spent his days, in his own words, 'eating curries in the food section of the Head office.'

So how did it happen, this transition from the world of food to the world of charity and housing?

'I worked for one of the city livery companies and that's where I got my grounding in charity finance,' he says, matter of factly. "There was no career path for me there, so I looked for a job that was out there, found a Finance Director job, I knew someone on the board and used connections, as you do in life. In hindsight, looking back, to work for a charity that has a lot of history, the locality framework, and also let's face it—money in the bank so you don't need to worry about whether you're going to get paid next week—that's very attractive." (He chuckles). "It also comes with a lot of responsibility," he continues on a more serious note, "you've got to make sure that [the charity] is going to be there in another 500 years—you've got the make your assets work as hard as possible."

That first role was as Finance Director of St. Luke's Community Centre in Islington, an older person's community centre that "hadn't had a lick of paint since 1970s." The Centre was in the midst of negotiating a merger with a large grant-making Trust, when the Trust suggested that the physical community centre would no longer be needed, prompting a period of soul searching from Trustees, after which the merger fell through. Martyn was promoted to Chief Executive with the remit of turning the community centre around.

It was a role that lasted 7 years, and, in addition to delivering a community centre that is nearly unrecognisable from the time he took it on, introduced him to his first dealings in housing and development. "We needed to repay some of the work that we had put into the old building" he explains, and ended up selling the community garden for residential development. "I had been pressing for older people's housing on the site, but it didn't get through." Reflecting on the reasons for this, he suggests that the image of almshouses was problematic for the Council. "Islington is left wing, progressive, and they probably saw it as a pejorative term—where the 'old poor' go." The failure to secure housing for older people on the site left Martyn with a sense of unfinished business.

He's now been in post at United Saint Saviours for two and a half years. As Chief Executive, his role is to oversee the 75 dwellings managed by the charity across their two sites, along with associated staff (there are two at each site) as well as the charity's Community Investment Programme, which distributed £800,000 pounds within a small geographical area this year, including to projects piloting GP and advice services in central locations for hard to reach older people, support for older LGBT people in care homes, and support for immigrant Latin American and Somali communities of Southwark, assisting with their integration in the neighbourhood.

He's also been charged with overseeing the charity's most recent and high-profile project—an 'Almshouse for the 21st century'

being designed by Witherford Watson Mann Architects, and delivered as the off-site affordable housing contribution of a private residential development on Bankside. Despite the project being initiated before his appointment, it is clearly a subject close to his heart.

"We believe buildings in Southwark should be beautiful," he emphatically states, "because we think the borough deserves good buildings. But we also believe that people in social housing deserve good buildings—that you shouldn't have cheaply built affordable housing as an offshoot of the nice designs in the private sector. So we're trying to build something that people will feel is an amazing piece of architecture and not be knocked down in 60 or 100 years' time—something that will become part of the civic architecture."

A key concept of the design, both physically and programmatically, is its emphasis on being outward facing— primarily through a generous and permeable reception space and central courtyard open to use by community groups and schoolchildren, but also through programming—pro-actively inviting outside groups in to use various parts of the building and courtyard garden, as well as preparing the local community for the 'landing' of a small community of eighty-year olds.

This emphasis in design and programme comes from the recognition of living in an ageist society, where getting older means becoming invisible. "If you look at the really busy streets of London" Martin sighs, "older people are absent; and yet they make up a massive proportion of our community. Why is that?" The default option, he reflects,

seems to be their removal from Central London to where life is easier. "To me that's just wrong," he asserts. "This is where they grew up, where pockets of families still are, the places they recognise...I always say, 'How would you want your mum to be treated? You don't want her to be ignored in the street—you want her to feel valued and cared for by society—and if we can do that in Southwark, that would be amazing."

As we speak it becomes clear that Martyn is keenly aware of—and sensitive to—a few areas of tension between social or behavioural ideals associated with living more closely together and the housing model and demographics unique to almshouses.

One of these tensions is between providing independent living and the duty of care required for residents of advanced age. "Autonomy is massively important, on a personal level" he says. "It gives you dignity. That's what we all want: our independence of living and making our own choices." But it also comes with challenges, he suggests. "What do you do when you see people making the 'wrong choices'? What do you do when you see people stop washing, or start hoarding? Do you intervene? It's a difficult thing."

This issue is addressed by United St. Saviours, for the time being, by having on-site staff, and shifting to a model of care which sees care workers making proactive home visits asking residents how they are, if they're lonely—acting in Martyn's words—"like a friend with an element of distance" and providing a range of pastoral care ranging from morning greetings and providing support writing letters or filling in forms right up to the point of formal 'care.' This

higher degree of human interaction is, in Martyn's estimation, what differentiates almshouses from a traditional sheltered home, where on-site staff are largely absent.

Providing care comes with challenges, however, particularly for residents who are more accustomed to greater levels of self-sufficiency. "I suppose there's an element of intrusiveness to it, for those not used to it," Martyn concedes. "I think that degree of independence stays until the 80s, when they'll maybe appreciate the fact that there's been someone 'intruding' on their lives in the last 10 years, because if they've got dementia they've had someone who has institutionalised all their memories." He pauses a moment to reflect: "I think what happens in the new almshouses is that we set the culture from Day 1: you've got to expect to be supported; that's part of why you want to live here."

This sentiment illustrates a subtle tension, throughout our conversation, of a struggle for the charity to balance its approach to enabling "autonomous or independent living" whilst curtailing 'institutionalisation'—a kind of tailing off of individual agency or initiative that can affect those moving into more supported forms of living. To a lesser degree, this is partially linked with the fact that residents do not have legal security of tenure. In United St. Saviours, once individuals pass an assessment of need and visit the site, residents are given what is called a 'Letter of Appointment' from Trustees, which establishes them as 'beneficiaries' of the charity. As beneficiaries, they pay a "weekly maintenance contribution" between £110-£140 per week for a one bed flat, which covers staff and building operations. It also means they do not have legal security of tenure, though Martyn is quick to point out that circumstances of terminated residencies are rare—in part due to the organisational structure of the charity's board. "Almshouses tend to have boards, and some of the people on those boards have their own personal reputations to protect, fiercely. If you look at our board you have people there with high public profiles and so if we were to start treating our residents badly, word would get around and that person's reputation

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and credibility would be tainted."

More substantially, Martyn is more than aware of how even the smallest of details, such as materials and signage, can play a role in how independent residents feel. Sharing a story of a recent interaction with one of Hopton's newest residents, he tells how he was asked why the external signage needed to say 'Hopton's Charity.' "[The man] was quite happy with the word 'almshouse,'" Martyn explains, "but not 'charity,' as it was more stigmatising."

Subtleties of design—entries and exits, signage and branding, fabrics, and even temperature, he continues, seem to influence feelings of independence. "When you go to our Purley Road houses," (United St. Saviour's Croydon-based site), "it's carpeted, all very warm, like walking through a hotel lobby," he volunteers. "It's very nice,

don't get me wrong, but there's a risk of feeling institutionalised." This observation is being considered in the new almshouse designs where, for instance, corridors, while glazed, will be unheated "so you should feel that you have to go put a coat on to go into the 'outside world' to see a member of staff or reception."

In addition to physical designs or branding considerations, Martyn is also aware of the link between trying new things and staying socially engaged with maintaining mental health and well-being among older residents. At the same time, he feels that United St. Saviours has somewhat limited agency to encourage interactions, new routines or even tolerance of difference. "You would expect that all the people moving into almshouses would have been living in communal living arrangements—blocks

of flats—so they should be used to [living in closer quarters]," he says, though this doesn't necessarily translate into the closer social relationships we imagine. "In our ideal world, all these blocks of flats would still be having TRA parties all the time, but I think that in reality the majority probably don't engage—they're probably quite happy in front of their telly. Hopton's almshouse," he continues "is a traditional horseshoe model with front doors facing onto a shared courtyard, but can I put my hand on my heart and say that everyone wakes up in the morning and says 'Good Morning' and 'Hi Bill' and has a cup of coffee? Sometimes people are quite happy to live totally isolated lives, through choice—they don't feel lonely and that's what they want. If they want to live behind closed doors and not interact, there's not a lot we can do about it."

For someone in his position—potentially far removed from the 'end user' of housing—Martyn is surprisingly knowledgeable about the range of disagreements between residents stemming from the disruption of established routines, such as the intimacies of arguments regarding the laundry facilities, which apparently range from people leaving their washing in and some washing two tea towels a day, to others 'stuffing a duvet in' and breaking the machines. He's keenly aware of the importance of established routines and behaviours for older people (for better or worse) and questions whether the emerging designs for the new almshouse also recognise this. The new designs "go down a green route," he explains. "Why have fifty-four pieces of white metal sitting in room mostly unused when you can have six sitting there fully used? [The designers]

should come along to the meetings that come to and see the rows to do with laundry! And what about the people with a health issue that need to wash every day?" he asks. "It's all well and nice but [in consultation exercises] people might not want to talk about their incontinence issues or the weeping sores on their body. If they want to put the washing on as if they're in their own private house, lovely you know? I think this idea of laundries as a place where you have a cup of coffee and natter about things with other people in the community is an ideal that maybe comes from people of a younger generation."

This fear of causing disagreements or quarrels amongst residents seems to result in a form of hesitancy around initiating new activity or inviting more ground-up (self-directed) projects or programmes, though Martyn notes that 'grassroots' project ideas are rarely initiated to begin with—"possibly because it's the way it's always been." Something as seemingly innocuous as encouraging more residents to take up gardening has the potential to generate divisions or feuds. "I think what we come up against with that one is the gardener who has been there for 20 years and starts thinking 'Oh, if they all start doing this, I could lose my job,' and other residents supporting the gardener because they've also been there 20 years...So you've got to think about the consequences..."

Concern about feuds and clan-like territoriality also enter the conversation surprisingly often. "Racism, homophobia, envy, snobbishness...you get it whatever age you are," he muses. "Just because you're eighty doesn't mean you're going to get on

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with every other eighty-year-old in your life. This is Southwark, we've still got residual feuds that go back decades; this is where the gangs were, where the Richardsons and Krays used to hang out, and the dockers... these were tough men, tough families."

This protection of traditional attitudes and demographics is of some concern to Martyn, who feels that the charity's current forms of recruitment and advertising attract particular, and potentially narrow, demographics. "We struggle with diversity in our existing almshouses," he admits. "I don't know if it's because people don't hear about us and we need to make more of an effort." United Saint Saviours currently advertise in the press and via Southwark Council, but aren't necessarily able to access housing lists for older social housing tenants who are struggling with the buildings they're in. "We're not 'out there,'" he says, "people don't know about almshouses, so it's a bit word of mouth—and the problem with word of mouth is that it tends to attract the same profile of people 'selling it.' It's also possible, he speculates, that it may be hard to attract people to a community where most of the people there don't 'look like you.' "Britain has gone through some major changes," he explains, "in terms of acceptance of different communities, but when you're older... You may have views that seem quite alien and strange to us."

Indeed, London is changing, becoming younger, more diverse, and global, and with it, Southwark's profile. More broadly, London, with high proportions of mobile younger residents and Europeans is younger, more mobile, and potentially 'rootless' than traditional almshouse demographics currently reflect. In Southwark, White British residents have continued to decrease since the millennium. This churn, flux and mobility presents challenges for Martyn's own life choices, it transpires. "I am bringing up my kids here," he offers, "but I haven't got any family here at all. I often think 'God it would be nice to have family living nearer,'" he says wistfully, "but we haven't. So that's the way we've become, with grandparents living on the coast. It's a tension..."

Meanwhile, United Saint Saviours are keen to continue expanding their portfolio and their mission, despite substantial challenges to the new development. While Planning Permission was granted in January of last year, funding for the development is not in place (the Section 106 development contribution to 'unlock' the development is linked with a separate private off-site development on Bankside). "It's frustrating us, it's frustrating Stephen" (the architect) he admits. "I still think [the new almshouse] will happen, we're just not in control of the timescale." United Saint Saviours has invested heavily to bring the new development forward—contributing costs of half the architectural and professional fees to date, generating a site-specific design. "We've put nearly £600,000 pounds into the project—so

> **"Racism, homophobia, envy, snobbishness... You get it whatever age you are. Just because you're eighty doesn't mean you're going to get on with every other eighty-year-old in your life."**

we don't want to lose that," he says, "and while there's a lot of learning we've got from [the process] that the next design should be massively informed by, I don't think you can plonk this one down anywhere—it's designed for this piece of land."

Would they initiate a similar project and delivery mechanism again? "Clearly it's the most lucrative way, but maybe we need more in the pipeline, so we can allow one or two to fail", he suggests. And while Martyn acknowledges that it's impossible to 'curate' a community of residents he is excited by the chance to continue developing ideas for programmes and mechanisms which promote new norms and new opportunities for United St. Saviours residents. "We're lucky with the new almshouse," he says, "in that you can set the tone from the start; you can build a team here who are going to have the knowledge of what's working and transplant it into the new place."
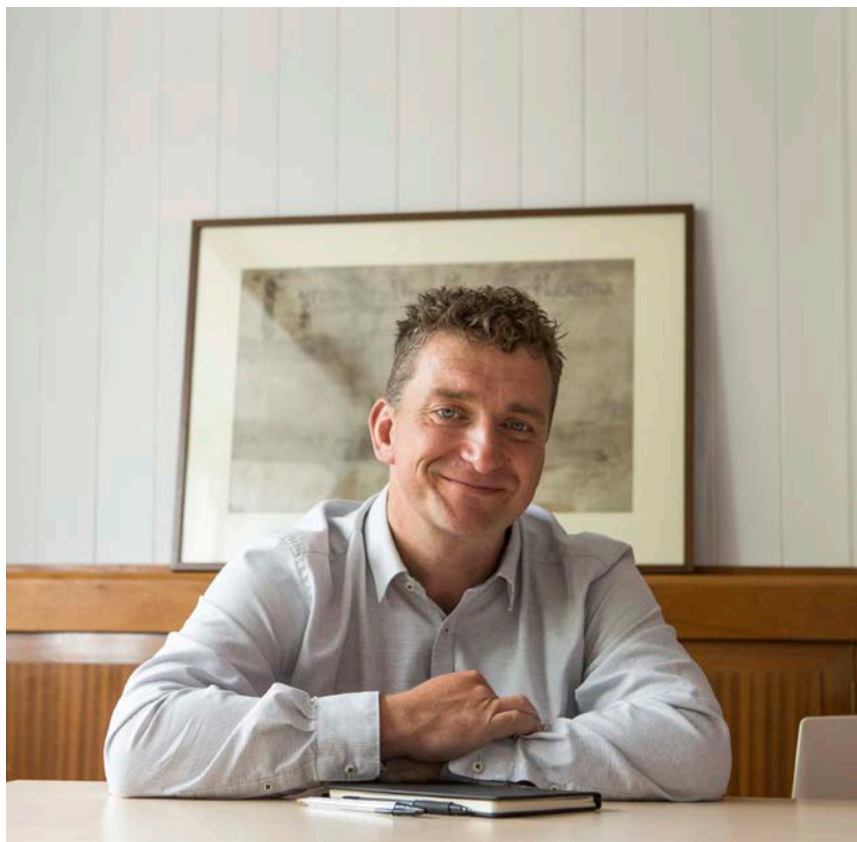
KAREEM DAYES

Rural Urban Synthesis Society

Age	**29 years old**
Profession	**Musician, Housing activist**
Role	**Project initiator**
Scheme	**Rural Urban Synthesis Society, a Community Land Trust which has submitted a proposal for 33 self-build homes in Lewisham**

Kareem's interest in co-living is driven by his desire to be part of a culture-shift around the delivery of more community-led housing. As a project initiator, his interview tended to focus on technical aspects (and challenges) related to project delivery, including the need to speak 'multiple languages' of planners, lawyers and social finance, and the importance of treating the public sector as partners rather than obstacles. He also discussed the need to address entrenched biases around class, race, and environment that exist in community-led housing projects and inhibit genuine inclusivity.

Five minutes walk from the train station and down a side street in Forest Hill, Lewisham, lies Walter's Way. The street takes its name from the architect, Walter Segal, who enabled a community to build their houses on a plot there in the 1980s, including the Dayes family, one of several who participated in this Council-supported self-build scheme, and whose son, Kareem, co-founded the Rural Urban Synthesis Society (RUSS), a volunteer-led Community Land Trust with self-build at its core.

The Dayes family home lies towards the end of this private path of 13 homes, where neighbours and builders spill out on this warm summer's day. Sunlight fills the room, through double height ceilings, and the house, which doubles up as Kareem's father's yoga studio, is filled with the happy clutter of everyday life.

Having lived in the Sanford housing co-operative and helped his dad renovate their family home, Kareem became increasingly convinced both of the benefits of community-led housing, and that there are 'other ways of doing [housing development].'

"It's a cultural thing," he reflects at the start of the conversation, "self-build is not mainstream in this country—it's very niche. Whereas in the rest of the world, it's a pretty normal way of doing it."

Now 29, Kareem co-founded RUSS together with his mom, dad a friend and their parent "around the dinner table" in 2009. With sustainability as their initial focus, they set their sights on developing a vision for development where, he says, "...a community could have a carbon neutral footprint" and provide an example as to "...how London communities could evolve to become more 'sustainable.'"

Their version of sustainability was holistic, including the ambition to generate energy and grow their own food. However, as time went on, the focus of the group shifted. "As the housing crisis has worsened, driving housing up the political agenda, RUSS has become more housing focused," he says. And while environmental sustainability is still a major motivator, RUSS has been marketed from an affordable housing perspective—with sustainability elements, such as Passivhaus

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standards, largely pitched on the basis of its potential to reduce energy bills, and as a tool to overcome fuel poverty, "which is still prevalent for a lot of people," he explains.

The shared or 'community-led' part was simply common sense. "We have public transport, national grid, gas system, sewage works, rubbish collections" Kareem says, "so many of our amenities are collectively owned managed or experienced... if you pick apart the fabric of the city then it's mostly collective. We collectively educate our kids in the same place. How much more intimate can you get? The city, by nature, is a collective thing and I don't think we're conscious of that."

It's the kind of clear and thoughtful precision that arises regularly throughout the conversation, including his reflections on co-housing itself and the wider family of intentional living arrangements. "I think we often get caught up in defining the difference between a co-housing, a co-operative and a CLT," he suggests, "and as far as I can tell, they're all the same thing, done slightly differently. And they're not mutually exclusive, so you could have co-housing group within a CLT, or a co-op within a CLT or a co-op with co-housing groups. They're all interchangeable."

Practically speaking, the nascent group needed to attract broader interest and demand for participation in a scheme, as well as identify a viable development site.

"If you pick apart the fabric of the city then it's mostly collective. We send all our kids to massive schools. We collectively educate our kids in the same place. How much more intimate do you get? The city, by nature, is a collective thing and I don't think we're conscious of that"

Alongside the others, Kareem played an active role in recruitment. "Through community engagement, workshops, door knocking, flyers in shops, talking to the council, and musical events and talks" he says, "we gradually managed to promote the idea." The group grew rapidly, to 50 members in year one, 100 members in year two, and "...it just grew from there," he says, modestly, of its current membership of 700.

For Kareem, a large part of the appeal of a scheme like RUSS revolved around offering people greater autonomy and control: in his own words, "... being your own landlord, not at the mercy of some 'high overlord.'" In addition, he adds, there seemed to be general sense of frustration in terms of people "feeling a bit stuck" in London regarding housing, and not just in terms of affordability. The quality of the housing, even when you can afford it, is 'depressing' he asserts, while speculating that something even more fundamental is at play. "I think a lot of people want to use their hands, and don't get to use their hands a lot...so that's a real attractor for people," he offers.

It's a hunch that has since been substantiated by RUSS member surveys, where acquiring practical skills ranks high on the list of reasons members are attracted to the scheme. At the same time, he's quick to avoid over generalisations about members. "We're all just people," he says, "and a quite diverse

"I think a lot of people want to use their hands...and don't get to use their hands a lot...so that's a real attractor for people."

group... Older people don't necessarily want to build, but may want to help in other ways...young people want to do loads."

In 2012, RUSS got a tip off from someone who lived near a small site on a flood zone that the Council wanted to develop. RUSS was unusually fortunate, he acknowledges, in being able to have both the confidence and ability to leverage the precedent of his childhood home as a compelling angle to approach the Council with. "We were able to say [to the Council] 'Let's do another [self-build scheme] because you haven't done one since Walter's Way,'" he recounts, "'and it's needed more than ever before.'" The approach kick-started a process of several years of lobbying and pressuring the Council, mainly through officers.

As someone who comes across as a humble and emotionally sensitive doer, it is unsurprising that he characterises this period as a time of 'building relationships.' People who work in Councils want to collaborate, he says, as long as their already stretched time isn't being wasted. Getting them on board was less about having planners on the team, and more about putting himself in their shoes which, he says, "...is just common sense really. You're trying to sell an idea to a Local Authority and so what's in it for them? Early on, we all realised that they weren't going to do it unless they see benefits for themselves. And so if people approach them openly and collaboratively with an offer which had some work behind it '- Here's something that will help you with your job and it's going to help the local community: why don't we work together?'—then they're going to listen to you and feel it's worth taking time out of their overly crowded schedule to

talk to you. We're speaking to Officers; it's their job to enact the Housing Strategy of the local area, to get more homes built."

It was also an education process, he admits. "They didn't know what a CLT was, they didn't know what self-build was: so we got them to come along [Walter's Way] to go to conferences, and they got their mind around it eventually." He's also quick to admit that the education process was two-way, and involved learning to speak in 'planner language' as well as drawing on external expertise for financial literacy. "We had architects involved, and we always showed them nice drawings and we got a financial appraisal done from a financial advisor who specialises in housing," he says.

It got to the point when RUSS made a formal offer for the site. The initial hurdle came when the Council decided to go for a competitive tender. This long (and expensive) procurement process, included generating "...a 200 page document which outlined the whole scheme—everything from allocations to the self-build, funding etc." RUSS had applied to the GLA for funding to support planning and feasibility fees; this change meant that they had to spend that funding on the tender process itself.

Frustrating as this was, Kareem understands why this was done. "You can't just give [publicly-owned land] to somebody—you have to go through some sort of procurement," he concedes. Fortunately, because of the three years of relationship building, they scored high enough on the community benefits aspect that they could overcome the high scores in the financial element for private developers. Kareem was able to convince the planners

by "showing them how we were going to pay for it; because we had the grant we could appoint a serious team of professionals... For them it's about deliverability and risk and track record and all the rest of it."

Delays arose through the co-design process and related to disagreements with planners on specific issues. The co-design process covered landscaping, materiality and finally, internal spacing with discussions around the "prioritising between private space and communal space, what to go into the community facilities." These aspects were then divided into headings which had a related design menu that the future residents could vote on. Planning disagreements revolved around the buffer zone against flooding and permeability through the site—points seen by Kareem as irrational though he says, shrugging, "You can fight them to a certain point and then you just

have to bite the bullet and compromise."

One thing he won't compromise on is valuing the sweat equity of the self-builders taking part, which is an element RUSS is currently receiving push-back from funders on. While the entire (challenging) 'development phase' has been supported by a range of grant funding from public and charitable bodies like the GLA and Tudor Trust, RUSS has secured a £5M development loan and £2.5M subordinate finance from social investors to cover the actual construction costs. A key challenge has been in demonstrating that the self-build sweat equity accounts for £1.4M; additionally, funders have worried that self-builders won't build up to standard, or that they won't even turn up, something that Kareem says runs counter to their experience, which "... is that self-builders build to better quality and they go to above

and beyond to make sure it works, because their whole livelihood is riding on it."

The process was anything but smooth, and was, by Kareem's own admission, extremely challenging at times, especially when "through all of it, you just want to build a house." However, he adds, once "you get to a certain point, you've gone too far and there's no turning back. The only way to get rid of the frustration is to get it done ... stopping isn't really an option."

Plans for the final scheme, which is to contain 33 homes, were submitted in September of 2017. If all goes to plan, construction will start in 2018, and residents will move in, though surprisingly, Kareem will not be one of them, due to changed life circumstances. Despite this, his commitment to delivery remains palpable, and he says, chuckling, "The only way my life is going to become peaceful is if we build these houses."

This generous and open-minded outlook is also reflected in the way he has digested and interpreted the self-build development process and all the players involved, especially figures like the Council, who can be regularly painted as adversaries by community groups. "What a lot of people don't get with this stuff," he reflects, "is that we often work within an adversarial framework; we see everything as a fight, or a competition, or government as bad—and sometimes we do need to fight them to get

good things, but most of the time it isn't true.... A Council is just understaffed people who are mostly trying to do good stuff."

Despite the origins of the group (local, community-led) Kareem's focus tends to fall, throughout the conversation, on more technical aspects of the process, such as funding mechanisms, or trade-offs between density and affordability, rather than who will be living there, or how. This is in part because he feels, overall, that members should be thought of simply as ordinary people. "I don't think there is a 'common characteristic' [of members], aside from the fact that we're all young people looking for a house," he says.

But what will the RUSS scheme look like, feel like? What will be shared, and supported, what will be private and independent?

"The landscape is going to be pretty much all shared, a shed in the garden, a little workshop space," he reveals. "The neighbours want an outdoor pizza oven, so there may be an outdoor pizza oven there ... But that will be up to the residents ultimately, so whatever form it takes will be decided by who is living there at the time." He pauses, reflecting back on his childhood at Walter's Way: "Growing up here, I played with my mates on the street, and then I'd come home and do my own thing. Some people's houses I went to a lot, some people's houses I never went to. It's pretty open."

Correspondingly, RUSS's principles, seem to reflect more consideration for wider

> "What a lot of people don't get with this stuff, is that we often work within an adversarial framework; we see everything as a fight, or a competition, or government as bad—and sometimes we do need to fight them to get good things, but most of the time it isn't true..."

social and economic relationships than on codes of conduct or shared values between residents themselves. Inclusivity is a chief principle, according to Kareem, and he's keen to highlight this means more than just paying lip-service to values like 'diversity.' That means being able to translate these into measurable proxies through which RUSS can monitor its success, he says. There are ten official guiding principles, touching on sustainability, representation and accountability, socio-economic opportunity and links with wider surrounding area and context. Proxies include whether people are housed who otherwise couldn't afford to live in Lewisham; the quality of people's lives over time; the amount of people trained; the amount of skills spread by and through the community over time; the number of people who get paid work out of the scheme and its carbon footprint over time.

The scheme will also contain a 'Knowledge Hub'—a workspace where RUSS could have a small office, which will act as physical HQ for future workshops, education, outreach etc., used by residents and the wider community. A proposal for this space recently won £30K of funding thanks to a successful crowd-funding campaign via the Mayor's Crowdfund London programme. We're still

shaping it," Kareem says, "because we get a lot of people down this street, people to do interviews, or take pictures and the rest of it— and it gets a bit tiring sometimes; having to host it in your house all the time." Unlike the traditional communal house and kitchen in many co-housing developments, "...the idea was to have a communal space, where people can come and visit for information, and they don't have to call someone, and go in a house to get it," he explains. "I think this scheme is going to be a bit of a flagship development," he continues, "so if we're going to get a lot of attention, that needs to be facilitated somewhere. So it's more about the education—if there is going to be another group that wants to develop a site, but they don't know how to, they don't know where to get started, they come here.

There are many lessons that Kareem and the team have learned along the way, and many things, he reflects, that they would do differently if given a second chance.

Firstly, there are learnings around the workflow, programming and costing for the construction method that he would take from this scheme. By using more accurate data, and costing earlier, he could, he says, "pre-sell equity, basically creating secure legal interest and then the debt burden is reduced and cheaper money raised earlier."

He would also 'try get his head around' other potential legal structures like the mutual home ownerships that co-operatives use.

But perhaps most surprisingly, and profoundly, he would rethink the allocation policy. For the Ladywell site, RUSS chose a purposefully loose process that would not be too demanding and therefore, Kareem thought, would invite people from 'all walks of life.' However, he soon came to realise that "only a certain type of people know about self build and architecture. It's quite a white, middle class domain." He also became aware of many innate biases in the process. Assuming hours of free time for volunteering, for instance, or being comfortable with 'picking names from a hat' were all innately biased towards middle class norms, he reflects.

To challenge this, Kareem would either work to ensure greater diversity of applicants, or put in a quota. "This sounds extreme," he admits, "and I would have never thought it was a good idea, but the way the world works—across all sectors of employment, politics—I seriously think there is a strong case for having quota systems in the short term... society is so divided and it's become very apparent to me, while doing this project, how divided things are."

People's backgrounds unfortunately affect their ability to 'see doors as open-able' he

> "I would have never thought it was a good idea, but the way the world works—across all sectors of employment, politics—I seriously think there is a strong case for having quota systems in the short term"

continues. This applies not only to challenges with 'unusual suspects' becoming involved with existing projects, but also, to initiating them in the first place. While RUSS weren't professional developers, its founders were able to convince the Council "to take us seriously because we're clearly serious people," he says, "but other members of society lack the confidence, or the trust in institutions, to make such demands." The failure to trust financially disadvantaged people is harmful, he asserts, using the example of treating Grenfell 'victims' as beneficiaries and recipients—rather than giving them cash to rebuild their lives—as a case in point on subtle erosion of autonomy.

For now, having received emails from different local authorities and with new government funding coming in, Kareem hopes to work on other sites as "33 homes is a good start but actually needs to be done on larger scale" which means, potentially larger sites or multiple smaller sites for RUSS. He also hopes that the group can return, at some point, to its original, more holistic ambitions. "Ultimately, housing is only part of the picture, and we're going to have to start doing other things like growing our own food, and generating energy. Once this first scheme is done we can start doing other things like social enterprises and branching out into other areas."

TESSA DRESSER
CHARLOTTE BALAZS
HEDI ARGENT

Older Women's Co-Housing Group

Age	77 years old, 64 years old, 88 years old
Profession	Retired GP, retired administrator, social worker
Role	Active participants and core residents
Scheme	Older Women's Co-Housing Group, London's first all-women senior co-housing development in the London Borough of Barnet, providing 25 housing units for women over fifty, completed in 2016

Tessa, Charlotte and Hedi live in London's first all-female senior co-housing group. Having joined at different points in the development of the scheme, with differing professional and geographical backgrounds, these women are united in their belief of the benefits of living in a mutually supportive community. In the interview, they highlight how joining a community in older age was ultimately more important than its eventual location. Living closer together, they say, is both rewarding and challenging; beyond their well-considered protocols and policies, it requires retaining awareness and sensitivity to each other's needs at all times.

In High Barnet, at the end of the northern line lies a development housing twenty six women united by a vision of living independently, yet as part of a community of peers offering mutual support throughout the later stages of their lives.

OWCH is the UK's first women-only senior co-housing development. Following 18 years of development, the completion of the scheme in November 2016 has been a relief. It has also led to a constant stream of visitors and publicity. Overwhelmed with the number of requests for visits and interviews, OWCH members have instituted a three month moratorium, which they have temporarily broken in order for Hedi, 88, Tessa, 77, Charlotte, 64, to share their individual stories around why they were drawn to this unique development, and their experiences of settling into it as a new 'forever home.'

Designed by Pollard, Thomas, Edwards architects (PTEa), the layout and other infrastructure of the OWCH scheme aspires to create a supportive—yet independent— environment for these women, who range in age from 51 to 87 years old. Like many 'traditional' co-housing schemes, the development, which consists of 25 (primarily 1-2 bedroom) flats, shares a garden space and common house, arranged in a T-shaped layout, providing sunlight and lookout to each resident, while placing shared facilities and communal gardens to their doorstep. Passing through the garden, where several residents grow fruit and vegetables, Hedi, Charlotte and Tessa point out a small gardener's shack, for those with green thumbs, containing gloves, buckets, spades, a radio and tea-making facilities.

As we enter it, the three unanimously agree that the common house is one element of the development they would have never have considered going without. Consisting of a guest bedroom, shared laundry facility—complete with eco-friendly washing powder—and large open plan living room and kitchen, the house is imbued with a friendly home-like atmosphere through small touches, such as the care that's been taken to select comfortable furniture, and a bookshelf bursting with well-thumbed novels like Catch-22. Arranged and delivered by a 'Commons Area' group, all residents have been involved, to varying degrees, in some aspect of the design of common areas, with one resident (a retired 'Scene Maker' at the National Theatre) leading arrangement and furnishings, and others providing informal or light-touch input around fabric and colour, for instance. It's intended for the whole OWCH community, so while residents can book the common house for events, it is implicitly understood that other residents will be welcome to attend.

It's a lively environment, bustling with activity; as Charlotte prepares a sandwich at the kitchen counter, other residents continue crossing through the grounds, on their way to their personal flats, or to the shared garden.

These types of shared spaces are crucial to co-housing, Tessa suggests, offering her understanding of co-housing as "...a group of individual homes, where you have your own flat or house, and you may have a bit of outdoors—a terrace or a garden—and a common house with kitchen, where you have communal activities, communal meals..." Charlotte is quick to add the emphasis on community to this definition.

Retaining a sense of community while ageing in place has been a crucial part of OWCH's appeal for the three. Tessa reflects on the pressure many older people feel to downsize their homes and take up residence in a care home or community. "On paper," she says, "some of those villages look the same [as OWCH]...They have spaces for communal meals, they have communal activities, and they have their own flats... but still if you moved into one of those you wouldn't know your neighbours at all." Hedi adds that while the space and sharing of infrastructure helps them live the way they want to, "community comes before accommodation" while Charlotte offers, slightly more dramatically, that thinking of the alternatives "make her blood run cold."

Charlotte is somewhat atypical in this group—the only of the three who had

not previously contemplated living more communally. A recently retired administrator for a medical college, she first started planning ahead in her 50s, asking herself (and doing desktop research around) how she wanted to live. While she wasn't sure what she was looking for, she felt certain of what she didn't want. "I didn't want to be isolated and retired in some little box in a mansion block" she says definitively. Instead, with much of her family living abroad, she felt curious to explore ways that she could be part of a wider community offering 'mutual support,' or, in her own words, "Giving and receiving, contributing and being part of a neighbourhood."

With a youthful energy and alertness, it's hard to believe that Hedi is in her 80s. Like Charlotte, she found her way to OWCH through personal research—this

time, by discovering a leaflet in her local library. Having lived on her own for five years, Hedi, like Charlotte, was keen not to spend later life alone. "I didn't want to go on for the rest of my life doing that," she says, matter of factly. Nor did she want to be a burden on her children. However, unlike Charlotte, Hedi, who still works as a social worker, had always been interested in living with a collective spirit. "In my younger years, I had been very interested in Kibbutzim, and went to go stay on Kibbutz," she shares, though in the end, her partner was less suited to the communal life.

Tessa, a retired GP, was also always interested in communal living, and had links with Madeleine Levius, founder of Growing Old Gracefully, a network that challenges preconceptions of older women as passive, and, as Tessa refers to her, one of the founding cohort's "original originals."

Madeleine had been one of several women invited by social researcher Maria Brenton to a presentation of her international research on women's housing—by all accounts a 'turning point' for the participants, who were inspired to spearhead their own development. Tessa recalls the early conversations about setting something up, though "it wasn't called co-housing and we didn't have a very complete understanding of it." At the time, she was working long hours as a GP at the Royal Free Hospital, and wasn't able to fully engage in the meetings, held on Sundays, as they conflicted with her work schedule. Despite this, she kept herself 'in the loop' regarding the development, until approximately six years ago, when she recalls thinking "it would definitely, hopefully, be my future."

Maria's research sparked a commitment to the concept, and kickstarted the process of group formalisation, site identification, exploring partnerships with Housing Associations and negotiating the financial and legal aspects of delivery. The group experienced multiple setbacks and delays, including those stemming from ongoing concerns from Barnet Council around hosting an older person's development in the borough.

The silver lining of the prolonged realisation, however, was that it carved a sense of solidarity between the women, and provided them with the opportunity to solidify their values and their processes. Today, for example, detailed policies are in place covering membership, equality and diversity, mutual support, pets, conflict resolution and parking allocation. They've also developed structures to support one other, from a cat rota which allows cat-owners to go on holiday knowing their pets will be looked after, to an email system which helps with post deliveries and other favours—a type of work Hedi characterises as 'communal work' often conducted around group dinners or meals.

Given the nature of the group's formation, which had always been highly social, in terms of its aspirations, and intimate, requiring sensitive negotiation of issues such as illnesses, planning for care needs and succession, for instance, it is no surprise that the process of membership forged by the group is actually quite rigorous—and highly personal.

There are two types of members: residents, and non-residents; all women must become members of OWCH before applying to live

there. The process for gaining membership is structured so that aspiring members are assigned a 'buddy' from the resident group, and are invited to attend group lunches, social outings, meetings, normally for a period lasting at least six months, before being invited to apply. After application, they are invited to interview—attended by two resident members minimum— after which they may or may not be accepted. All three emphasise that this is vital groundwork before joining the development. "It's lovely to have the flats," Charlotte explains, "but it's wanting to be part of a wider community... You get a lot from that, but you can also give a lot and there is great pleasure in the giving as well—not just the receiving bit."

Despite OWCH's equality and diversity policy welcoming any woman aged 50 or more able to live independently, regardless of their ethnicity, religion, disability or sexual orientation, and despite their partnership with Housing for Women to ensure women without savings or assets have been able to live there, the scheme has been criticised by some for being 'niche' (women-only) or exclusive (distinctly middle class).

While Charlotte jokes that they are all the type of women who would have been head girls at school, Hedi addresses the subject more soberly, highlighting that most OWCH residents have some sort of disability, are a wide range of ages, religions, ethnicity and financial means, and that eight of the flats are available for social rent. "It's very important to us to increase diversity of all kinds" she emphasises.

Demographics aside, they all concede that becoming an OWCH member does seem to require some shared qualities. Charlotte offers 'doggedness' and 'committed-ness' to which Hedi adds "...an ability to carry things through. We're all drivers, rather than passengers" she elaborates further, "though not everybody drives in the same way!" As an egalitarian structure, they are all expected to engage with the practicalities of the development, from managing finance, to communications, and membership.

Beyond solving practical challenges, being active, and being involved, seem to be psychologically important for this group of women. In Charlotte's experience, having retired only last year, "[The managing] keeps your brain and your body more active ...it's like having another job, there's always something going on, there's always something to do... You're contributing and bringing new ideas, planning and being proactive." Maintaining a voice, and a sense of empowerment seem to be fundamental angles of this driver to stay active and involved. "Older people are tired of being 'managed'" Hedi says, to which Charlotte adds her observation of the 'dehumanising effect' of living somewhere 'without a voice.' Unlike other schemes for older people, she continues, in OWCH "...you look forward and outwards rather than just inwards and

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"...you look forward and outwards rather than just inwards and being done to. There is consensus, and shared agreement and stuff like that, but it's us doing it. And you feel you have some control."

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These sensitivities are piqued when touching on the scheme's delivery. Having partnered with Hanover Housing, who forward funded the development, they felt distanced, at times, from influence of the designs and the timescales, and unable to address snagging issues that impacted their early lives here. Not being the clients meant, Charlotte explains, "...that we were the ones with the problems—but we weren't the 'client' with the voice—and that's what personally frustrated me and still frustrates me."

Thankfully, some of the 'get up and go' spirit has resolved some of those challenges. For example, as meters were wired to the wrong flats, Hedi was left paying for the Common Room gas, she reveals, chuckling good naturedly. As leader of the group addressing lingering snagging issues, she's managed to overcome the issue through interpersonal contacts with the builders, "rather than it having to go all the way up and all the way down again" through Hanover's "terribly bureaucratic processes."

Beyond the pragmatic, the women seem to generally enjoy the prospect of participating in this intentional community, while maintaining what they feel to be healthy levels of independence.

Discussing a trip they took before finalising the development, Tessa describes a Swedish scheme they visited where they do daily meals for 60 to 90 people. Tessa reflects that "We wouldn't like that. It's so 'co-housing,' so you never have your own meal or own friends. It's so strange. We've chosen what we've chosen and it seems to suit us."

Instead, there are occasional shared meals in the communal house, where four of the women sign up to cook, and four sign up to clear up afterwards. Charlotte doesn't like cooking, so she tries to compensate by offering extra help cleaning up afterwards; Hedi has a bad knee, so she can't stand for long periods of time to clean.

Charlotte, a game enthusiast with an addition to Scrabble, has set up a Wednesday board games group, which is complemented by other members having initiated film nights, or inviting practitioners in to give classes in Tai chi, yoga and sketching.

> **"When I first heard Barnet, I thought 'who wants to live here?' But in the end, how you live becomes more important than where you live...at least that's what did it for me: I cared more about how I lived."**

Yet transitioning into the day-to-day life hasn't been without its challenges.

These have been partly to do with the process of physical uprooting (most of the women come from further afield) and experiencing the loss of their existing communities. They have also been partly to with changes to routine and new forms of interaction. One of OWCH's residents found the move particularly difficult, despite having lived in Barnet her whole life. Hedi reflects on this a moment, before suggesting that perhaps for some, a bigger transition may ultimately be easier to adjust to than

one where your area remains the same but your life changes so much. "When I first heard Barnet," Hedi admits, "I thought 'who wants to live there?' But in the end how you live becomes more important than where you live... At least that's what did it for me: I cared more about how I lived."

Charlotte, perhaps the most introverted of the group, expresses that maintaining awareness of everyone and your surroundings can be quite tiring... and this extends to considering how 'out' and 'visible' she is to the rest of the community when she doesn't feel like it. "Quite a few people in the group say they feel tired and anxious," Tessa acknowledges, "... there is constant need to remember to do things...I mean we're on three cat rota at the moment!"

It was a common enough feeling at the outset, for members to set up a forum to discuss how they were feeling. For Charlotte, the forum helped. "I think once you start hearing other people's views and feelings it is quite comforting because you know you're not the only one," she says. "For a little while I thought it was just me...you sort of bottle it up a little bit and then you realise it's normal.

This is what happens, and the last couple of months I've started relaxing into it quite contentedly." The forum will continue, Tessa adds, though they haven't decided how often.

Ultimately, the group seems to recognise that all women have different needs, and articulate that the most important thing is to retain awareness of and sensitivity to those. "There are some people who's flats I would knock at if I wanted something, and others who I wouldn't," suggests Hedi, illustrating the point, "and not because I don't like them or something—I just know that their communication is different."

Despite their policies and their principles, the primary characteristics of its three representatives seems to be an attitude of 'live and let live.'

On the whole, it seems, the shared elements of their lives are working well, vis a vis negotiating responsibilities, individual contributions, patterns of socialising and maintaining respectful distance. More than anything else, they lend the impression of a group of women who have committed to figuring out what works for them—as individuals and as a group.

"In the end how you live becomes more important than where you live... At least that's what did it for me: I cared more about how I lived."

SUMMARY

The interviews surfaced a variety of understandings and interpretations of what co-housing is.

While co-housing is generally perceived as 'more sociable' than traditional forms of housing, the degree of social interaction or involvement in each other's daily lives was not a given. For some, co-housing was simply the means by which to secure an affordable or secure home for themselves. For others, it was clearly linked to expectations of more intimate or meaningful relationships. Others felt one of the core 'drivers' of co-housing is a commitment to wider principles around social justice, and improvement of the communities they are aligned with. On the whole, however, interviewees seemed to agree that residents are free to be as integrated or as isolated as they wish: that 'being part of each other's lives' was in no way a requirement.

Another notable point was that questions were raised as to whether co-housing can be considered a distinct 'model' of housing delivery or development, and a lack of clarity around which of its elements set it apart from other forms of collective living or community-led housing. One interviewee (representing a Community Land Trust) emphasized a point of differentiation between co-housing and Community Land Trusts (CLTs) being, for instance, that CLTs prioritize the achievement of an end result (permanently affordable homes) rather than how those homes are eventually lived in—the relationships between residents. Another perceived co-housing as having the 'same sort of principles' that govern his housing co-operative, only "looser." For others still, co-housing, Community Land Trusts, co-operatives, and other models of housing all loosely fall under the shared umbrella of community-led housing, sharing comparable principles around shared living space, reduced cost, mutual ownership and increased community cohesion, only implemented slightly differently in each case.

In addition to seeking out interviewee's understandings of co-housing, we asked each to respond to the following words, in order to gauge their understanding of the phrases 'private,' 'shared,' 'supported' and 'independent.'

Private (spaces and physical objects)

Private was considered as a spatial as well as a social consideration.

All interviewees shared the perception that some parts of life will want to be lived with others, but that everyone generally also requires privacy of spaces, to varying degrees, in their daily lives. For those for whom everyday sharing and interaction was higher, privacy primarily meant a space to retreat, when you don't want to share or interact; space(s) for private thought or to 'make noise.'

It was interesting to observe an instance of concern (and qualitative judgement) arise from one interviewee, noting that private developments risk being 'separate' and 'isolated' from neighbouring or adjacent community-led schemes, without "access to the community."

Shared (spaces, objects)

Apart from a nominal mention of day-to-day spaces such as kitchens and other communal spaces, all interviewees primarily associated 'shared' with interpersonal relationships rather than spaces and objects. Reciprocity was a key aspect of this, expressed as 'bringing energy' or 'giving something back' to interactions or shared challenges. It was also associated with behaviour and codes of conduct, with examples ranging from 'showing respect for each other's spaces' and 'relying on one another' to taking part in activities with others.

Supported (social, psychological)

Associations with the word 'supported' generally reflected three types of understanding amongst interviewees: support as a service, support as a form of capacity building, and support as primarily emotional, captured in interpersonal relationships.

An understanding of support as a service positioned support as a (pastoral, on-site 'friend with an element of distance') primarily offered by a paid external party. Others understood support from the perspective of capacity building, as reflected growing individual agency, campaigning power and wider networks to realise change, as well as enabling this by open, transparent and inclusive processes.

A third type of association reflected an understanding of support as emotional and practical, but fundamentally offered freely and informally through personal relationships, with examples being knowing your neighbours, looking out for each other, leading to greater feelings of trust and security.

Independent (Social, Psychological)

Autonomy. Control. Dignity. Power. Choice. Dignity.

These were some of the rich variety of associations that surfaced in response to this word, which all loosely spoke to power dynamics, particularly salient for older demographics.

Responses highlighted an understanding of 'independent' as intrinsically linked with structural power relationships: ranging from the fundamental ability to choose what situation what kind of living situation you want to be in, to not being 'at the mercy of others' regarding control over design, quality, and security (duration, affordability) of housing.

One group of interviewees suggested a link between 'independent' and disability or vulnerability—used in contexts where people might not be able to cater for themselves any longer. For individuals involved directly with housing for older people, the word triggered an underscoring of the need to retain autonomy—the ability to make one's own choices (even if physically dependent on others). This seemed to be intrinsically linked for several interviewees to feelings of dignity.

The following spread visually plots some of these understandings and associations.

CLT / COOPERATIVE

1. GRAND UNION CO-OP
Support is sharing resources: spaces and "what's going on in your life." 'Most people in London don't know their neighbours'
– Jamie Perera

2. GRAND UNION CO-OP
Support is pragmatic: A network of babysitters at the co-op, growing that type of support network
– Jamie Perera

3. RUSS
Support is relationships: Knowing your neighbours, feeling secure
– Kareem Dayes

4. GRAND UNION CO-OP
Support is physical modifications: Grand Union supported resident cancer patient by constructing wheelchair entrance to garden
– Jamie Perera

5. GRAND UNION CO-OP
Shared is pragmatic: Borrowing one drill as opposed to owning four
– Jamie Perera

6. ST CLEMENTS CLT
Capacity-building: asking members to 'give testimony' at meetings to build up their skills
– Hannah Emery-Wright

7. GRAND UNION CO-OP
Preconditions for support: security enables generous behaviour and ability to support to others
– Jamie Perera

8. ST CLEMENTS CLT
Typology enables support: Terraced houses unable to provide the same level of supportive network as CLT
– Calum Green

9. RUSS
Sharing is innate to urban living: schools, utilities, transport, sewage systems are collective infrastructure already in place
– Kareem Dayes

10. RUSS
Privacy is space for private thoughts, space to 'make noise in'
– Kareem Dayes

11. GRAND UNION
Privacy is necessary retreat from interaction
– Jamie Perera

12. ST CLEMENTS CLT
Shared spaces are shared responsibility: Resident-led management, with representation of all tenures
– Calum Green

13. ST CLEMENTS CLT
Independence is: breaking 'service delivery' mindsets of local residents
– Calum Green

14. ST CLEMENTS CLT
Independence is need-based: Related to disability and vulnerability, or 'loss of independence'
- Calum Green

15. RUSS
Independence is autonomy: control of design, tenure, 'being your own landlord'
– Kareem Dayes

16. ST CLEMENTS CLT
Independence is potentially isolated: non-CLT members risk being 'separate and isolated' from 'the community'
– Hannah Emery-Wright

LIVE / WORK

17. MANOR HOUSE WAREHOUSE
Support is everyday sociability: 'Drop-in factor' always having friends nearby, participating in each other's projects
– Candy Wall

18. MANOR HOUSE WAREHOUSE
Support is shared rituals: fancy dress induction dinners, supporting house-mate endeavours and time together at holidays
– Candy Wall

19. THE COLLECTIVE
Support is shared rituals: Newcomer induction, monthly brunches, drinks
– Ed Thomas

20. THE COLLECTIVE
Technology enables social and pragmatic support: using Apps, Facebook, and events to build connections and uncover shared interests between residents
– Ed Thomas

21. THE COLLECTIVE
Shared is convenience: A larger community of residents means more people to borrow from -e.g. Zipcar
– Ed Thomas

22. MANOR HOUSE WAREHOUSE
Shared can mean tension: pressure to not complain; risk of being poorly perceived if 'not sharing everything'
– Candy Wall

23. MANOR HOUSE WAREHOUSE
Independence means 'growing up': getting a 'grown up job,' moving to your own flat, having 'nice things'
– Candy Wall

SUPPORTED LIVING / EXTRA CARE

24. OWCH
Support is shared rituals:
Communal meals, board games,
classes and film nights
– OWCH Interviewees

25. OWCH
Support is primarily emotional,
but also can be practical
– Maria Brenton

26. OWCH
Support is sharing feelings:
Resident 'transition' forum for
sharing feelings after uprooting
and loss of lifelong communities,
co-designed resident policies
– OWCH interviewees

27. UNITED ST SAVIOURS
Support is pastoral: house visits,
offered by an external party.
'A friend with an element of distance'
– Martyn Craddock

28. UNITED ST SAVIOURS
Shared applies to behaviour: mutual
respect for each other's spaces;
'Giving something back'
– Martyn Craddock

29. OWCH
Shared objects does not
equal community: Not a 'real'
community if residents are just
sharing things for expediency
– Maria Brenton

30. UNITED ST SAVIOURS
Independence is choice: freedom
to 'come and go' which reinforces
sense of dignity, autonomy
– Martyn Craddock

31. OWCH
Support is feeling liberated:
keeping your blinds open or
closed, as you choose, without
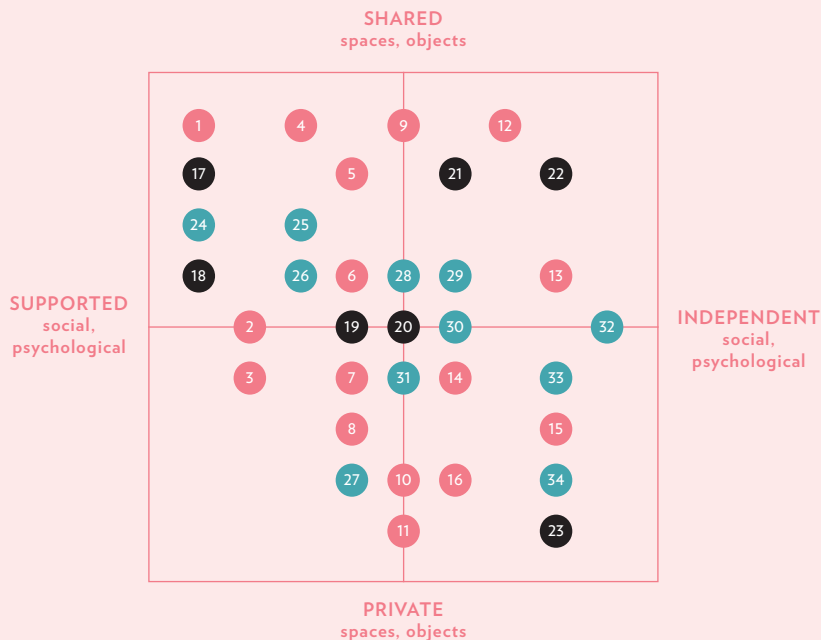feeling pressured or judged.
– OWCH interviewees

32. OWCH
Community: Need-based groups risk
lacking shared interests and bonds
– Maria Brenton

33. OWCH
Independence is autonomy:
Retaining decision-making ability,
even if physically vulnerable
– Maria Brenton

34. OWCH
Independence is innate to
British culture: individualistic
isolationism is the norm
– Maria Brenton

SHARED
spaces, objects

SUPPORTED
social,
psychological

INDEPENDENT
social,
psychological

PRIVATE
spaces, objects

The interviewees represented a small but deliberately diverse range of ages, roles, and organisational perspectives: from those with roots in direct action to those with charitable and commercial drivers. Conversations invariably spanned a range of topics, from personal histories and technical aspects of their scheme's delivery, through to their experiences of the everyday dynamics of living and working in unique housing schemes. The following pages offer points of comparison and contrast between the schemes, sifted into several digestible categories:

- **Forming** – initial drivers of group formation
- **Joining** – how groups formalise, build momentum, and design 'gateways' into a scheme
- **Living** – life inside the scheme after completion, from expectations of behaviour and involvement, to development of protocols and dedicated roles

Forming

Group origins seemed to fall into two basic types. These included 'grassroots' groups of self-selecting individuals responding to their own housing needs, and organisations formalised to campaign or provide a service to others facing unmet housing needs. The two were not necessarily always mutually exclusive. For example, Grand Union Housing Co-op was initially founded by activists squatting in homes slated for redevelopment, though they later formalised, adopting a commitment to help expand the number of housing co-ops across London.

For groups with roots in self-organisation, affordability, autonomy and social justice were articulated as key drivers. The issues they responded to ranged from 'the survival of the community' in the face of housing shortages and urban blight (Grand Union Coop), securing affordable live-work space among like-minded people (Manor House), and remaining visible, valued and independent (OWCH) to reacting against limited choice (and poor quality) of existing housing offers (RUSS). According to its co-founder, the driver for many members to RUSS's self-build scheme was a feeling of 'being stuck' in London—not necessarily in terms of affordability, but about their inability to 'make' or use their hands.

As an organisation with activist roots, but set up to deliver CLT homes, St Clements interestingly spans these two types. Their interview highlighted that they see themselves primarily as a capacity-building body with a core mission of up-skilling others to effectively campaign (and deliver) permanently affordable local housing. United Saint Saviours and The Collective, on the other hand, seemed to understand themselves as providing a service—albeit to very different demographics. They each deliver on a type of social mission, with United Saint Saviours continuing a historic charitable legacy, and The Collective providing a high quality lifestyle claiming to build social capital and reduce loneliness.

With the exception of the Manor House complex, all interviewees referenced having shared principles forged through group formation. These encapsulate their ethos, and act as 'anchor points' for the group's priorities. Later, they determine whether a person will 'fit in' with the scheme or

living situation, and are used for illustrating transparency and fairness of process.

Joining

Unsurprisingly, people join co-housing schemes for many reasons, but how they join is actually quite diverse. 'Gateways' into co-housing groups and schemes generally fell on a spectrum, from informal (interpersonal) to formal (rule-based).

On the informal end of the spectrum, people found their way to schemes through word of mouth, social media, workshops and by attending face to face interviews. This seemed most common where a degree of transience is the norm, such as in the Manor House warehouses and the Collective, which both largely cater to younger, single demographics, often in times of transition in their lives (moving to London, getting started in their career, ending a relationship). In terms of the actual 'joining' process, in the warehouses, candidates who care enough to be present interview candidates; their success depends largely on personality fit (as well as considerations around their careers and how they might fare in a noisy household). Joining the Collective is more indirectly brokered. A Community Team, rather than other residents, hosts tours and interviews; this team makes final decisions as to who gets in, based on how well they feel the candidate fits with the culture they are actively curating.

The emphasis in personality makes sense in these scenarios, given the higher degree of shared spaces hosting intimate everyday interactions (living rooms, kitchens). While these personality-based protocols for joining can be seen as exclusive or unfair, they are arguably as fair as criteria-based entry: candidates are not necessarily required to subscribe to a predetermined set of values, formal eligibility criteria, to demonstrate their links with the local area, or commit to active participation in governance, for instance.

The more formal joining processes involved registering as a member, paying a nominal fee, being assessed for eligibility (criteria ranging from income levels or relation to the local area, for instance), adopting a set of established principles or committing to participate in organisational governance. These processes tended to be linked with schemes intended for permanent settlement: a 'home for life.' The entry process for OWCH was an interesting hybrid of formal procedures alongside intensely personal interactions over a prolonged period. Applying for membership takes 'at least six months' and involves applicants attending shared lunches, group meetings, social outings, and getting to know all current members before formally applying—after which they may or may not be invited to join. This somewhat cautious approach can be explained by the fact that OWCH represents a final home for the women who live there; equally, its operation requires higher levels of participation, as well as interpersonal collaboration to solve problems.

Of all interviewees, St Clements seemed the most concerned with having a transparent process for allocating homes: a process they could "stand by" and "defend," most likely due to their origins. Their eligibility criteria touched on a range of elements, from housing need and income and saving levels, through to evidence of connections to the local area.

Geographical Rootedness

Geographical 'rootedness' was a criterion for eligibility for several schemes interviewed, and raised some interesting questions. At United Saint Saviours, applicants must prove they've been a Southwark resident for 5 years, whereas applicants to St Clements are asked to demonstrate their relationship with the local community. For these examples, involvement with (and dependency on) the social and economic networks of a place were deemed to be crucial aspects of legitimacy in the selection process. In contrast, the women of OWCH discussed that how they chose to live was ultimately a far more important a consideration than where they chose to live—a location that most had no previous ties to. As such, place was secondary to the community being formed.

Diversity

Another interesting point that arose in interviews was the issue of diversity in co-housing. Two of the interviewees most vocal in this regard were United Saint Saviours and RUSS. The Chief Executive of United Saint Saviours recognised that the almshouses tend to attract 'the same characters'—older white demographics—and acknowledged the challenge of encouraging [minorities] to apply to live in a place "where most people don't look like you." Our RUSS interviewee identified what he felt to be quite profound 'middle class biases' in community-led housing processes, such as 'putting your name in a hat' to be selected for a home, assuming spare time to volunteer, and other cultural thresholds that are just too unfamiliar, or too high. He even suggested that, if given the chance to start again, RUSS would implement a quota in its allocations policy, in order to overcome existing barriers to entry for more ethnically diverse and lower income groups.

Point of entry and empowerment

Perhaps one of the most salient topics to emerge, related to joining a scheme, was not how one enters but at what point. More specifically, interviewees questioned whether point of entry into a scheme impacts people's feelings of agency or empowerment: from the mundane (initiating gardening, or making minor adjustments to internal spaces) to the more profound (procurement and management of common spaces, ownership structures).

United Saint Saviours expressed concern with a distinct lack of agency and empowerment among their 'beneficiaries,' who come to them in later life, often from lower income backgrounds, and having lived in social housing. For our interviewee, this lack of agency manifested in 'passive' behaviour; an inability to propose new ideas for shared spaces or activities. It is an aspect of their dynamic with residents that the charity would like to change, while recognising that changing the behaviour of older individuals substantial cultural shift they aren't yet equipped to bring about.

For others, the point at which individuals engaged with the project affected their assumptions and feelings of entitlement. St. Clements, for instance, observed that individuals who had been most heavily involved with the project from the outset were also the most understanding if unsuccessful in securing one of the CLT homes, whereas individuals distant from the process tended to become most

frustrated and oppositional. According to St Clements, these same individuals were more likely to understand the CLT as being interchangeable with the Council, rather than as a community-led project. This was part of a wider struggle they defined as battling a 'service user to service provider' mentality with local residents.

Even for groups with activist roots, a common reflection seems to be the possibility that joining later makes it difficult for newer members to feel equally empowered (or conversely, equally responsible) in comparison to original founders or members. One interviewee, resident of an East London housing co-op admitted that there was a drop off in his participation straight after he joined, as there was 'nothing asked of him,' in terms of becoming more involved in the organisation.

Living

For several interviewees, life inside the development after its completion was simply not a focus. At RUSS for example, the shared community space in the scheme will likely be for hosting external visitors interested in learning about the scheme, rather than a shared space for resident's daily activities. Similarly, St Clement's interview emphasised an interest in outcome—affordable local homes in perpetuity- rather than how residents eventually live once they're in. Despite hosting meals with members to explore future amenities in the scheme, it was clear their lens on resident life was largely understood through participation in governance—setting structural relationships in place for the long-term—such as a resident management company, and transferring

the freehold of the site to a Community Foundation representing all the different tenures. Similarly, our interview with a member of the Grand Union Co-op suggested that while members are welcome to attend AGM and sub-committee meetings, this is not technically required; instead, how residents live, including how involved they become with the co-op itself, seemed up to the individual.

For those with a greater interest in behaviour inside the development post-completion, one aspect included how involved residents were expected to be in day-to-day management issues. These varied greatly.

As a model based on convenience, the Collective was unsurprisingly the scheme which required the lowest level of resident involvement (none). Yet interestingly, they recognised that helping residents feel more involved is 'good for business,' and have consequently developed a number of mechanisms for doing this, from co-designing a Collective 'Manifesto,' to providing a Community Fund that residents decide how to spend. Yet there is no formal obligation to participate, and no structural power or leverage held by residents. United Saint Saviours also required very little participation from beneficiaries in solving or addressing day-to-day matters relating to where they live. Despite perceiving the dis-empowerment of residents to be problematic, they had not yet developed systems to redress this; resident involvement with the charity's functions were limited to two representatives on the Housing sub-committee, which reports on issues to their Board.

Others, notably St Clements and OWCH,

demanded intensive levels of involvement from residents and members related to shaping policies and practical decisions.

Owch members are expected to sit on sub-committees or working groups of their choosing, responsible for 'snagging' to decorating the common house. Many also participated in the development of owch's shared principles that are now in place.[1] They've also developed a two page conflict-resolution policy which includes techniques such as reverse role-play, and states that individuals may request support from the wider group in facilitating this. St Clements seeks consensus from members in how decisions are made, asks for attendance at AGM and for members to pro-actively contribute ideas or 'testimonials' at social meals and meetings set up to address snags, strategize, or discuss future aspects of the development.

The schemes also represented different levels of investment being made into dedicated (paid) roles, ranging from practical care-taking and governance to 'member experience.' St Clements, for instance, has invested in a dedicated Membership and Stewardship Manager responsible for allocating the portion of CLT homes on-site, as well as building relationships between CLT residents and the wider membership. United Saint Saviours provides two paid members of staff per site who look after the fabric of the buildings and communal spaces, manage contractors, and carry out general upkeep as well as provide 'pastoral care.' The Grand Union Co-op has also invested in paid posts (residents and external

people) to manage administration of the co-op, thereby ensuring, according to our interviewee, that a level of 'professional distance' or neutrality is maintained. The Collective, meanwhile, has invested in a whole team dedicated to managing 'member experience' which includes curating activities and events, developing the member charter, and even commissioning an in-house App that will make it easier for residents to connect with others over shared interests.

The Manor House warehouse complex was the only scheme with an absence of formal policies and governance, and no funding from landlords towards management, programming or improvement of the space. In cases such as Candy's, a single resident would take on 'management' of the household, which covered collecting money for rent and bills, arranging cleaning, recruiting new tenants and dealing with ad-hoc issues such as fire safety and pests.

Perhaps some of the most interesting observations around 'living' in co-living schemes relates to the relationships formed, sources of tension, and forms of de facto support they enjoyed.

Like all living scenarios, the schemes highlighted tensions. The majority of those mentioned were emotional—such as feeling worried about being 'too private' or being poorly perceived due to 'not wanting to share everything,' not feeling able to complain, territoriality, or hostility to change.

Owch and the Manor House warehouse were the schemes that seemed the most 'social' of all, in terms of how the interviewees spoke about their relationships

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1 Sample principles include 'shared responsibility,' 'non-hierarchical structure,' 'mutual care,' and 'balancing privacy with community.'

to the scheme and the others in it—beyond information sharing and decision-making.

At OWCH, in addition to the weekly film nights, game clubs, yoga or drawing classes the women organise for themselves, they also seem to offer each other substantial support of both a practical and emotional nature. For example, when the scheme was completed and residents had moved in, several felt uneasy with the transition. In response, a forum was held to help members express their fears or frustrations in a supportive environment—to lighten the load. Members have also arranged to have meals delivered to neighbours in times of illness, and their policy with regards to use of the Common House means that all residents are de facto invited to any meals or events hosted there—a small but meaningful form of generosity.

Candy's interview around life in the warehouse illustrated a similar level of care between house mates, particularly around ensuring new members felt comfortable

and involved. She discussed at length small rituals she and others would devise to bring the household together, from fancy dress induction dinners, or hosting cooking lessons for those less culinarily confident, to a house 'shrine' that everyone would contribute to. Respect and support for one another extended outside the house too—by attending each other's events or performances, for instance, highlighting the unanticipated benefit of 'everyday sociability' innate to life there.

Living together in 'co-housing' also clearly surfaced several key challenges, worth further consideration. These include questions around how to balance 'agency' between older and newer members (or simply those 'stuck in their ways'); how people can be supported to express their needs, without fear of social stigma; how the benefits of 'everyday sociability' can be encouraged elsewhere, without feeling artificially manufactured; and how co-housing can support people to 'grow up' in-situ, rather than feel they need to leave.

TOWARDS THE NEW NORMAL

Our primary interest with this work was to explore how people live in co-housing, and why it matters. We were curious to uncover the individual stories of those involved in schemes—residents as well as professionals—to better understand what motivates them, and to learn about some of their social and psychological needs for community and belonging, autonomy and privacy. In so doing, we hoped to take a first step towards plugging the research gap recognised by Helen Jarvis in "understanding the social phenomena of mutuality and collaboration in practice." Below, we outline some of the initial findings of our research, and what they could mean for the growing debate around housing diversity in London and beyond.

Co-housing is not as niche as its reputation suggests.

At the outset, we recognised a common perception of co-housing as a niche form of housing, both socially, and from a design perspective. Socially, co-housing seemed to be associated with 'unusual' or 'exceptional' individuals and their families—the 'wooly,' the 'liberal,' or even 'outcasts.' It also seems to be perceived as a unique design challenge, requiring custom or specialist architectural solutions. Instead, what we found was a rich diversity of individual circumstances, personalities, motivations and spatial forms. Co-housing was, in fact, comprised of a highly varied constellation of typologies, both physical and organisational, each with different starting points, guiding principles, expectations of behaviour, as well as points of commonality.

We spoke to individuals from their twenties through their eighties, spanning a musician, graphic designer, social researcher, a retired GP asnd University Administrator, social worker, housing activists, CEO of a housing charity, and housing entrepreneur. They represented a range of living situations, from warehouse and terraced house shares, to individual flats and university-style living. With the exception of The Collective, many were, from a design perspective, indistinct: you could pass by them on the street without noticing them at all. This is significant in that the prevailing discourse around the 'exceptionalism' of co-housing in many ways rings untrue. It may even be harmful, in that it reinforces perceptions of co-housing as uniquely challenging, calling for specialised skills distinct from those required to deliver 'standard' housing, and could even be contributing, in some small part, to its marginalisation.

Much of co-housing is simply about living with 'more.'

Our interviews suggested a common desire to have 'more' than the market currently provides. So what is it that people are trying to achieve through co-housing, that can't be achieved through 'nuclear' housing units alone?

For some, co-housing was pragmatic—a means of securing either more affordable individual homes, or more generous overall spaces or facilities, such as guest houses, or large gardens, in comparison to what is normally on offer. For musician Jamie Perera, co-housing offered the stability and 'breathing space' to establish his artistic practice in an otherwise unaffordable city. For Candy Wall, a graphic designer, it provided affordable living and studio space at a point her life when she was professionally 'finding her feet.' St Clements and United Saint Saviours look to preserve local networks and social fabric by providing affordable homes in a context of rising costs.

For others, it represented the possibility of living with more meaningful connection to others, or having greater control over living the way they wanted. For Tessa, Hedi and Charlotte, OWCH offered the possibility of ageing independently and with dignity, surrounded by a community of proactive, engaged peers—even if more physically dependent on others. Kareem Dayes was inspired to form RUSS partly in reaction to the feeling of being 'at the mercy of others' regarding poor quality and unaffordable housing. Indeed the 'social accelerator' offer of The Collective, targeting those in transient periods of their lives, also claims to address

London's underlying epidemic of loneliness.

The diversity of these motivations and forms of 'living with more' are interesting in that they illustrate that while some forms of living closer together have arisen from economic necessity, others have clearly emerged from shifting norms—and sheer determination—to forge alternative and more desirable ways to live.

It's about having greater choice.

Over last several years, conversations have arisen around the need for increased diversity in housing delivery. These have highlighted the need to address issues around the limited range of providers, methods of construction and modes of investment—views captured in the recent report 'Fixing our Broken Housing Market,' presented by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government to Parliament this year. In London, the first of Mayor Sadiq Khan's top ten Manifesto commitments was the promise to build thousands more homes for Londoners each year, set more ambitious affordability targets and to protect renters. The Mayor's Innovation Fund provides funding for innovative housing schemes, including community-led housing, and the recent launch of the London Small Sites programme aims to help all public sector landowners unlock new models of housing delivery on their land. All of these are positive steps towards easing housing supply. Yet, together with useful tools such as the Housing Design Guide, or funding conditions, they will unlock greater numbers of the same—singular, individual housing units—rather than enabling more fundamental approaches to diversification.

Whether spearheading a new group or development, managing a house share, or working out how they can comfortably settle in life, all of our interviewees can be seen as 'Pioneers' in their own right, seeking out and actively creating alternative living arrangements to the standard offer.

Yet they all experienced substantial obstacles to achieving lifestyles more fully aligned with their principles or desires: from finding a site, or fellow residents able to weather equal levels of risk, to raising finance, addressing power imbalances between developers and themselves as 'non-clients' and facing forms of 'NIMBYism' from Boroughs. This level of struggle, together with overall lack of diverse housing choices, is curious. At a time when 'the market' provides an ever wider selection—and price points—for most goods and services, it feels odd that options for where and how we live remain so limited.

Why this matters

Like any form of lease, tenancy or domestic arrangements, co-housing throws up its own social challenges, and these were highlighted in the interviews—such as what a 'fair' selection process looks like, how to avoid 'middle class bias' and how to balance duty of care with respectful, independent living conditions for people with diverse needs.

Nonetheless, the reflections above do begin to hint that more sociable forms of housing— and a greater range of housing options—may go some way towards addressing some of the key

social challenges of our time: from boosting wellbeing and combating loneliness, to identifying how we can realise more sensitive or nuanced housing options in an increasingly elderly society.

One of the unanticipated benefits of co-housing could stem from the fact that it generally demands greater involvement and participation in developing practical systems and skills. Kareem's interview hinted at many Londoners generally feeling 'stuck' in the city—not only in relation to overall levels of affordability, but in terms of feeling genuine agency—the practical ability to 'make'—a factor he attributed with the growing interest in RUSS's self-build offer. As the New Economics Foundation suggests in multiple reports such as 2014's 'Hands on Communities,' learning and sharing practical skills can actually boost wellbeing by making people feel more connected with others, as well as contributing to wider community resilience.

Whether demonstrating support for each other by attending gigs or events in solidarity, communally deciding on what the next group investment should be, or setting up an informal network to deliver meals or cat sit during times of sickness or absence, the interviews highlighted that multiple forms of subtle social support are already embedded in many co-housing schemes. The protocol for using the common house at OWCH, for example, where residents understand they are always welcome at meals and events without having to be explicitly 'invited,' illustrates a touching form of subtle generosity and sociability. And while Candy wasn't initially attracted to warehouse living by a desire to be part of a community, her interview clearly illustrates how the informal everyday sociability of that lifestyle became a huge asset, to the degree that she felt reluctant to leave when she felt she eventually had to 'grow up' and move on.

Reviewing these types of benefits and relationships, it's hard not to feel that co-housing has the potential to positively impact current levels of loneliness and social isolation by fostering subtle, everyday interactions and relationships. However modest, these differences can be substantial over time.

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LIVING CLOSER
The many faces of co-housing

Shared living, whether through public realm, workspace or housing, has long been of interest to our practice.

The original impetus for this work was a concern with why, as a society, we have generally moved away from shared living and towards individual homes—especially in cities such as London, where housing shortages, inflated prices, and increasing levels of loneliness, mean that shared living models are becoming increasingly relevant, and where alternative ideas for living more densely and sustainably are desperately needed. It was also borne of a curiosity to 'get under the skin' of a form of housing from the perspective of those who live there.

This ongoing research explores how people live in co-housing, and why it matters. We were curious to uncover the individual stories of those involved in schemes—residents as well as professionals—to better understand what motivates them, and to learn about some of their social and psychological needs for community and belonging, autonomy and privacy. In so doing, we hoped to take a first step towards filling a gap recognised by researchers in "understanding the social phenomena of mutuality and collaboration in practice." This publication outlines some of the initial findings of our research, and what they could mean for the growing debate around housing diversity in London and beyond.

Studio Weave is an award-winning RIBA Chartered Architecture Practice based in London. We balance a joyful, open-minded approach with technical precision to create a diverse body of work in the UK and abroad for public, private and commercial clients. We are part of 00, a collaborative design studio of architects, technologists, social scientists and urban designers practicing design beyond its traditional borders. We work with individuals, governments, corporations and communities to solve problems, anticipate change and design deeply successful products, processes, platforms and places.