SELF-RENOVATING NEIGHBOURHOODS AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO THE FALSE CHOICE OF GENTRIFICATION OR DECLINE

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by

Jess Steele OBE

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School of Geography, Geology and the Environment

ABSTRACT

Can groups of local people in poor neighbourhoods take autonomous action that improves their neighbourhood without the displacement of gentrification, the disappointments of traditional regeneration, or the disempowerment of ongoing decline?

Rooted in 'worlds of possibility' literatures that insist on the relational nature of space and time and the openness of the future, the thesis moves iteratively between practice and theory. It considers the extent to which such action in two case study neighbourhoods fulfils or amends the hypothesised characteristics of self-renovating neighbourhoods outlined by Steele (2012).

Self-renovating neighbourhoods (SRN) is a term for DIY collective efficacy and an asset-based approach applied to long-standing neighbourhood problems arising from state and/or market 'failure', blindness or wilful exploitation.

Using existing and new research material, the thesis constructs Granby in Liverpool as a 'classic' case, a 'jumping off point' for a deeper dive into the 'autoactionography' of SRN in White Rock, Hastings. This seeks to refine understanding of the SRN characteristics and develop a conceptual framework to understand who is doing it (SELF), what they are doing (RENOVATING) and the object of their ambition (NEIGHBOURHOOD). Building on the urban commons literature, SRN takes commoning into a new field – the holistic regeneration of poor neighbourhoods – where it disrupts dominant models of property ownership and development, regen decision-making and everyday place-keeping.

The thesis reflects my own deep engagement in the active struggle to nurture self-renovating neighbourhoods as an alternative to the false choice of gentrification or ongoing disinvestment and decline. I have been directly and multiply involved in practice on the ground while simultaneously thinking through whether and how the existing human, social, cultural and built assets of neighbourhoods can be harnessed to resist and even subvert gentrification, stagnation or decline in new and more effective ways.

I like to picture the country as a huge piece of fabric, fantastically varied, sparkly in places, folded and torn in others, some bright colours, some distinctive patterns, some threadbare patches. This fabric is both physical and social – the world around us is not one or the other but both… and we don't have the option of going to the shop for a new one. Instead it must constantly be darned, stitched, carefully patched up.
So who is the Great Seamstress? No-one! No-one else can make this happen. As citizens and communities, we have to do it for ourselves, right down there in among the stitches and the holes. And once you look closely enough, you realise that there is an enormous wealth of resource at that fine-grain level.
(Steele 2012, from 'Connected Society' talk to Labour Party Policy Review*)*

"We couldn't stay in the area the way it was but we couldn't leave it either. And if you can't leave it then you have to change what you're living in. And that's what we did. And that was very local, very sociable and very self-interested" – Hazel Tilley, Granby 4 Streets CLT, October 2015

"In the heart of a dense, mixed neighbourhood are two massive empty (or almost empty) buildings on a site which currently drags the area down but could be the key catalyst for economic growth and physical regeneration…. Our plans for the rescue and redevelopment of the site are ambitious but rooted in local community needs and aspirations" – Jess Steele, White Rock funding application, October 2014

in memory of:

Jim Radford (1928-2020)

Jani Llewellyn (1955-2001)

Jon Cole (1962-2007)

Grace Lee Boggs (1915-2015)

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The faults and idiosyncrasies remain my own. This thesis is, as Geertz put it in 1973 "an attempt, in fine, to say what I have been saying" (2000: ix). And all those people to and with whom I have been saying it – insistently, inconsistently, both emergent and emergency, for several decades or more recently – deserve a great deal of thanks.

For their ever-willing and very effective support to me and my endeavours, I would like to thank Ronan Larvor, Chris Brown, Liz Richardson, Bob Thust, John Brunton, Eddie Bridgeman and Emily Berwyn. For inspiration over the years, special thanks go to my parents, Mike Steele and Emily Steele, and to Iain Tuckett, Hugh Rolo, Lorraine Hart, Vidhya Alakeson, Geraldine Blake, Naomi Diamond, Angela Fell, Alfred Gell, Anne Haxell, Julia Hilton, Glenn Jenkins and Marsh Farm Outreach, Immy Kaur, Ivan Labra, Sona Mahtani, Melissa Mean, Jess Prendergast and the Onion Collective, Annemarie Naylor, Sybil Phoenix, Maff Potts, Jim Sharpe, Hannah Sloggett & Wendy Hart of Nudge Community Builders, Becky Vipond, Ruth Townsley, Richard Walker, and Steve Wyler. I have been privileged to work in a series of great membership-based organisations (Magpie, BURA, DTA/Locality, Power to Change Community Business Panel). This thesis has been shaped by thousands of encounters with their staff and members. I am grateful to colleagues and peers across the independent community sector for endlessly demonstrating that we can look out for each other and we are stronger together.

Part of what appeals about SRN is its "2-fingered DIY" nature.[1] For me the roots of this attitude lie with South East London squatters in the early 1990s, boaters on the River Lee as the Olympics loomed, pirates and fishwives here in Hastings. It is what drew me to Granby – my alter-neighbourhood. I could not do you justice here but I will always be a fan. The support for this research provided in their different ways by Hazel Tilley, Eleanor Lee, Ronnie Hughes and Erika Rushton was extraordinary. Huge respect to everyone else involved in the neighbourhood now and over the decades.

The astonishing work to date and underway in White Rock is thanks to the ecosystem staff team, trustees, directors, investors, tenants and other participants in the Hastings Commons, past, present and future.

The ecosystem team right now - John Brunton, Kieron Copeland, Simon Crab, Amanda Davies, Shelley Feldman, Kit Godfrey, Donna Hayter, Billy Kent, Sean Lavers, Rosie Mockett, Andrew Myers, Sullivan Palmer, Charlotte Penlington, Pippa Le Bas, Jay Simpson.

Former staff, especially Tina Chang, Susanne Currid, Sam Kinch, James Leathers, Dan O'Connor, Caoimhe O'Gorman, Karen Simnett, Bradley Vandepeer, Beth Woolf.

Current trustees - Tor Evans, Darren French, Sarah Macbeth, Fliss Scott, Adam Wide, Richard Wistreich.

Trustees over the years - Rodney Buse, David Bysh, Ray Chapman, Tania Charman, David Chater (for Power to Change), Graham Collins, Jay Kramer, Suzy Tinker.

Tenants of Rock House, Rose Cottage, 39 Cambridge, 10 Claremont, Eagle House, and the Observer Building. Especially those who have been with us all the way - TechBox, Wave, the Old Bakers.

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Renovation specialists/teams: Cliff Broomfield and 8Build, Sarah Castle and IF_DO, Fred Courtney Bennett, Charles Couzens, Casper Cummins, Chris Dodwell and Hastings Buildings Services, Andy Morris, John Page, David Spooner, Jess Tsang.

[1] A phrase invented at the Ecosystem Awayday 10 February 2022

The people who try to make the generally dysfunctional money work - Glenn Arradon (Big Issue Invest), Jon Lee (Ecology Building Society), Sean Lask (Castlestone), David Chater (Power to Change), Marwa al-Qadi and Alex Colbran (East Sussex County Council), Asha Karbhuri and Tessa Hilton (Architectural Heritage Fund), Alma Howell, Marion Brinton and Jane Cook (Historic England), Kim Richards (National Lottery Community Fund), Victoria Conheady (Hastings Borough Council).

I also pay tribute to all the people who built and kept these old buildings over the years – the builders, the caretakers, those who protested against demolition – and acknowledge all the previous owners who failed to completely destroy them.

Thanks to Sherry Clark for showing me new ways to think about the future, for the sea-swimming, and for making a public living room when I could only dream one.
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And to the wonderful Scuffle who has been with me all the way, accompanying me on writing retreats and participating more or less enthusiastically in my woodland reflections.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

A NOTE ON PRIMARY SOURCE PRESENTATION

All primary source material is enclosed in square brackets.

Dated material is labelled with the date in the format YYMMDD which enables digital files to be viewed in date order.

For interview material I give the date label followed by the name of the source.

For other empirical material I give the date label followed by a brief description.

CAST LIST

Many more people have been involved in both Granby and White Rock. The list here is of those specifically mentioned in the text.

Granby

HAZEL TILLEY - my main informant, resident of Cairns Street since 1989, chair of Granby 4 Streets CLT at various times in the research period
ELEANOR LEE - resident of Cairns Street since 1976, started the street clean-ups and gardening in 2004, chair of Granby 4 Streets CLT at various times in the research period
ERIKA RUSHTON - social entrepreneur, housing specialist, chair of Granby 4 Streets CLT at the start of the research period
RONNIE HUGHES - community worker, housing specialist, photographer, utopian, volunteer for Granby 4 Streets CLT 2013-18
DARREN GUY - CLT tenant in Cairns Street, moved in summer 2016
THERESA MCDERMOTT - long-term resident of Beaconsfield Street, involved in Granby Residents Association in the 1990s, founder member of the Granby 4 Streets CLT, manages the street market with her husband **JOE** FARAG.
TRACEY GORE - CEO of Steve Biko Housing Association which manages Granby 4 Streets CLT homes
ASSEMBLE - architecture collective who won the Turner Prize 2015 for their work with Granby 4 Streets CLT

BUILDINGS & SPACES: Granby 4 Streets are the surviving historic streets at the bottom of the 2016 plan.

White Rock

JESS STEELE - author, director of Jericho Road Solutions, investor and Commoner-at-Large for the Hastings Commons

EMILY BERWYN & **EDDIE** BRIDGEMAN - directors of Meanwhile Space who partnered with Jericho Road to buy the first building and remain one-third owner of White Rock Neighbourhood Ventures (WRNV), the social enterprise property developer

JOHN BRUNTON - one of the original tenants of Rock House from 2015, General Manager and Development Lead for WRNV since 2018

BOB THUST - finance and governance advisor to WRNV since 2016

RONAN LARVOR - author's partner of 20+ years, musician, AV engineer, CNC-maker, general supporter

CHRIS BROWN - executive chair and founder of igloo regeneration, mentor to the author and the White Rock projects

CHRIS DODWELL - long-time local builder (and networker and party organiser!), founder of Hastings Buildings Services, contractor for Rock House, Lower Alley and across the Commons

DARREN FRENCH - Ore Valley volunteer, Organisation Workshop participant, trustee

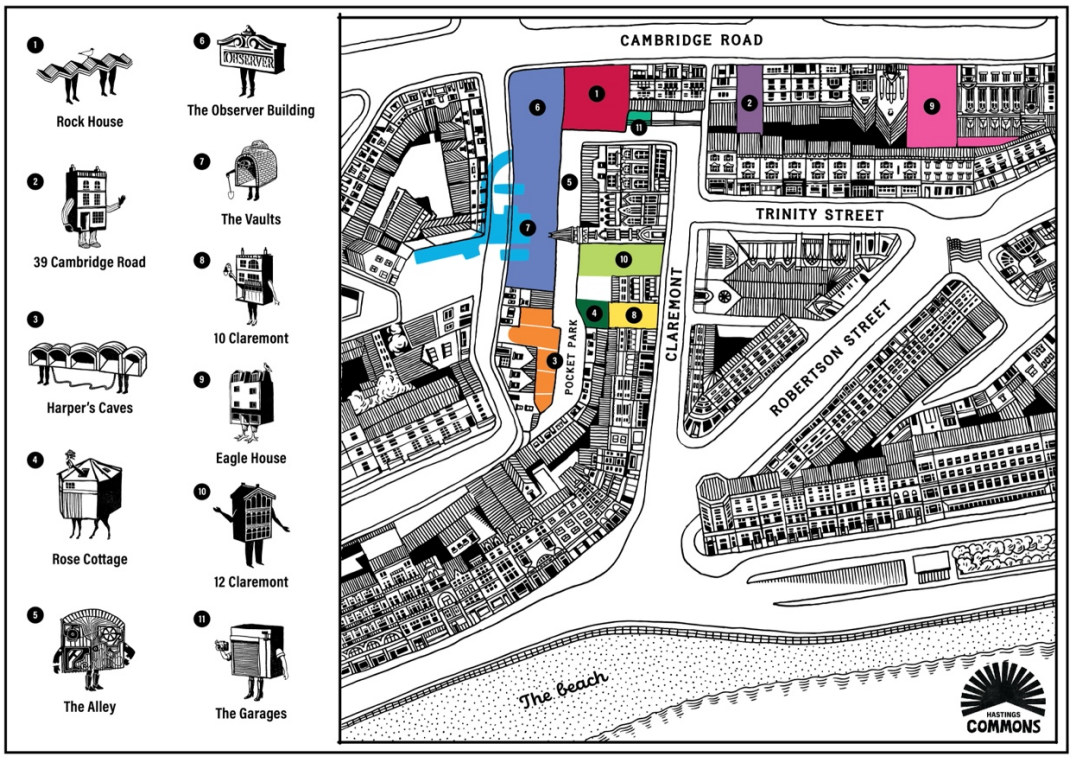
BEC LESTER - anthropology masters student who studied the Ore Valley project and then became a participant in the Organisation Workshop at the Observer Building

HEART OF HASTINGS CLT - community land trust established by the author and others in 2016. Owns 1/3 of the shares in WRNV.

SEA SPACE/SEA CHANGE - 'old-school' Hastings regeneration agencies run by John Shaw (2001-date)

Other mentions: Jeff Kirby, Flint (developer of the Observer Building 2015-17) Richard Upton, Basement Endeavours (owner of the Observer Building 2014-19)

BUILDINGS & SPACES: The spaces of the Hastings Commons are shown below.



CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

"Uneven development [is] inherently part of how capitalism operates in and through geographic space. Why not use that reality of capitalism to construct oppositional alternatives to it?" (DeFilippis 2004: 12-13)

"All audacities can be premised" (Lefebvre [1968], 1996: 155)

1.1 Inspiration and Purpose

Having been active in a sustained and intensive way in neighbourhood regeneration for more than 20 years,[2] I set out on this PhD adventure in 2015 to explore the characteristics of an epistemological and/or ontological phenomenon I had named as *self-renovating neighbourhoods* (SRN), and whether it could offer a genuine alternative to the 'false choice' of gentrification or decline facing poor neighbourhoods.

Both my earlier life-work (1991-2004) in Deptford, South East London and my life-work in Hastings (2004-) on the south coast of England have focused on regeneration approaches in areas of deprivation. While the threat of gentrification and its support by local governments, was present in both places, it seemed more obvious in Hastings where periodic pieces in the *Guardian* would wax lyrical about it becoming 'the new Hoxton' while still (usefully) reminding readers of its territorial stigma (Dyckoff 2010, 2012). It was not until around 2014/15 that it felt that the tide was turning for Hastings [EMP: 160206 report on CLT development work]. Since then the town in general and hotspots like St Leonards have seen unplanned but deep-impact change, driven primarily through changing tenures and prices in the private housing market. Meanwhile, in the White Rock neighbourhood, specific socio-historical-spatial circumstances have encouraged, allowed or given rise to a local innovation in

[2] This included setting up numerous community enterprises, leading grassroots regeneration programmes, working with cross-sector membership organisation and establishing Jericho Road Solutions (JRS) in 2012 to support local leaders taking on challenging regenerative projects in their own neighbourhoods

community-led alternative regeneration that is the core empirical subject of this thesis.

My inspiration came from reflecting over many years on two 'accidental transformations' in South East London in the 1960s-80s: the story of the decayed Crossfield Estate, handed over to young single students, teachers, social workers and musicians, and the renovation of upper Brockley by West Indian families shut out from other housing options (Steele 1993: 202-3, 216-7, see Appendix D). With minimal policy or official intervention (unlike the multiple regeneration initiatives experienced in the area in the following 30 years), these fine-grain transformations were the expression of the clear and common self-interest of groups of local people. There are other examples of these 'accidental transformations': artist-led cultural quarters that transform area reputations; music studios that provide hubs of employment, entertainment and a strong sense of family; seaside towns that drag themselves out of the bottle and into the guide books; family squatting groups taking over whole streets of condemned housing and paying rent into the pot to DIY some more life into them; self-build groups that get an amazing buzz from being in physical control of their housing destiny. They usually begin with relatively extreme affordability of space and with people who have the strength of will or peculiar circumstance to avoid the dead hand that keeps most people from participating directly in neighbourhood change. But there are too few of these stories; they are often snuffed out by economics and politics, both micro and macro; and it is very rare indeed that the value uplift they create is captured and reinvested.

Neil Smith's work on uneven development showed that gentrification and disinvestment should be seen as two sides of the same dialectical coin, the hills and the valleys of capitalist money flow. Capitalism requires the destruction of value in order to create gaps (Smith 1979); the money to be made is always in differentials. It is therefore a 'false choice' to offer or threaten gentrification or decline (reinvestment or disinvestment) for several reasons. It is factually false, presenting the two phenomena as binary opposites when, in fact, they are in an intimate relationship. It is ethically dubious, used by the powerful against the powerless to exploit undervalued resources.

And most importantly, it denies the possibility of alternatives.

> "Gentrification and 'decline'; embourgoisement and 'concentrated poverty'; regeneration and decay – these are not opposites, alternatives or choices, but rather tensions and contradictions in the overall system of capital circulation, amplified and aggravated by the current crisis" (Slater 2014: 521).

In this thesis I explore the historical emergence of approaches that attempt to decommodify property by challenging the valorising of exchange value over use value. Reviewing the literature on urban commons, community land trusts and other forms of alternative land ownership, I argue that decommodification is essential but not sufficient. I agree with Pierce et al that "ownership is a habit of mind" and that commoning organisations have to engage creatively with the "consensual fictions of urban property" (2021: 1). Despite the fundamental importance of ownership, the alternative is not all about ownership. It's about who does it (SELF), the way they do it (RENOVATING) and the scale and target of their ambition (NEIGHBOURHOODS). I use these three lenses throughout the thesis to explore a particular kind of collective local action that explicitly tackles both dereliction and the threat of gentrification.

In 2015 the literature documenting resistance to gentrification had been growing but there was far less about alternatives – *solution-focused thinking* appeared thin on the academic ground. This thesis aimed to fill that gap by bringing my own practice and experience under academic scrutiny. In the six years since, I have been delighted to encounter many literatures, old and new, within and beyond urban geography, that illuminate the landscape in ways that can foster solutions, and to have my prior and ongoing experience of community action across the UK and the world vindicated with that wonderful term 'actually existing commons' (Eizenberg 2012 *passim*).

While the urban geography literature on alternatives to gentrification remains relatively undeveloped, there is a wealth of other literatures, both within and beyond geography, full of the tools required to build alternatives to the 'locational seesaw' and "to enact a revolution of sorts, one that makes faint glimmers of hope into prefigurative elements of a becoming economy" (Gibson-Graham 2014: S151). From a

theoretical starting base that I call 'worlds of possibility' – which sees space and time as inherently relational and open multiplicity as a premise of politics – I have sought to weave the literatures around commons, community land trusts and neighbourhood development together with my empirical findings from the two case study neighbourhoods into a conceptual framework for the praxis of self-renovating neighbourhoods.

Neighbourhoods may be small-scale by definition, but they can and do inspire big thinking. Their rescue and co-creation through commoning practices constitutes new social relations that link agency, belonging and spatiality. Proceeding through restless improvisation and intense reflexivity, this praxis is 'prefigurative' of a better world and 'proleptic' in the sense it involves "particularly audacious attempts to 'reach ahead' and sets up an especially stark contrast between prefiguration and the surrounding milieu" (Jeffrey and Dyson 2021: 648).

1.2 Research aims, focus, and question

Research Question: what are the characteristics of self-renovating neighbourhoods and how might they constitute an alternative to false choice urbanism?

The thesis explores whether locally-rooted mission-driven ownership and collective enterprise can be disruptive of negative capitalist and statist forces at the neighbourhood scale. When people choose, in a specific place, to live by the spirit of the commons, the nurturing of solidarity, the belief in prosocial economies, can it make a difference to the 'locational seesaw' (Smith 1982: 151) of uneven development, there and elsewhere? And, if so, what is it that makes the difference?

Answering these questions has required literatures and inspiration both within and beyond urban studies. While drawing heavily on the urban geography literature on gentrification, property, uneven geographical development, community land trusts and the urban commons, I add into the mix, for example: Albert Bandura (1997) on

self-efficacy; Saul Alinsky (1971) on community organising; Robert Tressell ([1914] 2014) on radical renovation; and Amnon Lehavi (2008) on mixed property regimes. Moulaert (2010: 5) argues that understanding local dynamics requires *inter-disciplinarity* (insights from diverse academic fields) and *trans-disciplinarity* (connections between academics and practitioners). Crossing disciplinary and sectoral boundaries, this 'post-disciplinary' approach (Jessop and Sum 2001 *passim*) is a feature of this thesis, and my wider work in the world.

The empirical content comes from ethnographic research in two neighbourhood case studies in Granby (Liverpool) and White Rock (Hastings) of what could be seen as real examples of self-renovating neighbourhoods underway and that were, in any case, full of the opportunity for learning (Stake 1995: 6). The research has been deep-rooted and to some degree longitudinal, following these neighbourhood stories intensely since 2015 and, in both cases, drawing on data and memories from the preceding decade, as well as research into their histories. In both places the primary research methodology was participant observation; in Hastings it has been fully autoethnographic, an immersive heuristic research experience (Hayano 1979; Moustakas 1990; Duncan 2004; Wall 2006; Ellis, Adams and Bochner 2011).

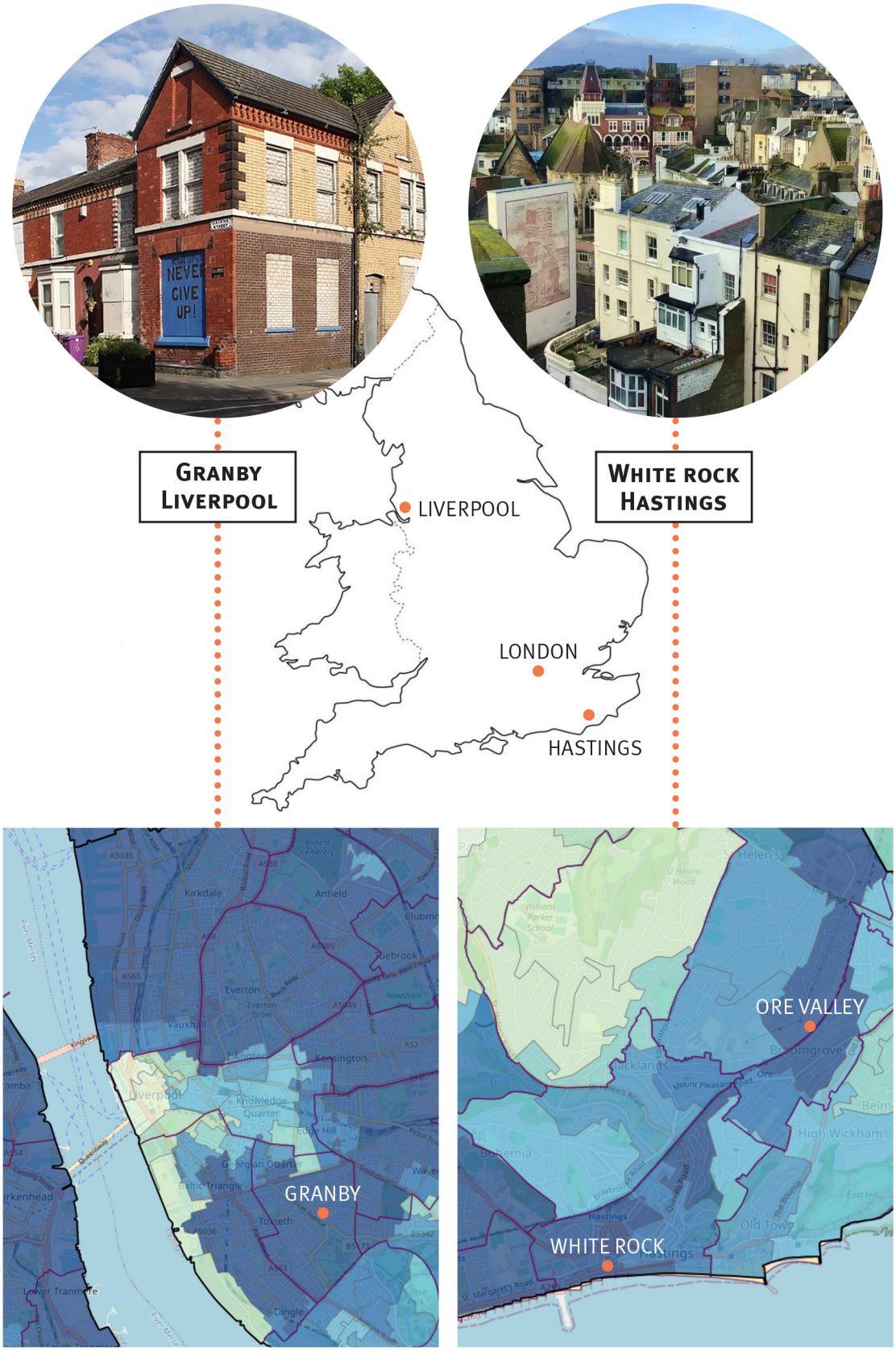
My two case studies are coastal communities – a North West port city and a South East seaside resort. Their histories are unique but they share some characteristics: a spirit of independence and an experience of neglect. Both have lived through an extended period of investor (private and state) neglect: they were lands that capitalism was leaving fallow. In contrast to the extreme impact of globalising urbanisation on its frontline, the increasingly unequal distribution of wealth and power that is "indelibly etched into the spatial forms of our cities" (Harvey 2013: 15), these neighbourhoods in their long state of managed dereliction retained a grip on their older stories. Geographically, economically and socially marginalised, with histories of smuggling, sea-faring, and shabeens, both areas display a strongly anti-authoritarian independence and a DIY resourcefulness. I believe the *eccentricity* of both Liverpool and Hastings as urban contexts, and Granby and White Rock as neighbourhoods in particular, are relevant to their drive towards SRN behaviour.

The Granby 4 Streets in Toxteth, Liverpool 8, have been going through a major physical renovation, achieved through the sustained efforts of local residents after many years of decline and demolition, including the blight of the 'Housing Market Renewal' programme (Cameron 2006; Thompson 2017). Ongoing dereliction or comprehensive demolition were both seen as more plausible than gentrification in 2015, but that shifted in the wake of the astonishing Turner Prize win in 2015. Much of the revitalisation has been through housing association investment, raising concerns about the imposition of 'voluntary' Right to Buy on housing associations since 2016 (House of Commons Library 2018). During the Covid-19 pandemic Liverpool has been in the top 10 areas for house price rises (Isherwood 2021).

In Hastings, the White Rock area was more obviously threatened with gentrification. It is a visually attractive neighbourhood of mainly Victorian buildings and a churning mix of independent businesses, bars and shops, all suffering from a historic lack of footfall. After a decade of community activism, Hastings Pier reopened in 2016 and the cluster of neglected ex-industrial buildings began to be transformed. Meanwhile, the rent gap in the town became increasingly obvious and capital was attracted, both in the form of individuals selling up and bringing London cash and private developers showing more interest in Hastings than ever before. Prior to and throughout the period of the PhD I have played key roles in the local community-based response to the twin challenges of dereliction and gentrification. This has involved the purchase, decommodification and redevelopment of numerous strange, large and derelict buildings clustered together around a relic of urban commons, an old alleyway not owned by anyone nor adopted by any authority.

Both neighbourhoods were facing risks of ongoing and even terminal decline or uneven but rampant gentrification and in both cases there were people and groups working to improve and protect the area while aware of the potential threats of displacement and sterilisation. The thesis explores the relationships of these activities with the theoretical and conceptual contexts of contemporary regeneration policy and practice, the 'grammars' of property and territory, and the 'failures' of market and state that have led people to seek a self-renovating approach.

Figure 1.1: The case study neighbourhoods



Index of Multiple Deprivation 2019 (DCLG 2020). Dark blue represents the 10% most deprived areas.

> “For two decades we lived in an environment that was extraordinarily degraded – surrounded by dirt, dereliction and decay that was truly staggering and all-encompassing. Finally with a kind of slow-burning resentment and rage we started to take some very small actions – we painted over a hundred boarded up voids; we created murals; we pulled up weeds, hacked up concrete, planted herbs and fruit trees. We literally laid our hands on the area. We dug, dragged, painted, brushed and planted, we made our mark. And in doing so, we began to make it ours again.”
>
> Eleanor Lee, in Granby case study, Power to Change July 2016
>
> “There had been a rot at the heart of the neighbourhood for 30 years, mirroring and caused by that at the heart of the property system… Once we’d bought Rock House we had £80k left in the bank and a QS report that said it would cost £1.89M to convert. We threw the report away and got on with the first two floors, got some tenants in, then took the next step and the next. Now we look back and call it ‘phased organic development’.”
>
> Jess Steele, oft-repeated part of the White Rock story

In addition to these two very special places, I have been privileged to spend my career in the field of neighbourhood development and continue to learn from and draw comparisons with a wide range of community asset builders and self-renovating practitioners in neighbourhoods across the country and the world.

I should be clear that the neighbourhoods I focus on are disinvested places. “Being in solidarity with the poor necessarily involves place-focused work, or place-making” (Walter, Hankins and Nowak 2017: 112). In theory SRN is possible in any kind of neighbourhood but it is harder/different in high-value areas and in any case I am only interested in it as an opportunity for those neighbourhoods that have been ‘left behind’ (an insidious term I will return to in Chapters 2 and 8). SRN is a riposte to the fanciful and frightening idea of such neighbourhoods being ‘levelled up’ by government decree.

In this research I set out to interrogate the characteristics of a self-renovating neighbourhood as first hypothesised in Steele (2012):

1. a focus on self-defined fine grain neighbourhoods
2. initiated and driven by local residents and small businesses
3. importance of self-interest as a motivator
4. the three grassroots virtues of thrift, impatience, sociability
5. neighbourhood itself increasingly seen as and acts as an enterprise, individuals within it as entrepreneurs and contributors rather than

recipients/consumers/ beneficiaries

6. explicit protection of diversity and action to avoid displacement of lower-income or otherwise more vulnerable residents and businesses.

I wanted to know whether and how these characteristics were relevant to the case studies, and how my empirical evidence might change the meaning and emphasis of the characteristics. Within the first 18 months of research and reading three further aspects came into focus.

Firstly, no kind of self-renovating will even begin without agency and efficacy, so Bandura's foundational work on personal and collective efficacy (see especially 1997), introduced more widely into the social sciences by Robert Sampson (2012), is key to understanding whether, how and with what success people might begin to self-renovate their neighbourhoods. This would help illuminate Characteristic 2.

Secondly I was looking for models of ownership and renovation that could work for self-renovating neighbourhoods. This led me deeper into property law and theory to consider questions of 'good land' (Berry 1982; Burdon 2010), 'pariah land uses' (Greenberg et al. 2008), 'delinquent ownership' (Jericho Road Solutions 2015), legal title through rootedness (Shachar 2010), the land narrative (Future Narratives Lab and Shared Assets 2020) and the balance of power between owners and users (Clark 2005). In considering new models of renovation I took heed of Tressell's thick description of the early 20th century house-painting trade in Hastings ([1914] 2014: passim) as the antithesis of a just and desirable approach. Meanwhile the empirical, embodied experience of building a mission-driven property portfolio in Hastings has both contributed to and benefited from the ongoing research and thinking for this thesis.

Thirdly, despite a turn towards consideration of the gentrification of whole cities and indeed the planet (Lees, Shin and Lopez-Morales 2016), and notwithstanding the dangers of parochialism (DeFilippis 2004; Fisher 2009; Shragge 2013), I have long been interested in the reframing of *neighbourhood* as a site for social good and inclusive economic opportunity, both empirically right now and normatively for the future. I

have argued, against current regeneration practice, that the idea of a 'Local Enterprise Partnership' covering three counties is an insult to the word 'local' (Gibson-Graham 2002). The abandonment of neighbourhood renewal policy and the loss of Area-Based Initiatives in the decade of austerity from 2010 created a policy vacuum at the neighbourhood-level that was inadequately redressed by the innovations of the Localism Act 2011. In the absence of government-led strategy and with local government hollowed out and reeling, local people in some neighbourhoods were increasingly taking matters into their own hands. In my experience, this was never a 'Big Society' poor-cousin replacement of public services – it was a full-throated cry from grassroots people and groups for practical holistic approaches to making places 'more after their own hearts' desire'.

> "Only when it is understood that those who build and sustain urban life have a primary claim to that which they have produced, and that one of their claims is to the unalienated right to make a city more after their own hearts' desire, will we arrive at a politics of the urban that will make sense" (Harvey 2013: xvi).

My selection of case studies changed over the research period as described in Chapter 4. Eventually I settled on the notion of constructing Granby as the 'classic case' to use as inspiration and a jumping-off point to analyse the more immersive empirical work in Hastings. In neither case is the aim to capture what other people think about what's happening – achieving that would require more distance than I have. Rather, I have a hypothesis (SRN) that I am trying to develop and refine by putting it through the filter of White Rock and Granby. From the centre of the praxis, experiencing it and making it happen, thinking-acting-reflecting, my aim is to craft the 'lenses' of SELF / RENOVATING / NEIGHBOURHOODS as a potentially interesting way to look at and think with poorer neighbourhoods about alternatives to false choice urbanism.

1.3 Shape of the Thesis

Following this introduction, I review the relevant literature and present the conceptual framework in two parts. Chapter 2 locates the work within core literatures on space, place, and relationality – the 'worlds of possibilities' that are continually disciplined

and closed down by the stifling hegemony of TINA[3] (There Is No Alternative). These radically open concepts of spatiality are made real in the understanding of 'diverse economies' pioneered by Gibson-Graham (1996, 2006, 2014, 2020), the 'potentiality' (Sharpe 2014) of the 'body multiple' (Mol 2002), and the hope (Dinerstein 2012, 2019; Bloch 1989) and DIY/punk resourcefulness (Holtzman, Hughes and Van Meter 2007; De Carli and Frediani 2016) that is at the heart of SRN. They are also implicit in the literature exploring the dominant ownership model and the 'grammars' of property praxis (Blomley 2004, 2013, 2014, 2016; Brown 2007; Cooper 2007, 2020; Parvin 2020). All these literatures open our eyes to the nature of 'what pushes back at us' (Gibson-Graham 2006: 1-6). They seek to unsettle; and in doing so they open up what I have called[4] the politics of TARA (There Are Real Alternatives), as a counterpoint to the behemoth TINA.

At neighbourhood level TINA manifests as a 'false choice' between gentrification and decline (Slater 2014; Doucet and Koenders 2018). This takes us into the gentrification literature to understand the threat, as well as into questions about what 'decline' actually means and how it is produced. Chapter 3 explores these as two sides of the same capitalocentric coin (Smith 1979; Marcuse 1985; Lees and Demeritt 1998; DeFilippis 2004; Slater 2014, 2021; Gibson-Graham 1996, 2006) and asks how these false choices and antisocial models may be exposed, challenged or wilfully bypassed, drawing on long histories and ever-growing literatures around communitarian, prefigurative, DIY approaches to consider what it takes to 'get off the seesaw'. Proposing that this is a false choice creates the imperative to show that indeed there are alternatives, and further, that, while fine-grain in scale, these alternatives might inhabit and embody a reading of space, time and social relations that could have the power to crack and erode the seemingly impregnable edifice (Holloway 2010, 2016),

[3] I use the acronym TINA to indicate not only the phrase 'There Is No Alternative' with its roots in Herbert Spencer (1851) and Margaret Thatcher (see Berlinski 2008) but also the heft of hegemonic power that always sits behind the phrase and is constantly replenished through its acceptance (Duncombe 1997; Harvey 2000: 258; Fisher 2009: 53).

[4] I think I invented the acronym TARA from trial and error attempts to counter TINA. A Google search (4/1/22) brings up https://gimms.org.uk/2018/10/26/move-over-tina-here-comes-tara-there-are-real-alternatives/. The comment below the article from Martin Freedman who tried STAB TINA (Solutions That Are Better Than TINA) confirms my concern to avoid 'assault' metaphors.

exposing it as a constantly-constituted product, a project not a fact of life. Massey helpfully reminds us not to "overestimate the coherence of 'the powerful' and the seamlessness with which 'order' is produced" (2005: 45). The contradictions and incompetences at the heart of power give some hope to efforts to expose it as a construction and thereby 'imagineer' new versions (Kuiper and Smith 2014; Demetriou 2018).

Chapter 4 locates the work in my background, values, prior experience, motivations and performed identities, before focusing on four aims for the thesis in terms of research, analytical, normative, and ethical frameworks. It describes the methodology developed to operationalise these aims, including the challenges of 'turning action into data'. Since the aim is to construct a coherent analytical alternative to gentrification-or-decline, rather than to prove the empirical impact of that alternative, my methodology has focused on developing, reflecting on and refining the notional characteristics of self-renovating neighbourhoods through exposure to ground-level examples in an iterative process of research and analysis. As for Gibson-Graham with diverse economies, I am "seeking the ethical coordinates for a political practice, not a model or a plan" (2006: 88).

My motivations in undertaking a PhD were to probe, challenge and expand my own thinking, to remind myself where it came from, and to locate it in relation to both academic literature and other practitioner narratives. The body of relevant existing knowledge that I mobilised was therefore both academic and practitioner, including my own experiential knowledge and expertise. So when I speak in the first person and harness my own memories, it is not arrogance but a choice that pays respect to the people and places that have shaped my experience. The section on positionality in Chapter 4 describes the trajectory of my life as an 'independent regen-watcher' from 1991. By 2015 I finally felt the need to 'ground' (or 'elevate'?) this grassroots and instrumental work in academic theory. It was 'useable knowledge' in the sense outlined by Lindblom and Cohen (1979) and I have always been a 'reflective practitioner' (Schön 1983), but I sought to extend and systematise my learning, develop the concept of self-renovating neighbourhoods in a robust academic context,

and immerse myself in the literature and in current thinking and practice.
I adapt the Timmermans and Tavory guidelines for *abductive* analysis, "a qualitative data analysis approach grounded in pragmatism aimed at theory construction" (2012: 169). This tackles the crude *deductive-inductive* binary, helping to ground the abstract deductive and situate the inductive discovery in a broader context. Jessop's strategic-relational approach (SRA) adds the idea of *retroduction*, "asking what the real world must be like for a specific explanandum to be actualised" (Jessop 2005: 43). Armed with speculative theoretical hunches from prior and ongoing experiential knowledge and the preliminary literature review, I spent (lots of) time in the neighbourhoods gathering empirical materials through audio recording, photography, note-taking, memo-writing. Back at base, transcription and coding, reviewing and reflecting tightened and refined those hunches into evidence-based analysis which, in turn, fed back into the praxis and reflection. This thesis is a reflection on praxis, an abductive iteration between my own ever-evolving theory and practice, rooted in the systematic collection of primary data.

Chapters 5 and 6 began as empirically-based narrative, telling the background stories of each neighbourhood, establishing the *genii loci*, and outlining the community-based activity over the past decade. For want of space, these became appendices with the chapters providing instead a more focused analysis, discussing key themes of most relevance to the core thesis.

In Granby I drew on the rich complexity of the neighbourhood's story, especially over the past half-century, interweaving my primary and secondary research and engaging with the locally-focused work of other researchers and scholars, especially Matthew Thompson, Andy Merrifield, Ronnie Hughes, the Gifford Report, and the Shelter Neighbourhood Action Project (McConaghy 1972). In later chapters we see Granby through the SRN lenses, drawing on my own research to conceptualise around the survivability and agency of the Granby selves (individual and collective); the Granby renovation in terms of performing ownership and the process of commoning; and the socio-spatial Granby neighbourhood emerging through the self-renovating process.
My Granby data came from in-depth interviews and particularly through iterative re-

interviewing of key players over the years (particularly Hazel Tilley, Granby resident since 1989 and deeply involved throughout that time in the Granby story), alongside recorded meetings, field notes and photography. In Hastings there is the added complexity and richness of active autoethnography: I have been trying to make SRN happen here at the same time as understanding what it is and what it means. This is a specific kind of fully-immersed action research, which generated an almost-overwhelming wealth of data, as explored in Chapter 4.

These case studies are not symmetrical and I do not seek to compare and contrast. They had different research methods, different levels and degrees of access and, ultimately, a different aim in each. I am using Granby as a foil, a touch-stone, a classic story of a UK community land trust to help with my 'reading' of White Rock which inevitably and deliberately goes much further and deeper. The 'fresh' case study is read through and in the light of the 'classic' case (Robinson 2016). Chapter 6 introduces White Rock in all its historical and topographical uniqueness, telling the story of the emergent Hastings Commons to lay the ground for analytical work in the following chapters – SELF, RENOVATING and NEIGHBOURHOODS.

These chapters deconstruct the idea of the self-renovating neighbourhood into its constituent parts, like clauses in a sentence: the subject (self), verb (renovating), and object (neighbourhood). They draw from and expand the literatures from Chapter 2, intertwined with analysis of specific elements of 'the experience on the ground', to focus on what the framework of SELF / RENOVATING / NEIGHBOURHOODS might illuminate. Chapter 9 ends with a consideration of the dangers and dilemmas inherent in self-renovating neighbourhoods, while the final chapter offers some conclusions, updating the 2012 characteristics and exploring the extent to which SRN might aid the disruption of dominant models of ownership, regeneration and development.

1.4 Original contribution

My purpose is to insist that there is an alternative to the false choice. My original

contribution is to position false choice urbanism as the manifestation of TINA at neighbourhood level and to counterbalance it with self-renovating neighbourhoods as the embodiment of TARA. I have constructed a framework in the form of three lenses SELF / RENOVATING / NEIGHBOURHOODS. The 'self' refers to local people both individually and collectively. It is the subject that leads the work of renovation. 'Renovating' is the verb, capturing everything that needs doing, including the enactment of ownership as well as the processes of renovation, occupation and ongoing place-keeping. Then there are the 'neighbourhoods' that do not start as blank sheets but as multi-layered historically-formed localities and do not end up 'renovated' because self-renovation is habitual not task-focused; it is never finished.

This framework is a novel contribution to the academic literature and also an heuristic for practitioners, policy-makers and scholars. It enables a deep-spiralling analysis of who is doing what and with what results. It builds on, and goes beyond, the literatures on community land trusts (organisational focus) and urban commons (resources + behaviours), to see the work of fine-grain renovation for the common good as grown within, impacting on and (re)constituting whole neighbourhoods. It brings together literatures that call for or study resistance to gentrification (Lees, Slater and Wyly 2008; Slater 2014; Annunziata and Rivas 2018) with prefigurative literature that explores how alternatives can be made in the here and now (Gibson-Graham 2014; Jeffrey and Dyson 2021; Yates 2015, 2021) and empirical evidence of that making in action in two neighbourhoods. In this way it uses my pragmatic tradition of constructing alternatives to address a classic failing of academic work that highlights the problem but fails to elaborate the way out.

While my primary approach is the subject-verb-object structure of SRN, I also interrogate these neighbourhoods as existing/emergent commons. As outlined below, commons theory tends to synthesise commons as commonwealth *resources* that are in some way shared, alongside and intertwined with commoning as social *relations* and activities by commoners. This maps onto my SRN trialectic. Commoning processes can be seen as my 'renovating' (the doing). The neighbourhood is the common pool resource, the object and entity we are working with and sharing. The commoners are

the ‘selves’, individual and collective, who are making change. My approach explores the potential of prefigurative commoning as an alternative to dominant models of local regeneration and place-keeping.

The aim of the thesis is not to evaluate these neighbourhoods or their renovating practice, still less to speak for them. Rather I want to acknowledge their ‘already-existing’ and ‘ever-emerging’ nature and to indulge in the analytical praxis in which I gaze at them through my lens of SELF/RENOVATING/NEIGHBOURHOODS and, as the image blurs and shimmers, iteratively adjust the focus to see more clearly the delicate tracery of coordinates and trajectories. This is like a leaf under a microscope, knowing that you could keep getting in closer until you were in an atomic world, or you could look up and see the forest. The task I set myself was to create a particular ‘lens’ or framework that I hope will be useful for us and others as a *way of looking* at what we’re doing. Even after six years and 100,000 words, this thesis remains only a starting point with many gaps (opportunities for R&D) which are highlighted throughout and summarised in Appendix H.

It is very difficult to know how and when to stop; I had to remind myself that this thesis can only represent Act 1. It takes the arc of the story in Granby from the later years of the Granby Residents Association (seen in the context of the aftermath of the 1981 riots) to the opening of the Winter Garden in March 2019. I had planned for White Rock to finish with the Organisation Workshop in the Observer Building (May 2019) but in practice, every time I sat to write I came straight from a Hastings Commons experience and could not help but include it in my ever-evolving thinking.

I cannot deny that I continue to gather ‘research data’ and perhaps I will never really stop now. It is tempting to promise ‘toolkits’ or ‘templates’ from my findings, but the impact is more grounded than that. The actually-existing Hastings Commons, in its continuous swirling emergence, is the best learning aid I can hope to make available[5].

[5] See www.hastingscommons.com

CHAPTER 2: WORLDS OF POSSIBILITY – MAKING SPACE FOR ALTERNATIVES

This chapter focuses on how the multiplicitous, plural world is brought to order through a series of powerful discourses, continually constituting and entrenched within social, economic, cultural and political structures that privilege unevenly (Jessop 2005: 50-52). Outlining literatures that provide a theoretical flavouring to every part of the thesis – the worlds of possibility that are closed down by the hegemonic concept of TINA (There Is No Alternative) – it explores how this closing down of thinking manifests in the specifically spatial terms of the neighbourhood. Dominant models of ownership and regeneration lead to the 'false choice urbanism' (Slater 2014) which offers only gentrification or decline, as will be explored in the next chapter.

2.1. Worlds of Possibility

2.1.1 The Liveliness of Space

Doreen Massey's opening propositions in *For Space* (2005) bring spatiality alive, directing us to understand space differently in order to sustain the "genuine openness of the future" (2005: 11). In contrast with culturally-embedded notions of space as immobilised and highly differentiated *surface*, she sees space as a) the product of interrelations, b) the sphere of multiplicity/contemporaneous plurality and c) always under construction, "a simultaneity of stories-so-far" (ibid: 9). Ours is "a world being made, through relations, and there lies the politics" (ibid: 15).

How does this construction of space proceed? Both threads of performativity theory, drawn from Erving Goffman and from Judith Butler, are useful and challenging. It is one thing to say that the world is made through relations, interactions that are shaped by positionality and power, but performativity takes this further to describe the self as "a performed character… the peg on which something of a collaborative manufacture will be hung for a time" (Goffman 1956: 252-3) or, in Butler's formulation, "if a word… might be said to 'do' a thing then it appears that the word not only signifies a thing,

but that this signification will also be an enactment of the thing… the meaning of a performative act is to be found in this apparent coincidence of signifying and enacting" (Butler 1995: 150). I agree with Gregson and Rose (2014) that limiting the debate to an identification with performing bodies is wasteful and prefer a more expansive engagement with 'the performative' as "the citational practices which reproduce and/or subvert discourse and which enable and discipline subjects and their performance" (Gregson and Rose 2014: 38).

At the core of hegemonic (TINA) discourse is the "suppression of…actually existing multiplicity" (Massey 2005: 69). A key tactic in this taming process is the convening of spatial multiplicity into temporal sequence, reworking difference so that *coevalness* is reduced to "place in the historical queue… The lack of openness of the future for those 'behind' in the queue is a function of the singularity of the trajectory" (ibid: 69-70). While this temporal convening of space is best known from Eric Wolf's challenge to traditional anthropology's singular trajectory in *Europe and the People Without History* (1982), it is mirrored in discourses of gentrification and decline. In all cases when space is "marshalled under the sign of time, these countries [neighbourhoods] have no space – precisely – to tell different stories, to follow another path. They are dragooned into line behind those who designed the queue" (Massey 2005: 82). Hastings as 'the new Hoxton' services a development model based precisely on the extractive, uneven development which justifies itself by conceptualising contemporaneous difference as temporal sequence[6].

The recent governmentalist concept of policies for 'left-behind' places (Local Trust/OSCI 2019; No Place Left Behind Commission 2020; Johnson 2021) and the formation of the 'Department for Levelling Up' (UK Gov 2021) is neo-colonialist in this tradition – closing down the future, anti-diversity, a harnessing of the spatial by the temporal as if we were all treading the same path but at different speeds, whereas in fact we could make different choices, or simply be distinctive (because of the different constellations of relations). Moreover, this discourse, like that of developmentalism

[6] To some extent we do this ourselves with the often-used phrase "Too late for Hackney, not too late for Hastings".

more generally, leaves no space for the idea that 'under-developed' places might have anything to offer in the other direction (Robinson 2011).

It is relevant that the 'singular trajectory' approach in which 'Detroit is your town tomorrow'[7] (Vermuelen 2018), requires an external disembodied agent – the market, globalisation, gentrification. Gatherings of the powerful (eg at Davos) have relied on "a powerfulness which consists in insisting on power*lessness* – in the face of globalising market forces there is absolutely nothing that can be done. Except, of course, to push the process further. This heroic impotence serves to disguise the fact that this is really a *project*" (Massey 2005: 84). This is played out locally with authorities insisting that social and political effort must be directed into the only game that matters – competing for mobile capital by funnelling public funds into the 'externalities' that make capitalist production possible, while often also providing direct funding to corporations and developers as an 'apology' for the low land values of which they are about to take advantage. Again this can be seen in the 'left behind neighbourhoods' discourse: TINA, it's not our fault, you need to jump hoops and *compete*.

In contrast, Massey's radical openness, the insistence on the "coexisting heterogeneity" of the spatial (2005: 12) and her project to think time and space together as mutually implicated – "it is on both of them, necessarily together, that rests the liveliness of the world" (ibid: 56) – generates a compelling sense of possibility which I find chimes with the empirical findings within self-renovating neighbourhoods. Her question: "How we might imagine spaces for these times; how we might pursue an alternative imagination" (ibid: 13) is the core pursuit of SRN.

2.1.2 Place as Meeting Place

So if 'space' is open, multiple, lively and emergent, what of 'place'? The dominant discourse is of "place as closed, coherent, integrated, as authentic, as 'home', a secure retreat; of space as… always-already divided up" (Massey 2005: 6). In this view places

[7] Personal conversation in Detroit (2011) with Richard Feldman, community organiser and support worker for civil rights activist Grace Lee Boggs (1915-2015).

are constituted through isolation and separation, geographical variation arising from internal characteristics and creating a "tabular conceptualisation" (ibid: 68) in which all places can be pinned down, compared and contrasted and, above all, ordered into leagues. If instead we see space as an emergent product of relations then 'place' must be *meeting* place and the 'difference' of a place is to be found in "the constant emergence of *uniqueness* out of (and within) the specific constellations of interrelations within which that place is set… *and of what is made of that constellation*" (ibid: 68, my emphasis).

Massey argues against the romance of a pre-given and eternal place identity, seeing instead that "what is special about place is precisely that throwntogetherness" (2005: 140), conceiving place as "a constellation of processes rather than a thing" (ibid: 141). "'Here' is …where the successions of meetings, the accumulation of weavings and encounters build up a history… weaving a process of space-time". She sees these "layers as accretions of meetings" meaning that "there and then is implicated in the here and now" (ibid: 139). Again this resonates with the experience of SRN as an intensely *located* and *relational* process over longitudinal time (Bevir 2000).

In terms of scale, my focus has always been on neighbourhood: figure 2.1 hints at why. Neighbourhood is the scale of human experience and encounter; it is a scale at which individual buildings and spaces loom large rather than flatten out into zones; it is a 'do-able' scale for prefigurative politics and radical experimentation. It reflects the intertwining of the social and the spatial, and can spark new ways of thinking about modern neighbourliness. Most of all, it is open to definition and redefinition by its own producer-consumers.

Figure 2.1: The neighbourhood scale

There are many ways to ride the wind,
none alone sufficient to keep us sky-borne,
but ride it we must, or die in the sludge.

I'm interested in neighbourhoods,
the economies of small scale,
the genius of place,
the fine grain of the social and physical environment.

Places are peopled and people are placed.
Both are dynamic,
changing over the years, with the seasons, throughout each day.
Places feel different to different people.
People change when they change place.

Bricks and mortar, wood and stone, glass and steel,
boarded windows and corrugated iron,
hanging baskets and public art,
open fields, historic parks, suburban gardens, back yards, alleyways,
the corner shop, the estate parade, the grand old department store (tatty now),
civic, religious and leisure spaces old and new,
the pub, the pier, the port, the petrol station in Yackandandah,
homes of every kind,
and small spaces, usually ugly, unloved, unwieldy to solve
but transformable
by those who will darn the fabric, close up among the fine-weave
take care, pay attention, work together.

Land and buildings – assets of community value –
matter because, along with money, that is where power is held.

No-one can give communities rights. They have to take them through use.
Sit in the wrong part of the bus, speak when you're not spoken to,
stand up for what you care about, say you will.

There are many ways to nurture change,
Grow from seed, cascade a ripple, switch on lightbulbs, set off fireworks
But this never changes: we thrive together, die alone.

Jess Steele, May 2013

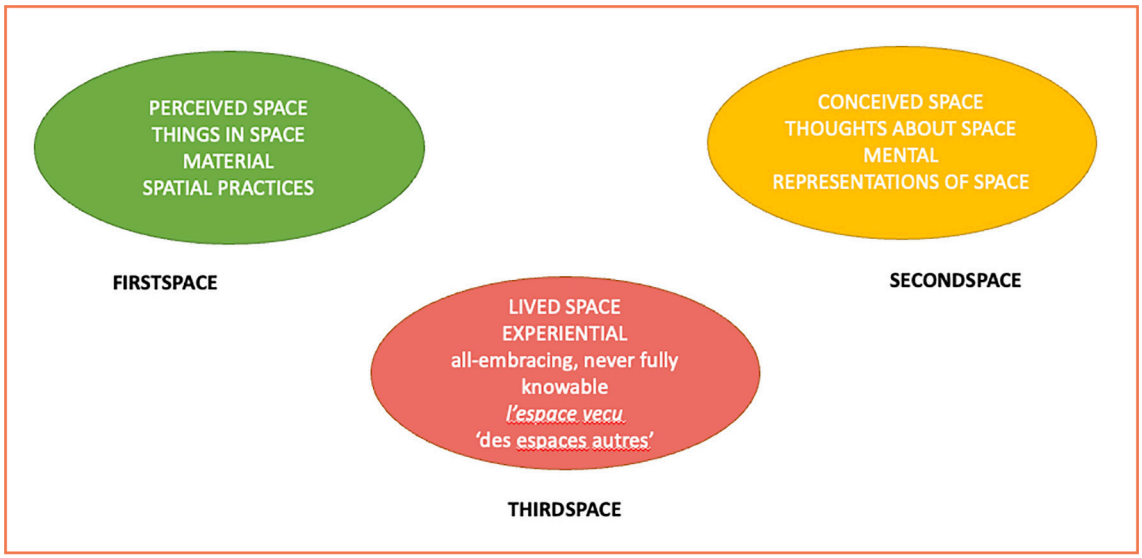
We can understand place as historically constructed, 'layer upon layer', while also watching it be remixed through performative social relations in the ongoing present, and still retaining its open multiplicity. While DeFilippis (2004: 33) insists 'places' can't be actors and don't have agency, if place is made through meetings, weavings and encounters, then it matters *who* is doing the meeting, weaving and encountering, and why (with what motivation and values, to what purpose). These questions will determine whose 'heart's desire' is mirrored in the making of the urban form. Not only

can local actors make choices that enable more encountering and *being-in-common* overall, we can also seek to engage a wider population and/or take action to include specific population groups. We may aim to influence the types and content of encounters, to inject particular values into the interactions that are endlessly (re)making place. Of course, there will be thousands of other interactions underway every day that have countervailing or deadening impacts but that does not detract from the concept that our weaving ('darning the fabric') can make the event of place.

The 'common sense' of the place is created in the power relations between the lived experiences of the 'functionally immobile' and external forces in the production of the locality (DeFilippis 2004: 25). Lefebvre argued in *The Production of Space* (1991) that places are constructed through social and political relations in three ways. Firstly through spatial practice – how people live their daily lives. Secondly through representations of space by those who can make it (surveyors, planners, developers, architects etc). Thirdly, through 'lived space' (l'espace vécu) – how spaces are meaningfully experienced. The importance of this third axis is that "places are not prefigured in their meanings to the people that use them" so they can transform them "not simply by physically reorganizing them, but also by ascribing new meanings to them" (DeFiliippis 2004: 26). When the Observer Building came into community-rooted ownership on Valentine's Day 2019 it was still a derelict building, but everything had changed.

I have attempted in figure 2.2 to simplify and summarise the various spatial triads from the work of Lefebvre, Fremont, Foucault and Soja, illustrating the 'thirding' approach as "a deconstruction of a prevailing binary logic… and the creation of a third, an alternative, a significantly different logic or perspective" (Soja in Borch 2002: 113; Foucault [1967] 2004). This 'thirdspace' Soja describes as "another, different perspective that sees space as fully lived, as things in and thoughts about space, and more" (ibid 2002: 114). This experiential space – *troublante et troublée,* "unsettling and troubled" (Fremont 1974: 232) – is the SRN milieu.

Figure 2.2: Spatial triads in Lefebvre, Foucault, Soja



As with the set of places constituted by both discursive and distributive practice as subaltern, stigmatised, 'sunk', deprived, excluded, left behind, there are a series of *time-concepts* that are ignored or excluded by traditional economics, regeneration policy and practice and wider governmentality. Human-scale time-space concerns relate to immediate localised issues and to the lifecycle needs of where people grow up, raise families, live out their twilight years. Shaped instead by electoral timescales or developer imperatives, traditional place-based regeneration has been blind to the importance of now and of the long horizon. I consider these 'landscapes of time' in more depth in chapter 8. Not just single buildings but whole neighbourhoods become marginalised in a "politics of postponement" (Gibson-Graham 1996: ix) through cyclical (cynical?) processes of energetic strategising ('masterplanning') followed by long periods of limbo which await the alignment of other factors (land values, political will, funding availability). Such masterplans, as we will see in both Granby and White Rock, become part of the discursive infrastructure that holds the place in its liminal, 'pre-delivery' mode and closes down other options.

2.1.3 The Diverse Economy and Prefigurative Politics

I have argued above that the inherent liveliness and multiplicity of space, place and time, and their performative construction, are hidden by discourses that constrain, immobilise and coerce them below the water line. With these disguises, the economic,

the technological and, until recently, the wider environmental, are removed from political consideration. The only political questions become ones concerning our *adaptation* to their inevitability. This "discursive manoeuvre… at a stroke obscures the possibility of seeing alternative forms" (Massey 2005: 83).

JK Gibson-Graham (1996, 2006, 2014, 2020) have provided the most powerful critique of this view that the form of capitalocentric globalisation is the only one possible, by gathering all practices to do with material survival onto one conceptual plane and revealing the already existing diversity of economic practice. In all the fields – enterprise, labour, property, transactions and finance – there are mainstream, capitalist, private, wage and property markets that are generally seen and measured as 'the economy'. This is the tip of the iceberg; under the water line there are both alternative systems that adapt these approaches and entirely non-capitalist, open access, unpaid mutualist versions. Although 15-25 years old now, Gibson-Graham's formulation of the diverse economy and their exploration of what a 'community economy' might entail remains fresh and relevant. Indeed the *Handbook of Diverse Economies* was published in 2020.

Like Massey, Gibson-Graham are committed to "a politics of economic possibility", drawing on a feminist imaginary that is not about the category of 'woman' but "about subjects and places… a politics of becoming in place" (2006: xxiv) with a sense of urgency about 'the here and now'. They define the 'lineaments' of this *emerging political imaginary* in ways that map closely to the SRN framework: focusing on the centrality of subjects and ethical self-cultivation; the role of place as a site of becoming; the uneven spatiality and negotiability of power; the everyday temporality of change and transformation as a continual struggle under inherited circumstances of difficulty and uncertainty, in the face of modes of economic and political thought that threaten to undermine and destroy it (2006: xxvii).

For Gibson-Graham the problem is not (only) the discursive artefact of 'capitalist hegemony', but "the way capitalism has been 'thought' that has made it so difficult for people to imagine its supersession" (1996: 4). At the end of *The End of Capitalism (As*

We Knew It) they posed the flippant but profound question: "Why can feminists have revolution now, while Marxists have to wait?" (ibid: 251). Feminism went global through ubiquity and the location of struggle as everywhere and everyday, making it a lived project that reshapes the terrain. For as long as capital-C Capitalism presents itself as unity, singularity, totality (ibid: 253), the only revolution possible is total systemic change and until that time all the 'exotic creatures' (ibid: 3) of the diverse economy remain in the shadows – utopian, prefigurative, powerless. If we hope to achieve a 'dislocation' of both the ideological and materialised versions of all-encompassing Capitalism, "[s]omething outside the given configuration of being must offer itself as an element or ingredient for a new political project of configuring" (ibid: xi). I am hopeful that self-renovating neighbourhoods can be such an ingredient – a practical, visible, liveable assertion that 'other economies are possible'. SRN offers what Sharpe calls "a mode of potentiality that inheres in the very matter of the present" (Sharpe 2014: 27), creatively generating 'cracks' in capitalism (Holloway 2010), and including something of the 'radical incrementalism' described by Pieterse (2008).

For some scholars (eg John Law and Annemarie Mol) it is enough to present this concept of open multiplicity, but the inherent opportunity lures entrepreneurial activists into prefigurative work. Gibson-Graham called this "performative practices for other worlds" (2008: 613); for Jeffrey and Dyson it makes the present "a terrain of politics… an object of intense reflection" (2021: 641-642).

In anticipatory politics "dominant institutions pre-empt futures in order to manage the present" (Jeffrey and Dyson 2021: 641). Anderson showed how this works "by (re)making life tensed on the verge of catastrophe in ways that protect, save, and care for certain valued lives, and damage, destroy and abandon other lives" (2010: 793); and other scholars have built on this issue of dominating the spatio-social production of the future (Amin 2013). The narrative of emergency means governing as if the emergency is already existing; a danger is prefigured and manipulated to reorder social and political opportunities in the present (Jeffrey and Dyson 2001: 642). One relevant example is the artificial shortages of time endemic in both the property industry and

government regeneration programmes. As Anderson himself (2010, 2017) argued, however, this mobilisation of the future is not the sole prerogative of the powerful. In progressive prefigurative politics the *figure* is not a 'harbinger of danger' but a beacon of a better world: "the self-conscious channelling of energy into modelling the forms of action that are sought to be generalised in the future in circumstances characterised by power, hierarchy and conflict" (Jeffrey and Dyson 2021: 644-5).

This practical enactment of a vision of change is inherently spatial and performative (Jeffrey and Dyson 2021: 643). It focuses on performing here and now, "through a combination of resistance and creation" (Pickerill and Chatterton 2006: 730), the 'everyday rhythms' of post-capitalism that make the practice "mundane, but at the same time also, exciting, feasible and powerful" (Chatterton and Pickerill 2010: 488). It seeks coherence between means and ends, especially through "free initiative, free action, free association" (Kropotkin 2009 [1898]: 10) which balances individuality and voluntary association, and understands harmony as "a temporary adjustment… an ever-changing and fugitive equilibrium… established among all forces acting upon a given spot" (ibid: 6, 10).

In Hastings we have used the Three Horizons model of long term change developed by Bill Sharpe (see figure 8.3) to think about these different forces and see how they might interact within the dominant present (Horizon 1), the desired future (Horizon 3), and the disruptive innovations of Horizon 2 – a "zone of innovation and turbulence" that looks both ways. These "three possible patterns in which the present might play out into the future" (Sharpe 2020: 5) offer a rich framework to which I return in Chapter 8 as a way of thinking and in Chapter 10 to consider how this kind of 'DIY regen' and mission-driven ownership might disrupt negative-impact capitalist and statist forces at the neighbourhood scale and beyond.

While Gibson-Graham's work is "a question of actualising as yet unthought potentials" (Sharpe 2014: 41), Scott Sharpe draws attention not just to their focus on potentiality, but also the importance of impotentiality – "being able to not do" (Agamben 2011); whether that is choosing not to affirm the negative, withdrawing from the

“empowerment of outrage” (personal conversation with Katherine Gibson quoted by Sharpe 2014: 37), or allowing space for the diverse economy without flattening it into a pre-given ideal. This resonates with Holloway’s (2010) valorisation of ‘doing not labour’ and particularly with his focus on ‘not-doing’, ‘negating-and-creating’, positively choosing not to make capitalism.

Likewise, Harvey points to “heterotopic spaces all over the place” and says “we do not have to wait upon the grand revolution to constitute such spaces” (Harvey 2013: xvii). Lefebvre envisioned a revolutionary movement as the spontaneous coming together in a moment of ‘irruption’ when “disparate heterotopic groups suddenly see, if only for a fleeting moment, the possibilities of collective action to create something radically different” (ibid: xvii). The evidence from Granby and White Rock, as for so many neighbourhoods that I have worked with, is that at neighbourhood level this is a slow-motion ‘irruption’ requiring ‘sustained impatience’.

Figure 2.3: Community Power is sustained impatience

2.2. Dominant Models of Ownership and Regeneration

2.2.1 Grammars of Property, Narratives of Land

Why is it so hard to make these changes 'all over the place'? Why is it such a radical idea that local people might have a primary role in the making of their neighbourhoods? It is to do with the way land and buildings are held and developed, which is a 'grammar' of particular property conceptualisations made real through the discipline of performativity. MacLeod and McFarlane see such 'grammars' as "the infrastructure through which conceptual vocabularies are structured" (2014: 2) and stress that they are both concepts and practices. Blomley describes 'the crucial grammar' of *property* as "an organized set of relations between people in regards to a valued resource" and *territory* as "a bounded social space that inscribes powerful meanings… onto defined segments of the world" (2016: 593). The stress on relationality in both concepts is key as it raises questions of power and agency.

John Allen insists that power cannot be 'read off' a resource base. He sees such resources as part of 'the apparatus of rule' rather than constituents of power, which is a relational effect rather than a thing (Allen 2003: passim). While agreeing theoretically with this position, I would argue that power and agency are (at least in part) both *stored in* and *expressed through* land and buildings.

The dominant ownership model (Singer 2000; Blomley 2004) seeks to position property as fixed, natural, and objective, essentially private, definable, separate, a 'thing', or as Lefebvre put it "the epitome of rational abstraction" (Lefebvre 1976: 31). "Property organizes the world for us… Its importance is hard to overestimate… It is pervasive and consequential… an intricate space of refusals and permissions" (Blomley 2016: 594). This 'absolute approach' (Underkuffler 1990) in the ownership of property powerfully "shapes understandings of the possibilities of social life, the ethics of human relations, and the ordering of economic life… (It) shapes our understanding of what property actually *is* and how it *ought* to be structured" (Blomley 2004: 3). Yet since "*dominium* [private power] over things is also *imperium* [political power] over our fellow human beings" (Cohen 1978: 156), the focus on the right to exclude others

highlights that property is not just an extension of the subject but very much a relationship between subjects (Keenan 2010: 425).

The portrayal of property by the dominant ownership model as fixed, excludable and settled is clearly open to challenge on grounds of accuracy: because all property is relational and no space is 'innocent'; because the state is the guarantee of all property rights (which are therefore politically determined); and because contemporary property rights are hugely divided up (between freeholders, leaseholders, tenants, mortgage lenders, neighbours, spouses, probate and so on). Yet, as Singer (1996: 1459) makes clear, just because property can be deconstructed does not stop it being an organising category. "What is and what is not property makes important things happen" (Blomley 2004: 4).

Alastair Parvin has provided a provocative demolition of the current relational system, posing the simple question: "wait, what work exactly is it that we're paying Landlords to *do*?' And basically the answer is: *nothing*. We're paying them to… *not evict us*… The single largest cost burden on most households and most businesses is a kind of fee, paid by poor people to rich people, for no work. Just for *having money in the first place*. And that fee has been going up and up" (Parvin 2020: npn). Even as we know that this is extraordinary, and can understand it as performatively reconstituted on a minute-by-minute basis through relations of power, we also feel the weight of its embeddedness. To understand this 'heaviness', it is worth exploring what land has been made into – the 'land narratives' that enable the most fundamental and sustained oppression of people and planet while strangling or swallowing alternatives.

These frames (see figure 2.4) speak to the idea that humans are inherently 'utility maximising', with society and civilisation providing a thin veneer of order. They show how Garrett Hardin's (1968) 'Tragedy of the Commons', though long disproven by Elinor Ostrom (1990), is still hugely influential.[8]

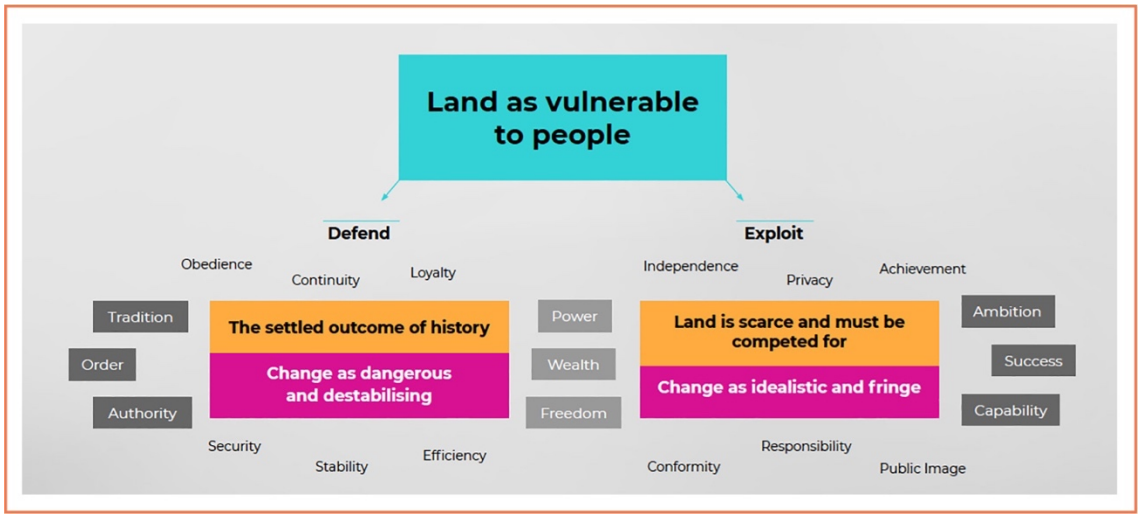
[8] As we will see in the next chapter, Ostrom and her followers have been criticised (eg Caffentzis 2004) as insufficiently anti-capitalist, but I remain grateful for her core work in hacking away at these narrative frames.

Figure 2.4: The Power in Place Narratives of Land project (2020) explored five frames that support the current land narrative

FRAME 1	The settled outcome of history, intertwined with tradition, identity and social order – in practice the natural order of things. This makes change immensely difficult and complicated. Stresses inertia and immobility of the status quo – pre-emptive dissuasion.
FRAME 2	Land as scarce and for competition, a limited resource rapidly running out, individuals must act fast to get their share and then exploit. Discourse of crisis and crowded, with land as security or defence against the competitive threat of others. The castle metaphor is one of the "oldest and most deeply rooted principles in Anglo-American jurisprudence" (Hafetz 2002: 175)
FRAME 3	Change as dangerous and destabilising, alternatives presented as inherently violent with a collective imposing their will upon individuals and seizing their property – often with undercurrents of totalitarian communism, colonialism, mob rule, chaos and disorder that will be 'bad for everyone'.
FRAME 4	Change as idealistic and fringe, unrealistic and utopian, impractical and unworkable for the mainstream, the province of indulgent upper or middle classes rather than something for the majority Presented as old-fashioned or 'unBritish' or simply unviable and not worth considering.
FRAME 5	Land as vulnerable to people. This is underlying the other frames. Land is seen as binary – either a financial asset to develop or a pristine environment to protect. People are a threat to land, the only relationship possible being one of exploitation.

How does this narrative work to protect the dominant model? It pre-emptively discredits and rules out alternatives while reinforcing the legitimacy of the existing system. This reinforcement operates by association, linking the nature of the current system to historical tradition and market driven competition/scarcity, defining land as inherently vulnerable. These themes performed in popular discourse strengthen its dominance. They are also the means by which reform is dismissed as dangerous or utopian (Future Narratives Lab and Shared Assets 2020). In my experience, this long and effective discourse results in land being seen by many as boring, unmoving, irrelevant, a non-issue, adding a further layer of defence. As Parvin (2020) puts it: "The land system is not sexy, it's not emotive. It's complicated. But once you see it you cannot unsee it. It sits at the root of so many of the issues that are flooding across our timelines every day."

Figure 2.5: Outcomes of the Land Narratives (Power in Place 2020)



2.2.2 The Development Nexus

Developers are often associated with risk but in fact typical developers rarely risk their own money. They secure the land by way of an option, expect the professional team to use their own time to develop a scheme, forward sell parts of it and find others prepared to fund it. In other words they are *managing* risks rather than taking them. Chris Brown, founder of igloo regeneration and a highly-respected figure in the development and regeneration world, describes the developer as "a spider in the middle of a web, connecting the landowner with the money, the professional team, contractors, and occupiers" [210823 Chris Brown]. The web is a series of mutually-reflective legal contracts. Money and risk flow around it in particular, managed ways. All that developers want from those *outside the web* is approval to proceed (or rather an inability to stop them). The housebuilders' influence on planning policy is chillingly revealed by Bob Colenutt in *The Property Lobby* (2020).

> "Developers are essentially driven by the arithmetic of markets. They are working out whether the value of a building less the cost of building it will be greater than the existing value. Some of us wrap that up in non-financial impacts, but fundamentally it's very much about financial value" [210823 Chris Brown].

Developers take advice from professionals. Surveyors advise on cost and value, based on what has been done before. Planners advise on what is expected, based on what

has been done before. Funders aim to optimise their perceived risk-return ratios by investing in more of the same. The tax system incentivises landowners selling a single large block of land to a developer rather than allowing for smaller-scale or piecemeal alternatives. Given these drag weights, the inertia in the system is not surprising.

The land professions – planners, surveyors/valuers, architects, cost consultants, and developers themselves – are both constituted by and conspire to sustain the dominant model. Lefebvre described how planning as the "science of space" isolates space from its context, posing it as a given, a specific, scientific dimension of spatial organisation. This pure, neutral, 'innocent' space is "primarily discussed in connection with high-level decision-making and only secondarily with social needs which [are] considered localised" (Lefebvre 1976: 30). The de-coupling of space and place from their generative social relations, temporality and context helps create a supposed independent object that is then subjected to specialist attention. Jane Jacobs called it 'pseudoscience': "years of learning and a plethora of subtle and complicated dogma have arisen on a foundation of nonsense" ([1961] 2011: 13). This 'silly substance'(ibid: 26), with all its disastrous consequences, is an imposition from above of "a series of models which justify and impose an order alienated from the existing city" (Tavolari 2019: 17) by professionals "having not yet embarked upon the adventure of probing the real world" (Jacobs [1961] 2011: 18-19). These decades-old insights are vindicated by the evidence of Granby and White Rock.

Surveyors are supposedly bound by their Royal Charter of 1881 "to secure the optimal use of land and associated resources to meet social and economic need" (quoted Hill 2015: 17) yet they are deeply implicated in the 'viability appraisal' which protects both landowner and developer interests against those of local communities and wider society (Hill 2015: 28; see also Raco, Livingstone and Durrant 2019). As with planners, the figure of the specialist is destabilised when faced with "the pedestrian's knowledge, which derives from living in the city" (Tavolari 2019: 17) and is able to see complex systems as order and not as chaos (ibid: 22). As Jacobs put it, "simple regimented regularity and significant systems of functional order are seldom coincident in the world" ([1961] 2011: 489).

All three intertwined practices, property, planning and development, and the politics that underpin them, rely heavily on the power of cartography – the representation of space – to create and sustain the regimented regularity imposed upon the more complex, organic functional orders existing at neighbourhood level. Blomley (2014) provides a fascinating history of land surveying which took on a cartographic nature in the early 17th century. In 1523 Fitzherbert expected surveyors to "butt and bound" the manor with help from tenants with long memories to note the uses and marks that "have been very anciently used and accustomed" (quoted Blomley 2014: 147). A century later Love was putting forward the construction of distant place by traversing the land so "that you may have as it were a Map of it in your head" (quoted ibid: 148). By mapping land as a space rather than a set of relations it is rendered as a parcel so the survey becomes no longer a description of use rights but a performative picture of "an exclusionary asset held against the world, vested in one owner… The survey seeks to bring a new reality into being" (ibid: 148-150). For maps to 'enter the law' (Harley 1988: 285) people needed to "learn to think like a map" so that "geometry helps produce the very idea of space itself" (ibid: 161).

As is his habit (2004, 2013), Blomley reminds us that while the survey may have sought to perform property differently (and we live with the results of the stabilisation of specific land narratives), these performative processes are hard not easy, uncertain not preordained and not entirely successful. People continue "to view property and its geographies through multiple and often conflicting frames" (2014: 170), as witnessed by the continuing importance of title deeds that outline relationships (charges, rights, easements, covenants and so on) alongside title plans that (rather bluntly in my experience) carve out the borders of excludability.

2.2.3 What ought (not) to be

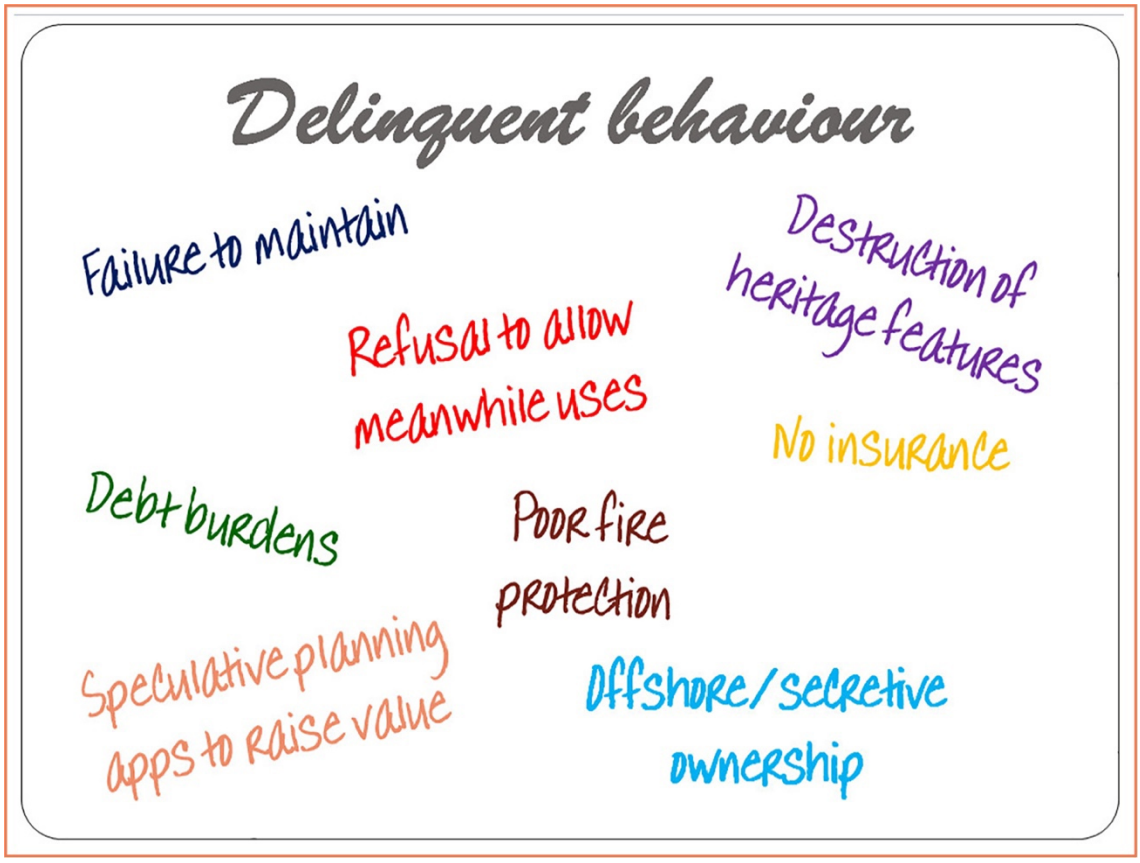
The dominant ownership model tells us what property 'ought to be'. The visible geographies (maps, fences, signs) "give a reassuring legibility to property" (Blomley 2004: 14) which is expected to create secure and uncontested relations or 'quiet possession'. In contrast Blomley and others have shown that property is "ontologically

and politically diverse" (ibid: 14) and that the law is capable of accommodating very widely (ibid: 16). Moreover extra-legal property claims ('un-real estate') can be effective when people "act as if they were asserting and acknowledging property claims, even though it is quite well known that these claims really have no legal status at all" (Rose 1994: 290). It is precisely the long-standing ability of property law to allow for 'legal title through rootedness' that Shachar wished to transpose into the immigration field as "a regulated path to earned citizenship" (2010: 5-6).

Dominant ownership models have also been challenged on social and political grounds. Locke honed in on spaces left empty and supported the 'appropriation by labour of unused land' (Locke [1690] 1980: section 38) and this horror of waste is at the heart of the meanwhile philosophy (Meanwhile Project 2010). Thomas Jefferson took this further, claiming that "the earth belongs in usufruct to the living" (Jefferson 1789). Usufruct is defined as the right to enjoy the use and advantages of another's property without wasting its substance. Jefferson was denying any natural right to bind future generations or for any occupant to "eat up the usufruct" – for then the lands would "belong to the dead" (ibid). This is a powerful argument for a stewardship approach, and for clarity that what matters is the *rules* of appropriation that have been established by 'the society' (and therefore can be changed).

When the dominant ownership model is allowed full rein, waste is just one of the ways it damages society. Wendell Berry's (1982) 'vagrant sovereigns' are empowered into delinquent behaviours (see figure 2.6). Pariah land uses (Greenburg *et. al.* 2008) that undermine the quality of the local environment trigger downward spirals of decay. The imbalance of power between owners and users erodes investment by the latter (Clark 2005). The model ignores community. The "law does not agonise over this issue… The interests of a community have no formal status; they are not, for example, property rights. In the law's eye, they are only sentiment" (Sax 1984: 506).

Figure 2.6: Delinquent behaviours (Campaign Against Delinquent Ownership 2015)



Most egregiously of all, the dominant model enables the appropriation of the 'social increment' by private profiteers. As Henry George explained in 1884:

> "there arises, over and above the value which individuals can create for themselves, a value which is created by the community as a whole, and which, attaching to land, becomes tangible, definite and capable of computation and appropriation. As society grows, so grows this value, which springs from and represents in tangible form what society as a whole contributes to production, as distinguished from what is contributed by individual exertion" (George 1884: 295).

Winston Churchill famously called land "the mother of all other forms of monopoly" and the capture of land value uplift "the principal form of unearned increment… derived from processes which are not merely not beneficial, but which are positively detrimental to the general public" (Churchill 1909). In a 1907 speech he said "There are only two ways in which people can acquire wealth. There is Production and there is Plunder" (quoted in Hill 2015: 22-23).

Given the social increment, and since "land lies out of doors, it cannot be hid or carried off" (George 1884: 288), it is astonishing that it is so barely taxed. Parvin describes the feudal genesis of this calamity and makes the 21st century plea against 'the land value capture industry': "If we *really* want to prevent climate collapse, renew our society and build a successful, prosperous market economy, we will need to fix this obsolete right of extraction that is coded into the foundations of our society, this dysfunction that is coded into the foundations of our economy, this injustice that is coded into the foundations of our democracy" (2020: npn). Indeed, far from shifting towards 'a new land contract', our relationship with land and property has become, increasingly disastrously, financialised (Fields 2017; Christophers 2017).

What would property look like if we committed fully to the idea of it as first and foremost relational? Davina Cooper speaks of "property organized around relations of belonging rather than control" (2007: 627). We will see this, at least aspirationally and some of the time achieved, in the Granby and White Rock case studies. What would be different if it was widely recognised there are lots of ways of organising property, including some not yet invented? Gibson-Graham's powerful interventions (1996, 2006), pointing out rather than inventing the multiplicity of 'diverse economies', are a guide to what is necessary in the field of property rights, claims, and relations. Once people understand they have options, perhaps the Land Narrative can be shaken. Parvin (2020: npn) asserts that our current land system "is perfectly designed to never, *ever*, give us" what we know we want. He outlines a new land contract as the answer:

> "So, as a landowner, you shouldn't be a Lord over anyone, you should be a steward; you are effectively renting a piece of land from Everyone for as long as you want it, and in return you should pay a proportionate ground rent — or 'Land Value Tax' (though I don't like that term) — back to the community for its use" (Parvin 2020)

However, recognising that this is unlikely to be implemented in the real estate market (not least because it would require "a government of extraordinary vision, courage and skill"), Parvin offers four other approaches he says could be taken right now:

1. Public buy-backs of private rented property (saving £6bn a year)
2. Allow local authorities to buy agricultural/ex-industrial land at current value

and use the uplift created by the community to pay for community infrastructure or to keep the land affordable.

3. National Land Trust and Building Society "that slowly buys land from under people's homes, and then leases it back"
4. Fairhold – public authorities buy land and licence it to steward organisations who pay a fair ground rent

I hope that this thesis will begin to add a fifth option: political support and financial resources for self-renovating neighbourhoods to enable localised community acquisitions of all kinds of property (according to local priorities) so that it becomes normal for there to be commons in every town centre and many city neighbourhoods. If ownership is power, let us both think critically about ownership and collectively become 'owners', in whichever ways are possible, so people can choose together how to hold and use that power rather than be continually locked out of our shared uplift.

Alongside and intertwined with the dominant ownership model is a dominant approach to 'regeneration' that will be explored further in the chapters on Granby and White Rock, as well as in Chapter 9. This focuses on competition between places to attract 'higher and better uses'. For those places seen as unable to do so, the only viable option proposed is 'renewal', which usually involves the physical wiping-clean of existing urban spatial formatting for replacement by a newly-engineered population. Additionally, the professional players in the regeneration game, whether technocratic or entrepreneurial, jump like grasshoppers between places, cutting-and-pasting 'transformational' delivery plans and insisting that 'what works' is what they know how to do, even when it clearly has not 'worked' so far or elsewhere.

Jean-Luc Nancy contrasts the French terms *globalisation* and *mondialisation*. As his translator notes: "At stake in this distinction is nothing less than two possible destinies of our humanity, of our time" (2007: 1). In opposition to *globality* – "totality grasped as a whole… enclosure in the undifferentiated sphere of a unitotality" – he offers *world-forming* as an expansive process at the world's horizon, a space of relationality and possible meanings held in common and able to become an object of thought specifically *because* globalisation is the 'fact' that is destroying the world (ibid: 1-2, 35-6).

My argument in this thesis is that the concept and praxis of self-renovating neighbourhoods is a 'world-forming' response to 'failed' ownership/development/ regeneration regimes. Until relatively recently I held onto the belief that if only we could show persuasively that 'the old regeneration is dead and so it should be' (Steele 2012: 53) we would be allowed to try something different. Coming to understand more fully the ongoing systemic, discursive and physical violence with which contemporary capitalism is upheld, its mutually-constituting impacts in every field, and its Alien-like ability to infiltrate and suffocate, has squelched that naïveté.

And yet… over the same time period I have been directly engaged in the birthing and expansion of a new commons with impressive physicality and inspirational narrative. So I bring with me Lefebvre, Massey, Butler, Harvey, Nancy, Soja, Gibson-Graham, Blomley and all those who seek to *unsettle (space, discourse, capitalism, property)*, as we zoom in to see what TINA looks like at the neighbourhood level when the multiplicities and openness of space, time, the economy and property become reduced to a false and offensive binary that will be explored in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3: THE FALSE CHOICE FOR NEIGHBOURHOODS

Poorer, more derided, stigmatised, undervalued, devalued places[9] are treated in a particular way that has been naturalised but must be problematised. One recurring element is that they tend to experience, at some point and for some over many decades, the 'offer' of a particular binary false choice: gentrification or decline, backed by the full force of TINA.

Heads, you gentrify – replace the people with those of a higher social class. This can either happen though the market (including the individualised choices of 'pioneer gentrifiers'), which neoliberals view as the market working properly or, if the market is not working, it can be done through/by/with the support of the state as we will see in both case studies. We will return to gentrification in the next section.

Tails, you decline. If the financial and intellectual resources are not in place to imagine or implement neighbourhood change through gentrification then instead there will be some kind of 'managed decline'. Notwithstanding the more organically de/recomposing features of weather, pigeons, pollution, and time, it is important to recognise that decline is always also a managed process. As we will see, in Granby the police, council and housing associations were all making choices that *implemented* decline. In Hastings the market was making choices with the same effect – not only the failure to invest but also the 'farming of dereliction'; not just passive choices about what not to do but active choices that *sustained the production* of dereliction.[10]

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[9] In a UK context this would mean those in the '20% most deprived' category in the Index of Multiple Deprivation, ie. the bottom quintile of neighbourhoods of around 1500 people, measured by economic activity, income levels, crime rates, education, health and other measures of disadvantage.

[10] I use 'dereliction' in its usual sense of the physical decay of built fabric, but it is worth exploring its other meanings. It comes from the Latin *res derelicta*, defined by Duhaime's Law Dictionary as "a thing that has been abandoned and has become ownerless". Interestingly, if something is *res derelicta*, it is not capable of being stolen and no theft occurs in its appropriation. Saw Cheng Lim has explored 'the law of abandonment and the passing of property in trash' (2011): the Singapore High Court held in 2020 that a person cannot commit theft of an item that has been discarded by its owner. Our trouble, of course, is that the transmogrification of the physical asset into a financial asset means that it has not been abandoned until it leaves the spreadsheet, whatever the state of the building close up. Perhaps it is time to present a legal case that connects physical dereliction to

3.1 The Imposition of the False Choice

If a place is deteriorated hard enough for long enough it will actually begin to disappear – buildings will fall down, be burned, flooded and otherwise helped on their entropic way; people (who matter) won't live there anymore. Decline is the setting up of the future shift to a 'higher and better use'. It's the slow-fast-slow attritional removal of what's in the way of the flow of capital into rent gaps. Usually that's people; sometimes it's physical, such as historic buildings or polluted land. Decline presses down on land values to maximise the profit at the moment of transformation. At some point in the future there will be an opportunity for change, and because capital is so mobile it has the time to wait, it can go elsewhere for the moment. States and urban governments are not mobile but they are capable of *distracted patience* – they can also wait it out, as we will see in both Granby and White Rock.

For the people directly experiencing that decline, tethered for all kinds of reasons to their place, it appears that there are no other options. TINA is not in itself an ideological or political position, although as "an image in which the world is being made" (Massey 2005: 5, 84), it is associated with the protection of existing power. Rather it is the ongoing, agile and everywhere foreclosure of possibility (Gibson-Graham 2006: 106). It's a silent killer. As Chomsky says: "The basic principle, rarely violated, is that what conflicts with the requirements of power and privilege *does not exist*" (Chomsky 1992: 79, my emphasis).

I am concerned with the particular *gentrification / decline TINA* as a fundamental element in sustaining the false choice, the ongoing reproduction of capital and state power, and the negation of grassroots responses.

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res derelicta abandonment and enables an 'ownerless' transfer to a suitable community organisation? Hoag (2014) stretches the term to include people 'forsaken' by society. See also Scottish Community Right to buy abandoned, neglected or detrimental land (https://www.gov.scot/policies/land-reform/community-right-to-buy-abandoned-neglected-or-detrimental-land/).

Figure 3.1: A Rant about the Bins (2015), Hazel Tilley

So, houses are knocked down, because someone who's never walked down Granby Street knows how to improve our area, and the best way for us to live.

And people are moved out, because the shops are closing down

And the area's neglected.

And the other people, the ones who know the best way for us to live, smell money

So, they ignore the history of each brick and slate and skirting board.

Of each life spent in each house.

They interfere with the little lives of little people, who don't know the best way to live.

They neglect how each house, and life and family, how each street, came together.

And the people who know the best way for us to live remove the lead from the roofs of the houses they emptied.

To stop it being stripped and stolen and sold by us, who don't know the best way for us to live.

So that we can't buy drink and drugs or heating or food or pay our bedroom tax or buy a present for those we love, who also don't know the best way for us to live.

And money and ideas and promises change hands between the people who know the best way for us to live and the people they consult

Because they too, the expensively useless consultants know the best way for us to live.

And what of us? The people who don't know the best way for us to live.

We remain unseen, unheard and neglected like the houses.

And rain penetrates the houses and the floorboards weep.

And the people who know the best way for us to live are shocked by our audacity and stubbornness.

When we refuse to change the way we live – even though it might not be the best way for us to live.

When we refuse to leave our homes and agree with their consultants.

When we ignore the wisdom of the people who know the best way for us to live

And we make something of the neglect of shops and houses and people.

And build gardens in our streets and make space for a market and dreams

We can do this, because we don't know the best way for us to live.

And other people visit us, they come to see the people who don't know the best way to live.

And they write about us and film us and paint us and make art in our streets.

And they congratulate us on our stubbornness and audacity.

And the plants and the dreams grow, in a messy, organic way, and our stubbornness and audacity grow too

And the rain penetrates the houses and the floorboards weep.

And the people who know the best way for us to live, smell money.

So they pretend to listen and tell us, when they need publicity, how great we are.

Even though we don't know the best way for us to live.

And they promise 'to keep us together' when they buy our houses from us

And we refuse to change the way we live.

And the politicians change, and the people who know the best way for us to live run out of money

And break their promises, and feel it's a shame that we had audacity and stubbornness;

And they just don't know how to help us and they shake their head and walk away.

And the plants grow and our dreams shine

And the rain penetrates the house and the floorboards weep.

And us, the people who don't know the best way for us to live, cheered

And we carried on being stubborn and audacious and we gathered together and think we might smell money now, being a small part of the Big Sodding Society.

But the people who know the best way for us to live, fill our nostrils with bureaucracy and virtual paper and tell us 'we are on your side' and smile and say 'we share your values', and whisper aside, 'but you can't share our money'.

But they know the best way for us to live, so they give away the houses they let rot and scatter a crumb or two towards us, the people who don't know the best way for us to live.

Listen up now, you don't know the best way for us to live

And you don't share our values.

You, who think you know the best way for us to live, who squabble over the bones of power and pose for the smell of money,

Who can't imagine the way we want to live and whose values are such that they can't be shared by our values.

You don't know the best way for us to live.

You moved people who didn't want to move, you tried to close us up and sweep us into corners.

You saw a 'big picture' and a 'whole solution', and where you saw messy, we experienced variety and home and life.

And when you couldn't shut us down, you left us, the people who don't know the best way for us to live, with the rain penetrating our roofs and our floorboards weeping. You, with your talk of the World in One City, break up the heart of it and leave its history to crumble.

And we don't go away and bit by bit we reclaim our streets.

You don't help, you can't think small enough to know what to do with people and their messy, organic, piecemeal lives, with dreams and values and who have found a way to live.

And in a messy and piecemeal way the rain stops penetrating the houses and the weeping floorboards and comforted and people move in and streets light up.

And sometimes, on Wednesday, the bin men drive round. And nobody gave much thought to where we keep the bins

Not even you, the lots and lots of you, who know the best way for us to live.

And what of the bins I hear you say?
Well that's for another rant on another day.

The message of politicians and planners to poor neighbourhoods is that decline means: *something bad has happened, it's probably your fault, you must compete your way out of this*. Depending on structural and perspectival positions, this imperative will be phrased with different pronouns ('we need to get our act together'), but more often it will be directed squarely at the spatialised entity ('Granby needs to be demolished and rebuilt', 'White Rock has a rotting heart'). I will return to the anthropomorphism of the neighbourhood-self in Chapters 7 and 9. For now the point is that decline is portrayed as the neighbourhood 'letting itself go' and 'letting itself down'.

Decline refers to a poisonous combination of physical dereliction, lack of economic opportunity, and social problems including crime and 'antisocial behaviour'. These will be present as' firstspace'/material (rotting buildings) and 'secondspace'/mental (deprivation showcasing in funding bids), but mostly they are 'thirdspace'/lived (the all-encompassing, never fully knowable feeling of the neighbourhood).[11] Frequently what looks like 'decline' to outsiders can be a vibrant, exciting, supportive community for those involved. Driving back into New Cross (south east London) aged 21 with a friend from the north I was horrified when he said the word 'slums' under his breath.

Statistics of social inequality such as the life expectancy figures for Hastings (Whitty 2021: 63) are important reminders of the seriousness of 'decline' in the face of an 'aesthetics of decay' noted by Trigg (2006) and others (DeSilvey 2006; Pinder 2005). We may be grateful for Urbex enthusiasts finding ways into spaces left to dereliction but their focus is on first-hand experience and establishing their own credibility through documentation: there is little to no critique as to why Detroit has so many ruins in the first place (Mott and Roberts 2013: 231-3). Indeed there is a whole genre of photography known as "ruin porn" (Greco 2011), inspired by the wrecked spaces of Detroit. Leary (2011) contrasts the aestheticization of poverty with the lack of interest in its origins and the romanticising of "isolated acts of resistance without acknowledging the massive political and social forces aligned against the real transformation, and not just stubborn survival, of the city".

[11] See Figure 2.2: Spatial Triads

Leary lays out the three uses of the term 'Detroit' – metonym, lament, utopia. In the first Detroit stands in for other things: the motor industry, the death of industrial capitalism, the bankruptcy of urban government, etc. The lament is preoccupied with loss, mournful in tone and viscerally focused on the spatial "the empty lots, the derelict buildings, the overwhelming vastness of a city mutilated by freeways and marked by more vacant land than it can ever plausibly develop" (Leary 2011). In photographic form, the aestheticism and postmodern detachment of the lament jars with the social violence of the history being depicted. The 'utopians' Leary calls "well-meaning defenders of the city's possibilities" and local entrepreneurs persisting against the odds. He asks: "If Detroit is really so full of possibilities, why do so many of the possibilities so closely resemble a cut-rate version of what western Brooklyn already looks like?". Here he is describing the false choice of gentrification or decline, whereas my own inspiring experience in Detroit with Grace Lee Boggs and other community organisers was of a more genuine and critical 'utopia in progress' of a type we will revisit in Chapter 9, along with considering the dangers of its co-option.

My aim in this thesis is not only to shine light on the processes behind the false choice and pay respect to the experience on the ground – how neighbourhoods suffer from that 'offer' and how they resist and/or survive it – but also to show that there are indeed alternatives and to investigate one approach in detail. This method is what Soja called "thirding-as-othering" to crack open and disorder the binarisation of power: "The assertion of the Other term disrupts the logical and epistemological foundations of the binary" (Soja 1996: 188). This thesis explores what that alternative other might be, who might do it, what is involved, what the potential emergent neighbourhood might look like. And how those practices that create and sustain that neighbourhood might be disruptive of capitalism, or at least of the false choice: can these practices make people realise that there is no binary in that binary? The actual opposition is between imposed 'solutions' which seek to manage neighbourhood poverty in a state of decline until it disappears or can be swept away, and those locally-tethered people and organisations who have the temerity to think they could do better, often by growing change (relatively) quietly in the cracks of dereliction. In other words, this is a battle between state-supported neoliberalism and upstart neighbourhoods.

3.2. Gentrification as an 'Option'

> "The question the gentrification critics have to address is what would they do? Would they like to turn back the clock, to the urban dereliction and decay of 40 years ago, or would they accept that gentrification may have some positive benefits? … *They can't have it both ways*." Chris Hamnett, 2008

> "Gentrification is treated as the only conceivable remedy for pathological 'urban dereliction and decay'. Those in the path of urban transformation are presented with a false choice: they can either have decay or gentrification. There is no alternative." Tom Slater, 2009

There is a large gentrification studies literature and numerous reviews of it. I do not seek to reproduce those here (on the Euro-American literature see Lees, Slater and Wyly 2008, 2010; for a more global view see Lees, Shin and Lopez-Morales 2016; for a recent review see Lees with Phillips 2018). However, this study is located in the field of gentrification studies by the very fact that I am trying to dispel the 'false choice urbanism' that suggests gentrification as the only alternative to inevitable decline. I want to explore how self-renovating neighbourhoods can challenge that common sense and the poisonous offer of 'gentrification or decline'. Responding to Hamnett, we don't need it 'both ways', we want it otherwise.

There are two reasons why this a 'false' choice. The binary does not hold under scrutiny, and the TINA (There Is No Alternative) hegemony both misses current realities and constrains future possibilities.

The binary choice has long been questioned by academic authors. Whether using empirically-grounded approaches or more abstract theorising, they have shown these 'options' as two sides of the same coin, opposites but intimately related (see Lees and Demeritt 1998 on 'sin' and 'sim' city), or indeed as a continuum, the peaks and troughs of a wave, the flow of capital into and out of areas. For Neil Smith, drawing on Marxist dialectics, reinvestment and disinvestment were intimately linked in the 'locational seesaw' of capitalism stalking ground rents or "the successive development, underdevelopment, and redevelopment of given areas as capital jumps from one place to another, then back again, both creating and destroying its own opportunities for development" (Smith 1982:151).

Marcuse (1985) took to pieces the assertion that gentrification and abandonment are polar opposites, showing instead the intimate relationship, the 'vicious circle' in which "while neither process causes the other, each is part of a single pattern and accentuates the other" (1985: 197). His explanation is worth quoting in full:

> "Abandonment drives some higher-income households out of the city, while it drives others to gentrifying areas close to downtown. Abandonment drives some lower-income households to adjacent areas, where pressures on housing and rents are increased. Gentrification attracts higher income households from other areas in the city, reducing demand elsewhere, and increasing tendencies to abandonment. In addition, gentrification displaces lower income people—increasing pressures on housing and rents. Both abandonment and gentrification are linked directly to changes in the economic polarization of the population. A vicious circle is created in which the poor are continuously under pressure of displacement and the wealthy continuously seek to wall themselves within gentrified neighbourhoods. Far from a cure for abandonment, gentrification worsens the process" (Marcuse 1985: 196).

In Marcuse's field at the time (1980s New York City) and in his theory, both abandonment and gentrification led to displacement. While his work is undoubtedly US based, and abandonment is far less of a feature of British cities in general, nevertheless it is fully relevant to both Granby and White Rock (and potentially other neighbourhoods where self-renovating might be an optimal approach).

In arguing against the false choice of 'gentrification or decline' – both of which can lead to displacement – it is worth reprising Marcuse's four forms of displacement. If we are to argue that there is an alternative we need to show whether and how such an alternative might mitigate displacement on all levels. I return to this question specifically in relation to the case studies in Chapter 10.

The most obvious and most measured is direct last-resident displacement – people pushed out directly by gentrification or abandonment through physical 'winkling', reinforced dereliction, or economic 'price-hike' mechanisms (Newman and Wyly 2006). Beyond direct displacement, Marcuse highlighted three other types, including 'direct chain', those *previously* forced to leave by abandonment, demolition or redevelopment. There is another crucial field of people who are greyed-out spectres

missing from the spreadsheets of Decision Makers: those people who might have but won't move in in future because of gentrification or abandonment. These people *who will go somewhere else instead* are unresearchable but they matter in the theory because the place will be really different due to their absence. '"When one household vacates a housing unit voluntarily and that unit is then gentrified or abandoned so that another similar household is prevented from moving in, the number of units available to the second household in that housing market is reduced. The second household, therefore, is excluded from living where it would otherwise have lived" (Marcuse 1985: 206). This 'exclusionary displacement' is particularly relevant to White Rock and Granby – both places with a strong sense of who might have been part of the future, and a fear that they might be lost to the detriment of local diversity.

Marcuse's other innovation was the concept of displacement pressure – the overwhelming sense of change because of gentrification or abandonment. While Marc Fried's work in the 1960s made visible the grief that displaced people feel (Fried 1966), Caitlin Cahill's work with young women experiencing cultural dislocation *even while they stayed* in the Lower East Side voiced their "viscerally local and intensely personal" experience of "both a social betrayal and a public assault on their subjectivities" (2006: 335). Atkinson has shown a similar experience for actual and 'symbolic' displacees in Sydney and Melbourne, stressing that alongside actual physical dislocation there is for others still residing in the neighbourhood a "symbolic violence that they locate in a changing built environment and a shifting social physiognomy that impinges and threatens the viability of their tenure of these places" (2015: 373). He suggests there is an 'incumbent unanchoring' or 'unhoming' that occurs whether or not people are actually forced to move away (see also Elliot-Cooper, Hubbard and Lees 2019). Both Atkinson and Cahill locate this dislocation and resentment within "a sociopolitical context that celebrates ownership and investment in the very homes and places that are now lost to them" (Cahill 2006: 345). The long process of gentrification in a still-disinvested place like the Lower East Side is experienced as a deepening of inequalities. The neoliberal framing of poor people as problems to be pushed out of the "circle of deservingness" is required in order to secure public consent for the inevitable 'social costs' of 'upscaling' the neighbourhood (Cahill 2006: 346). This

becomes even clearer in the 'mixed communities' programmes of 'gentrification by stealth' (Bridge, Butler, and Lees 2012) in which the public is invited to collude in the common sense urbanism that any kind of gentrification is better than 'nothing'.[12]

Newman and Wyly (2006) and Atkinson (2015) bookend a decade of scholars arguing that the boosterist interpretations of displacement (Freeman 2005, 2008; Freeman and Braconi 2004), which received the most media attention (see for example Kiviat 2008 and Davidson 2014), missed huge swathes of the story. Despite methodological shortcomings and lack of nuance (see Lees et al 2020), the 'new evidence' "rapidly jumped out of the scholarly cloister to influence policy debates that have been ripped out of context…[and] to dismiss concerns about [policies and strategies] designed to break up the concentrated poverty that has been taken as the shorthand explanation for all that ails the disinvested inner city" (Newman and Wyly 2006: 25).

Slater (2006, 2009, 2014) has provided a running commentary on this link between gentrification and disinvestment in which he rightly and consistently refers to James DeFilippis (2004). "Perhaps a key victory for opponents of gentrification would be to find ways to communicate more effectively that either unliveable disinvestment and decay or reinvestment and displacement is actually a false choice for low-income communities" (DeFilippis 2004: 89, quoted in Slater 2006: 753).

The subjects of both Cahill's (2006) and Atkinson's (2015) research, and of Lees' (2014) description of the injustice of 'new urban renewal' on the Aylesbury Estate, clearly demonstrate the point that "investment and disinvestment do not represent some sort of moral conundrum, with the former somehow, on balance, 'better' than the latter. Nor does investment represent some sort of magical remedy for those who have lived through and endured decades of disinvestment" (Slater 2014: 521).

The antagonistic starting point for several academics (Lees, Slater and Wyly 2008;

[12] This was a frequent response from Cllr Jeremy Birch, Labour leader of Hastings Council until his sudden death in 2015. The narrative continues: in March 2021 Everton community leaders on a visit to Hastings were still saying "we'd welcome a bit of gentrification".

Slater 2014) is Andres Duany, an architect and 'new urbanist' planner who in 2001 wrote "Three Cheers for Gentrification" for a right-wing American think tank magazine. Duany argued that "cities like Detroit [etc] could use all the gentrification they can get… [It] rebalances a concentration of poverty by providing the tax base, rub-off work ethic, and political effectiveness of a middle class, and in the process improves the quality of life for all of a community's residents. It is the rising tide that lifts all boats" (Duany 2001: 36). As banal, misleading and persistent as 'trickle-down', this 'rising tide' is at the heart of the state-led pro-gentrification policies that have carried this very common perspective forward (Blomley 2004; Bridge, Butler and Lees 2012). DeFilippis has argued that since people in low-income neighbourhoods "are facing the 'choices' of either continued disinvestment and decline in the quality of the homes they live in, or reinvestment that results in their displacement", reinvestment can no longer be seen as a desirable end in and of itself and that what people in low-income neighbourhoods lack is not resources but "power and control over even the most basic components of life – that is, the places called home" (DeFilippis 2004: 89). Slater made it explicit as "the false choice between gentrification (a form of reinvestment) and a 'concentration of poverty' (disinvestment)" (2014: 518).

Slater (2014: 519) quotes a *New York* magazine article (Davidson 2014) entitled 'Is Gentrification All Bad': "Economic flows can be reversed with stunning speed: gentrification can nudge a neighborhood up the slope; decline can roll it off a cliff. Somewhere along that trajectory of change is a sweet spot, a mixed and humming street that is not quite settled or sanitized, where Old Guard and new arrivals coexist in equilibrium. The game is to make it last". As discussed in Chapter 2, this is a false portrayal of the temporal nature of spaces and places as following an inevitable linear path of capitalist development. Slater slams this 'game' that sets the urbanist's holy grail on the middle ground between 'up the slope' and 'decline', as if capitalist logics can be halted at a moment of our choosing. He argues that we need to overcome the "tenacious and constrictive dualism of 'prosperity' (gentrification) or 'blight' (disinvestment) *by showing how the two are fundamentally intertwined in a wider process of capitalist urbanisation and uneven development* that creates profit and class privilege for some whilst stripping many of the human need of shelter…. Despite many

attempts to sugar-coat it and celebrate it, gentrification, both as term and process, has always been about class struggle" (Slater 2014: 519, emphasis in original).

In this summary building on Neil Smith's work, Slater ferociously makes my point about the false binary but fails to go beyond this critical analysis and illuminate what might be possible instead. This lack of attention to alternatives that *both* stimulate neighbourhood improvement *and* take explicit action to prevent displacement has been a wider and significant failure of gentrification studies. The *New York* article suggested that "gentrification can be either a toxin or a balm. There's the fast-moving, invasive variety nourished by ever-rising prices per square foot; then there's a more natural, humane kind that takes decades to mature and lives on a diet of optimism and local pride" (Davidson 2014). My argument is that the 'humane' version is not gentrification at all but self-renovating neighbourhoods taking explicit action to prevent displacement.

3.3 The people who will participate

While I have argued above that there is a false choice for neighbourhoods between gentrification and disinvestment, there is no doubt that in this unequal world some people do have choices. The conventional critique of Smith's rent-gap thesis was its lack of attention to the role of human agency in the process (Ley 1996). By contrast, classic 'consumption' explanations of gentrification open the door to a focus on choices. However, this preference-driven approach only gives space for the choices of gentrifiers, originally formulated as individual middle class 'pioneers' but later including private developers, financial institutions and state actors (see Lees, Slater and Wyly 2008 for a summary of these 'production' and 'consumption' theories of gentrification).

Alongside the false choice of gentrification or decline, there is a false binary between rapacious gentrifiers and low-income displaced which leaves no space for 'the TARA people', those who will participate in creating diverse economies. Perhaps they have been lying in wait beneath the burden of the previously-available processes of

gentrification and decline. They have been proving their 'survivability', 'staying put' in the face of "the everyday, visceral realities" (Lees, Annunziata and Rivas-Alonso 2018: 2), and awaiting an opportunity to choose differently. Their acts count as economic because they relate to material survival "including, to name just some, trust, care, sharing, reciprocity, cooperation, coercion, bondage, thrift, guilt, love, equity, self-exploitation, solidarity, distributive justice, stewardship, spiritual connection, and environmental and social justice" (Gibson-Graham 2014: S151).

Not all incomers to poor neighbourhoods are yuppies. Rose (1984) asked long ago why we think the initial in-movers have anything in common with the affluent end-stage residents except that their household incomes are (usually) higher than the previous residents. These moderate-income newcomers she called 'marginal gentrifiers' and argued that they are not making a lifestyle choice (in the sense of "unbridled choice influenced only by fashion") but rather there is a considerable need given the nature of the available alternatives (1984: 5). They have often been women, LGBT+ and other minorities who do not move to 'gentrify' the inner city just because they cannot afford the suburbs but because they couldn't carry on their lifestyle 'out there'. A version of this continues to be relevant for many people. Older inner-city neighbourhoods, with housing in a range of smaller sizes, continue to "facilitate access to community services, enable shared use of facilities, provide an efficient and non-isolating environment for reproductive work, and enhance opportunities for women to develop locally based friendship networks and a supportive environment… As yet, few new communities have been designed with such goals in mind, and thus existing inner-city neighbourhoods have been the foci of such efforts at developing alternatives" (1984: 64). Four decades later, Rose's conclusion stands: those old neighbourhoods, rather than greenfield utopias, remain the best ground for developing a DIY alternative to gentrification or decline.

Rose stressed that we "should not assume all gentrifiers have the same class positions as each other and that they are 'structurally' polarised from the displaced" (1984: 67) and went further to argue that there could be common cause between pre-gentrification residents and initial in-movers, particularly in the 'sphere of everyday

life'. Presciently for Granby and White Rock she suggests they could "work together to develop housing alternatives that would provide them with the same 'ontological security' as homeownership, but without upward redistributions of wealth and compatible with, or even dovetailing with, the needs of low-income tenants" (ibid: 65).

Indeed the people Rose describes are the people who led the 'accidental transformations' mentioned in the Introduction: the student teachers and social workers, musicians and artists of Crossfield estate in the 1970s and 80s, the West Indian families of 1960s and 70s Upper Brockley. They were not 'gentry' through financial clout but their collective resourcefulness distinguished them from the incumbent residents, without necessarily dividing them. Those who moved into Granby in the 1960s, 70s and 80s and many of the DFLs (Down From Londons) to arrive in Hastings over the 40 years to 2015 were of this marginal type, making consciously alternative choices in limited circumstances. While such 'pioneering' by the intangibly resourceful may appear 'old-hat' to gentrification scholars, these 'joiners-not-colonisers' remained a significant incoming demographic for Hastings that has only changed in the past few years.

It is a defining feature of these marginal incomers that they soon become embedded in the neighbourhood, making use of its existing markets and facilities, mingling with the incumbent population while also developing specific services to fill any gaps in meeting their own needs. In general they are coming because the place is cheap and/or because they like the edginess of its reputation and the experience of its diversity. These are pioneer gentrifiers, no doubt. The question is whether they will or should take responsibility for the later phase of gentrification. And the answer, as will become clear later in the thesis, rests in whether they notice and how they choose to prepare for and respond to that foreshadowed tsunami.

Japonica Brown-Saracino (2004) reminds us that the variety of social actors in a locality are distinguished by perspectival positions as well as material hierarchy. Clark rightly criticised Brown-Saracino's simplistic caricature of the gentrification field which she accused of only considering gentrifiers as pioneers and reminded her that "there are

other players besides newcomers and old timers: capital and the state" (2011: 191). Nevertheless, I find her concept of 'social preservationist' useful in looking for 'the TARA people'. Social preservation is "the culturally motivated choice… to live in authentic social space embodied by the sustained presence of old-timers" (Brown-Saracino 2004: 135). She makes the point that "the 'original' residents that embody the 'authentic' community are 'original' only in the sense that they were there before the social preservationists arrived. This notion does not acknowledge the long history of neighborhood succession" (ibid: 154). This is interesting in the context of Hastings 'born and bred' versus DFLs in which there is a recognition of succession over decades. People ask 'how long have you been here?' and they are impressed by anything more than ten years (ie before 2010) perhaps because that timeframe signals you came before Hastings began to slough off its territorial stigmatisation.[13]

"Social preservationists derive their identity as much from who they are not, or where they do not live, as from who they are or where they do live" (Brown-Saracino 2004: 147) – the choice to live in a particular place is 'a mode of self-definition'. They are prepared to work hard to prevent the neighbourhood becoming inauthentic, but first they "engage in the construction of the old-timers they later work to preserve" (ibid: 140) using complicated and often contradictory criteria to differentiate, often glamorising old-timers' financial struggles. I recognise this in the contrast we draw in Hastings between 'people who scrape a living' versus commuters, second homers and, more recently, the post-pandemic move-in zoomers (Bryson et al 2021). Brown-Saracino highlights the importance of strong social networks in the authentic community, reflecting that membership is predicated on insider knowledge and relationships with other old-timers.

The 'authentic' community is a matter of kith and kin and the webs between them; it "possesses children, extended families, economic diversity, social interaction, ethnic groups, civic involvement, old-timers, their accompanying traditions, and social networks" (Brown-Saracino 2004: 145). Yet the construction of authenticity goes

[13] Since 2020 it has become increasingly likely that people respond in terms of months or even weeks.

beyond the construction of 'real people' to decide what constitutes the 'real place', leading us into the realm of heritage conservation. Granby and White Rock (especially the America Ground) are both imagineered places where 'conservation' is an attempt to sustain and reincarnate the inheritance (Labrador 2013). While gentrifiers may seek to preserve "aesthetic vestiges of the neighbourhood's past" (ibid 2004: 138), social preservationists aim to preserve actual residents, and the potential for similar residents to live there in future. They are therefore vehemently anti-displacement in all four forms outlined by Marcuse (1985) and particularly attuned to displacement pressure – the foreboding sense of exclusionary change. They generally would only sanction change they see as organic, careful, improving what's already there, 'renewal without destruction' (see Steele 1999). "Social preservationists express a basic distaste for affluent newcomers, whose presence, like a bulldozer in the natural wilderness, threatens the social wilderness" (Brown-Saracino 2004: 146).

Rose (1984) and Brown-Saracino (2004) were clearly describing different time periods and contexts but I think they are describing a type of motivation that is similar, lasting and relevant to SRN. Are Rose's 'marginal gentrifiers' social preservationists, pioneer gentrifiers, or are they just looking for a place that is affordable and tolerant? Perhaps they become social preservationists when they realise that their affordable, tolerant, diverse places are under threat from more affluent gentrifiers?

Brown-Saracino acknowledges that social preservationists sometimes become gentrifiers and that the practice of social preservation can lead to neighbourhood reinvestment that may facilitate gentrification. So the boundaries are not clear-cut for specific individuals, yet she argues strongly that "social preservationists are not merely a variant of gentrifiers but an entirely different 'species'" (2004: 136), before clarifying that gentrifiers and social preservationists are not culturally or demographically distinct but *ideologically* distinct. I agree! It is this value-based distinction – a willingness to sacrifice private profit for the wider and longer term benefit of the adopted place – that makes all the difference.

> "While gentrification is an investment in the social, economic, and cultural *future* of space, social preservation is an investment of economic, political, and

> cultural resources in the *past and present* social attributes of a place. Gentrifiers seek to tame the 'frontier', while social preservationists work to preserve the wilderness, including its inhabitants, despite their own ability to invest in and benefit from 'improvements' or revitalization" (Brown-Saracino 2004: 136).

I disagree with this differentiation between future-focused gentrifiers and past/ present preservationists. We will see empirically in Hastings and Liverpool the investment that so-called 'social preservationists' make in improvements that also and very deliberately *protects affordability to preserve diversity into the long-term future*.

The 'frontier' meme plays out in various typologies, where incomers could be labelled colonialists, salvationists, or the symbolic consumers of diversity (Butler and Robson 2003). There are those who come to settle our spaces and exploit our resources. There are those who come to save us, to unleash hidden potential and 'transform once-grim neighbourhoods'.[14] And there are those who come to package up 'alternative culture' for sale to the millennial mainstream. Hostile to all of these, social preservationists doggedly seek to protect the 'wilderness',[15] while painfully aware of the impacts of their own relative privilege and "the risk of gentrification and displacement wrought by their very presence" (Brown-Saracino 2004: 152). In Hastings we are trying to turn this hand-wringing into community investment as an action to 'offset the impact of your arrival' [EMP: HoH Investors Collective prospectus 2016].

Whatever they come for, those newcomers that join the neighbourhood – as distinct from the absent forces that continue to shape it – become part of it and will experience first-hand, alongside those previous residents that are able to stay, the crashing waves of uneven geographic development. They will have varied ability to withstand or actively gain from these pressures and therefore varied responses. Following Rose and

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[14] 'Transform once-grim Deptford' was a phrase used by the developer of Broadway Fields in Deptford c.2002

[15] Although 'wilderness' is a very American trope, I think it translates in our context into the 'beyond the pale', 'here be dragons' stigmatised spaces of poverty, what activist Glenn Jenkins (2017), called 'the lands that capitalism forgot for a while'. The contest is between the frontier mentality of those who want to tame it, farm it, level it up, and the social preservation approach which seeks to protect the soul of the place, its roots, diversity, vibrancy, and feel.

Brown-Saracino's notion that some incomers and incumbents may share collective interest and could create alliances, my argument in the next section is that there are alternatives for them to explore together. Tim Butler's (1995) description of the gentrification of Hackney as 'gentle and understated' appears quite shocking in 2022. I would argue that there were many missed opportunities in those early years for incumbents and the first-wave incomers to work together to create permanently decommodified spaces that could have mitigated some of the violence and destructiveness of later waves.

For nearly three decades Loretta Lees has guided and prodded the study of gentrification through its various twists. In 2000 she set out a progressive research programme (Lees 2000: 402) that helped to re-energise gentrification studies and focus attention on context, scale and intersectionality. Lees has continued to guide us, including into studying resistance, survivability (Lees 2014, Lees and Ferreri 2016, Lees, Annunziata and Rivas-Alonso 2018) and the ethnographic biographies (Goldstein 2020: 78) of gentrification impact. And she has done all this as a scholar-activist providing direct and intensive support to local people resisting the gentrification of council estates. Building on this huge body of work about the impacts of gentrification, my aim is to contribute towards a practical conceptualisation of *what could happen otherwise*.

3.4. Getting off the Seesaw: Decommodification & Commoning

Neighbourhoods are seen by geographers as a lower-order spatial scale, but for grassroots activists they can be the bedrock of social change. Consideration of the choices made by incomers (whether social preservationists or rent-gap exploiters, or both) and of the displacement experience of the gentrified (whether physical or psychological), leaves out entirely the idea that 'the neighbourhood' – that is, the incumbents however they are constituted at any given moment in time – could make its own choices.

Kearns and Parkinson (2001), at the peak of 'neighbourhood renewal', captured the false choice in one paragraph. They argued Putnam's (1995) point that bonding capital

creates in-group loyalty but out-group antagonism. And then they offered that on the other hand, for some "aspiring groups with sufficient resources", the neighbourhood can become the focal point for a "coordinated action to create a self-conscious class habitus through processes of gentrification. The neighbourhood can then be the hero or villain of the piece" (Kearns and Parkinson 2001: 2107). But they do not consider an alternative – that there could be coordinated action to create a cross-class, difference-embracing, open, collaborative process in good faith to self-renovate, to make our own neighbourhoods better for us and for others without that being a class-driven aspiration. In which case the neighbourhood is neither hero nor villain, but nursemaid and cradle and outcome, both parent and offspring of the revolution.

With that in mind, the second, and more urgent, reason to challenge the 'false choice' is that it is wrong both factually and ethically to claim there is no alternative to staying on the seesaw, only a question of how to be at the top end. Genuine alternatives are both imaginable and emerging and the TINA hegemony is itself the biggest barrier to their realisation. As David Harvey wrote in 2000 "how come it is that we are so persuaded that 'there is no alternative'?" (2000: 155). Eric Clark asks: can gentrification be avoided? And answers: "Yes, but resistance against gentrification involves a struggle for power over the entry of other entities and events into time-space: not only blocking gentrification, but creating alternative regimes for development" (2010: Slides 68-70). He stresses the three problems that must be overcome in the development of alternatives: the commodification of space, polarized power relations and the "dominance of vision over sight, characteristic of 'the vagrant sovereign' (Berry 1982)" (2010: Slide 11). At the end of *Gentrification*, Lees, Slater and Wyly offer up the decommodification of housing as the way out, but do not elaborate on how that might happen (2008: 271-5).

* * *

Community Land Trusts sit within a wider framework of "transitions beyond the capitalist present" (Chatterton 2016: 407) though not everyone involved would be comfortable with that. John E Davis tells a lovely story about 'the sweet old lady' describing her CLT which is involved in both urban agriculture and affordable housing: "What we are really about is land reform, dear, but we hide behind the tomatoes" (Davis 2017: 50). Everything that CLTs do is focused on locality, yet they are also part of a global practical and philosophical 'program of change'. They are clearly trying to *tether capital to place* (my phrase for what Cox 1998 and DeFilippis 2004 call 'embeddedness'). They are 'the developer that doesn't go away' (Davis 2017: 31; 2015: 4); they focus on stewardship in perpetuity; they trade the chance to speculate for the prize of permanently affordable housing. They challenge "a housing market used to the pleasures and pains of speculating on housing value, which is, economically, fundamentally speculating on the value of a given location, and instead see housing as a necessity of a decent life and a supportive environment for all" (Marcuse 2014).

I believe these attributes make CLT-style ownership a prerequisite for self-renovation. However, although essential, the decommodification of land and buildings is not enough on its own. This section therefore concludes by engaging with the wealth of literature on the urban commons that has emerged in the past decade. This can offer insights to help conceptualise self-renovating neighbourhoods which push the concepts of commoning further to challenge traditional approaches to ownership and regeneration across whole neighbourhoods and thereby to the heart of 'levelling up' policy and practice.

* * *

Although the literature on resistance to gentrification (Hartman et al 1982; Newman and Wyly 2006; Lees and Ferreri 2016; Lees, Annunziata and Rivas-Alonso 2018) is illuminating and important, resistance in itself is not an alternative. Chester Hartman, recognising that "the right to displace is an overwhelming fact of life" (see Lees, Slater and Wyly 2010: 533), put forward 'the right to stay put' as a series of legal, financial, and ultimately political solutions and mitigations for displacement. In most cases

resistance has focused on the disruption of gentrification rather than the development of genuine alternatives (Slater 2009). Indeed, sometimes it has become an end rather than means whereas, in practice and in theory, I would heed Alinsky's warning that "the price of a successful attack is a constructive alternative" ([1971] 1989: 130).

In 2002 DeFilippis asked whether community land trusts and mutual housing associations might be an alternative to "the current emphasis on the defence of council housing and a rejection of alternative, perhaps more progressive, forms of community ownership" (2002: 150). Achtenberg and Marcuse (1986) had already made the clarion call for a genuine alternative when they argued there was

> "an opportunity to develop a broad-based progressive housing movement that can unite low-and moderate-income tenants and homeowners around their common interest in decent, affordable housing and adequate neighbourhoods… a program that can alter the terms of existing public debate on housing and its role in our economic and social system, and that demonstrates how people's legitimate housing needs can be met through an alternative approach" (1986: 475).

Such a programme would require social ownership of housing, social production of housing supply, public control of housing finance capital, social control of land, resident control of neighbourhoods, affirmative action and housing choice, and equitable resource allocation. It would "limit the role of profit from decisions affecting housing, substituting instead the basic principle of socially determined need" (ibid: 476). Marcuse knew that "the large question is not whether abandonment can be avoided, gentrification controlled, displacement eliminated, or even how these things can be done, but rather whether there is the desire to do them. That is a question that can only be answered in the political arena" (ibid: 175). The negative political answer was a tsunami of financial and property deregulation, right to buy and the end of rent control, reductions in public subsidy for affordable housing, the ongoing valorisation of individual home ownership, the demonisation of social renters, and the criminalisation of squatting, to the extent that many of Hartman's sensible suggestions seem hopelessly outdated (such as a call to stop the move to 'the new variable-rate mortgage instruments').

Resistance aims to stop what is happening or, more often, mitigate its impacts for specific people in specific places and times. Whereas to produce alternatives, as Marcuse recognised in the 1980s, requires us to understand what lies beneath the phenomenon of gentrification/decline so that we might actively create different economic, cultural, and political conditions, mobilise support to ease the process of implementation, and disseminate emerging conclusions in real time to feed the rhizomatic spread of post-capitalist commons (Chatterton 2016; Deleuze and Guattari 1987; Forno and Weiner 2020). Developing alternatives has to involve the disruption of dominant understandings of ownership and urban change and the creation of new models of stewardship and renovation.

Newman and Wyly pointed to the 'central dilemma' (2006: 31) between "the use-values of neighbourhood and home versus the exchange values of real estate as a vehicle for capital accumulation". A turbulent decade later, Madden and Marcuse restated it as "a conflict between housing as lived, social space and housing as an instrument for profitmaking" (2016: 4). They also make clear that the so-called 'housing crisis' is in no sense novel for working-class and poor communities: "for the oppressed, housing is always in crisis" (ibid: 10). Since capitalist market practices facilitate disinvestment in order to create opportunities for reinvestment, exploiting commodified housing regardless of the impact on access to its use-value, a key element of any alternative must be to take property out of that market. This has become known as the decommodification of housing.

A significant thread of this process of decommodification has been underway for several decades in the cooperative housing and community land trust movement (though too often its radical intent is 'hidden behind the tomatoes'). Slater's helpful formulation: "It may be more fruitful to think about the decommodification of housing in the context of preventing widening rent gaps from being exploited by the owners of capital" (2009: 309) sounds great, but he gives few clues as to how we should prevent capitalists from exploiting rent gaps. After several years of thinking about and discussing this, the only answer I've found is to bring/buy property into community

freehold and cap the rents with inflation in perpetuity. Nothing I have read in the literature since has offered any better alternative. The history of the community land trust movement is a remarkably coherent (with hindsight?) development of a long-haul argument about what Brown calls “the way land ought to be” in line with her “key moral axes [who, how, what and where] of property enactment” (2007: 508, 514).

Wyler (2017) has traced the notion of self-determining communities from the Roman collegia, via the medieval guilds, to the Civil War radicals, the friendly societies and eventually the coops. At the heart of the modern Community Land Trust is the J S Mill notion of the ‘social increment’, used by Henry George (1884) to argue that landownership creates poverty by capturing for a few the land value uplift generated by the growth and development of the surrounding society. This core idea became a base for Ebenezer Howard (who heard George lecture in London) in establishing leased-land ‘Garden City’ communities; Ralph Borsodi who argued that land should never be individually owned and was the first to use the term ‘land trust’, establishing the School of Living with 30 families holding group title; and Arthur Morgan who founded an influential community landholding experiment through the Tennessee Valley Authority in which no tenant paid more than 25% of salary and the town’s businesses were operated as non-profit coops (see Davis 2014 for a full history).

A different route to a similar destination was Feargus O’Connor’s Chartist villages. With the rejection by Parliament of the 1.2 million-signature Chartist petition in 1839, O’Connor’s Land Plan envisaged a new route to suffrage through a radical extension of the property qualification. His Land and Labour Bank attracted nearly £100,000 investment from 70,000 working people from the slums of the industrial cities to create five villages of cottages and smallholdings between 1846 and 1848. This visionary scheme was eventually destroyed by a hostile press, the Poor Law commissioners (who insisted that it would fail and turn these slum-dwellers into burdens on the rural parishes) and the refusal of Parliament to allow the company legal status leading to the declaration of O’Connor’s scheme as an illegal lottery (Wyler 2017: 81-83); a reminder of Freire’s warning that the powerful will never allow the powerless to organise (“no reality transforms itself”: Freire 1972: 30).

These precursors were land trusts but it was in the US that Bob Swann, working with Slater King (MLK's cousin) added the 'community' element (Meehan 2014). They met through the civil rights movement and both were looking to move beyond 'protest' to what Gandhi called the 'constructive' movement – how to secure the gains of struggle and build a new society "within the shell of the old" (Davis 2017: 49). Most CLT communities remained what Swann later called "nice communities; they were good for the people there, and they were interesting experiments for the time; but they were what I call *enclaves*" (quoted Davis 2014: 28). Inspired by the Village Gift or *grandam* movement in India where land was held in trust by a village council and leased to local famers, and also by the leased-land model emerging in Israel through the Jewish National Fund, Swann and King were determined to use these large-scale land tenure approaches to tackle the plight of African-Americans in the South. In 1969 they established New Communities Inc and bought an old 5,000-acre plantation for a million dollars (originally proposed to be federally funded but when Bobby Kennedy's Office of Economic Opportunity was abolished by Nixon they had to rely on borrowing, burdening the new CLT with $100,000 a year in finance costs).

In 1972 Swann and colleagues wrote *The Community Land Trust* which Davis credits as recognising that "such a radical experiment… could only survive… through the continuing participation of sympathetic outsiders" (2014: 26). In 1978 two new organisations, both established by women, introduced new elements. The Woodland CLT (established by former nun Marie Cirillo) was inspired by tithing to impose resale conditions that kept 10% of the market value for the CLT. The Covenant CLT (established by Sister Lucy Poulin) introduced the concept of a "preferential option for the poor" which Chuck Matthei who had advised both CLTs spent the next 30 years embedding into the CLT movement.

The last half-century has seen the uneven withdrawal of the state and the consistent aggrandisement of capital to the extent that the historically recurring debates about land and how it is to be allocated have been marginalised by the hegemony of the dominant ownership model. Throughout, though, there has been just enough room for

the concept of *community + land + trust* to continue its evolution under the radar. John Emmeus Davis, who has his own long history of involvement in CLTs and has been instrumental in spreading the message more widely, complains that "far less creativity has gone into thinking about land than is regularly devoted to thinking about labor and capital… New ways of owning, controlling or utilizing land for the improvement of distressed places and for the empowerment of the people who live there are rarely considered – or summarily rejected as too difficult to do" (Davis 2015: 1). He contrasts this not only against the creative approaches of the community development sector to work (training, cooperative enterprise and employee ownership) and money (micro-lending, benefit maximisation) but also against the hyper-creative ways that commercial projects find to arrange and allocate the rights, responsibilities, risks and rewards of land.

For Davis the Community Land Trust picks up Howard's mixed-ownership model and adds crucial organisational and operational features. Organisationally a CLT is 'bottom up': responsibility would not lie with "gentlemen of responsible position and of undoubted probity and honour" as Howard ([1898] 2003: 12-13) had described them. Instead "participatory planning and direct democracy began on the day a CLT was organized… This was not development on behalf of a needy population inhabiting a particular place, dictated from above by either a governmental body or a benevolent provider of social housing. It was development from below, initiated and guided by a locality's own residents: community-development on community-owned land" (Davis 2015: 3).

Davis acknowledges that CLTs own and manage a tiny amount of land and property. "When cultural norms, financial prerogatives, and institutional practices are weighted so heavily in favor of land being held as an individual commodity, not as common ground, alternative arrangements for the ownership, development, and stewardship of land are difficult for most people to imagine" (Davis 2015: 4). This failure of imagination has major impacts on the "tough slog down a muddy road" (Davis 2017: 9) of implementation. Public agencies, private lenders, municipal valuers, homebuyers and neighbourhood residents all have to be coaxed out of their usual paradigm.

Sometimes CLT proponents themselves find it hard to stick to the radicalism of their proposition (DeFilippis, Stromberg and Williams 2018; Gray and Galande 2011). Luckily, they continue to find themselves in a wider world of "self-managed and community housing that encompasses self-build and self-help housing, cooperatives, land trusts, eco-villages, low impact dwellings, intentional communities as well as cohousing" (Chatterton 2016: 404). It has been heartening to see in recent years the community-led housing world at last re-connecting to wider practices of community enterprise (it's not all about dwellings) and neighbourhood development ('it takes a village to raise a child'). It has been rare however, to find academic work that sees, let alone theorises, these linkages.

It is worth noting how easily the debates slide between property in general and housing in particular. As an activist who has spent most of my life focused on neighbourhoods, heritage, green space, workspace and welfare, I came late to housing, seeing it as a world for specialists. Instead I built bridges, restored buildings and gardens and piers, ran nurseries and newspapers. These are all important but Madden and Marcuse rightly make the point that housing "has a special capacity to spur the political imagination" (2016: 12) by revealing existing power relationships and allowing for the imagination of alternative social orders. "No other modern commodity is as important for organizing citizenship, work, identities, solidarities, and politics" (ibid: 12). While accepting this point of political precedence, I agree with Pratt (2009) that gentrification studies inadequately synthesise the special category of residential change either with other special categories like retail, tourism and industrial, or with the broader consideration of the gentrification of neighbourhood (which includes: public realm, green space, retail, street corners, churches, signage, and 'legacy' assets/liabilities like piers, theatres, town halls, swimming baths, mission halls, and the rest). The 'right to the city' and the 'politics of the inhabitant' (Lefebvre [1968] 1996) are not only about the fight for 'home'. They are, equally, about 'common pool resource problems' which Ostrom (1990) has shown are unsatisfactorily solved by market and state. "People do not only live in homes. They live in neighbourhoods and communities. They occupy buildings but also locations in a social fabric. A radical right to housing must affirm and protect this web of relations. It must propose new links

between housing and other domains" (Madden and Marcuse 2016: 198).
Such 'rights', I agree with Lefebvre, are not an end-point of inscription by law but a starting point for the struggle to transform the power relations that underlie the production of space at multiple scales (Hubbard and Lees, 2018: 9), part of social struggle not individual entitlement (Mathivet 2016: 22).

> Don't ask f'r rights. Take thim. An' don't let anny wan give thim to ye. A right that is handed to ye fer nawthin has something the mather with it. It's more thin likely it's only a wrong turned inside out." Finley Peter Dunne's Mr Dooley, quoted by Alinsky (1971: 124).

If the dis/re-investment process is the result of the mobility of capital, "a redistribution of wealth from society as a whole to the limited number of individuals who are able to realise wealth from that mobility"(DeFilippis 2004: 5), any alternative approach must find ways to tether capital to place. However, ownership for the common good is not the only task of CLTs. They are also expected "to increase long-term community control of neighborhood resources [and] to empower residents through involvement and participation in the organization" (Gray and Galande 2011: 241). The clarity in the name (community + land + trust) and the historic but uneven links to community organising offer CLTs a potentially key role in neighbourhood development.

Gray and Galande's (2011) research into one North Carolina CLT argued for the critical importance of a community organiser in "keeping 'community' in a Community Land Trust". DeFilippis, Stromberg and Williams found that "community control has been gradually subdued in the implementation of CLTs" (2018: 755), particularly in those more recently created. Although 'community control' has no intrinsic political content, they make the point that for communities that have long endured political and economic marginalisation the goal of community control is inherently radical. As outlined above, the US and UK CLT back-stories are different, particularly in their connection with community organising. UK CLTs began instrumentally in high-price rural areas and only later (since c2011) did community organisers find the CLT model and make it a radical tool for poor, urban areas. Both White Rock and Granby, though, are examples of CLTs "created in places where people in poor communities were trying to realise some power in their relations with the larger world" (ibid: 758).

This initial mobilisation with its flowing surge of hopeful energy can be lost as such organisations "tend to eventually align themselves with the elites who control access to both practical and political resources and shed the confrontational energy that created them" (ibid: 757) – they endure by abandoning opposition and becoming "subsidy-efficient producers of affordable housing" (ibid: 756). Meeting housing need in an otherwise-broken system, they begin to 'sell' the CLT movement for what it can provide to major funders and the state. As the lead fundraiser for the self-renovation in White Rock, I am acutely aware of this challenge.

If the CLT movement has struggled to stay connected to its organising roots, it has also been, perhaps surprisingly, separate from the development of practice and scholarship around urban commons. This nexus of organising-decommodification-commoning is the generative space which both Granby and White Rock seek to occupy, and is arguably the most logical outcome of SRN activities.

I salute Elinor Ostrom's life work marshalling evidence against Garett Hardin's 1968 intervention 'The Tragedy of the Commons'. Contravening his generalisation that all commons resources would eventually be exhausted by selfish behaviour – and that the only options[16] are sell-off as private property or public ownership with rights to enter allocated on wealth or bureaucracy – Ostrom won the Nobel Prize for Economics in 2009 for showing the patterns of commitment, sustainability and stability that community-based resource management can, has and does accomplish (Ostrom 1990, Bezdek 2021). This core argument, while long accepted in academia, has barely impacted on wider popular and governmental mindsets. Since the commons is "a resource intertwined with social practice" (Huron 2018: 4), a new political contract, a collaborative culture of citizenship, a challenger system of value exchange, a marginal source of hope and resistance, a "location of radical openness and possibility" (hooks 1989: 23), perhaps such invisibility is not surprising.

[16] "We have several options. We might sell them off as private property. We might keep them as public property, but allocate the right to enter them. The allocation might be on the basis of wealth, by the use of an action system. It might be on a first-come, first-served basis, administered to long queues." (Hardin 1968: 1245).

Ostrom's school of thought is known as 'institutionalist' because they are most interested in how commons are governed and maintained over time. Another school, that Huron (2018) calls the 'alterglobalizationists', (eg Hardt and Negri 2009; de Angelis 2012, 2013) is focused on how commons may be seized and protected, though not particularly in everyday practices of sustained commoning. Both accept the tripartite commons as resource; institutions for governing that resource; and the commoners who create those institutions (Kip et al 2015), but it is as if the two sets of politics behind these approaches sit back-to-back: institutionalists focusing on the management minutiae of commons which "seem to emerge from a historical mist", and alterglobalizationists focusing on the "relentlessly historical" struggle between capitalism and the commons and committed to creating "a global commoner consciousness" (Huron 2018: 28-9). This latter has led to a focus on commoning "understood as a verb" (Linebaugh 2014: 13) and the commons as "an ongoing practice: it is labour and activity, not a seemingly inert resource that exists outside human social life" (Huron 2018: 31). Yet while they theorise broadly they tend not to dig into the detail of how commons operate in contemporary life (Federici 2012: 4).

There has been an explosion of interest in urban commoning, partly because it underscores "that commoning can and does happen even in places that are seen as being completely enmeshed in capitalism" (Huron 2018: 7). In such circumstances the two main traits of the commons: collective self-organisation and decommodification "must be made to work in the here and now, in the midst of capitalism" (ibid: 9). This is why thick description of case studies – "rich, nuanced and engag[ing] the complexity of the social and material relations at hand" (ibid: 13) – is needed to understand how a commons is actually regulated and to avoid 'flattening out' complexity (Goldstein 2020:78).

While some CLTs function as fairly traditional housing providers, others fit the model of 'CLTs-as Commons', defined by "self-governance, and rules for the transgenerational resource-preservation in commons 'management'" (Bezdek 2021: npn). This focus on future generations is important as a response to the apparent contradiction in extending the idea of the commons beyond non-excludable common

pool resources to 'private goods like housing' (Durose et al 2021). Bezdek (2021: npn) reminds us that "land originates as a commonwealth, a non-renewable resource passed down from previous generations" and that the "CLT holds land… in a form designed to preserve its availability as housing for generations". I agree with the focus on the *holding open* of commons stock not just for future generations but to allow for the incorporation of strangers which is such an important "part of the heterogeneity of the urban commons" (Huron 2018: 9).

This idea of 'holding open' does not mean I agree with Shiva that "in the commons, no-one can be excluded" (2013: x). One problem with the alterglobalizationist approach is its lack of clarity around issues of exclusion and access. While institutionalists are clear that commons are bounded systems, alterglobalizationists talk as if the commons should be freely available to all regardless of contribution and belonging, whereas commons in fact entail obligations as much as entitlements. The community of the commons is based not on "some privileged identity but on the basis of the care-work done to reproduce the commons" (Caffentzis and Federici 2014: i102).

However, Bezdek argues that a "CLT-as-Commons must do more than hold a portfolio of housing units in trust across generations at below-market sales prices. It must construct a cultural commons — the essential knowledge production and distribution, and capacity for efficacious self-management by the members—necessary for its members to remain committed to the CLT mission and vision" (2021: npn). This is a continuous story-telling process that we will see in both Granby and White Rock; and it only works because the stories can be told within the setting of an "actually existing commons" (Eizenberg 2012).

A further point to which I will return is Noterman's (2016) theorising of 'differential commoning' – the often-bitter recognition that individual 'commoners' will contribute and benefit differently from each other – as a positive aspect that allows for difference and therefore enables commoning within diversity (see also Oosterlynck et al 2016 on solidarity in diversity).

Those who wish to create 'common ground resources' (a land-based subset of all the resources that could be common pool) have to find ways to buy or otherwise acquire land, using proprietorial power and/or other methods to tip the balance between exchange-value and use-value in order to protect from the gentrification of our commons (out-pricing being the modern form of enclosure).

CLTs and urban commons are part of what Chatterton calls "transitions beyond the capitalist present" (2016: 403) – some agitating and disruptive, others more reformist, still others straightforwardly utopian "creating interstitial or prefigurative examples of the future in the present… These are not disconnected tendencies, but pragmatic and strategic choices that build on and give momentum to each other" (ibid: 405). Instead of 'scaling', the mission and duty that such 'transition projects' share is to: experiment on the ground; prioritise collaboration; network between themselves and beyond; publicise and discuss emergent results. "This shifts strategy away from merely scaling-up niches towards a multiplicity of ways to corrode the overall regime and landscape through more networked forms and distributed social relations" (ibid: 405). I recognise from my own experience, Chatterton's description of "something quite provisional that proceeds through experimentation, prototyping and taking risks. It is a set of practices that are contentious, messy and deliberative" (ibid: 405). As we will see, these DIY practices are 'fundamentally punk' (Holtzman, Hughes and Van Meter 2007): "the struggle of the collective individual against the production of its subjectivity, against its reproduction as a commodity of capitalism" (ibid: 45-46; Negri and Hardt 2000: 195-197).

This chapter has attempted to locate conceptual and practical space in which the worlds of possibility can survive and fight back against TINA and the dominant models of ownership and regeneration that sustain her. While the false choice between gentrification and decline presented to marginalised places is the manifestation of TINA at neighbourhood level, there is a rich source of alternatives in the fields of DIY, decommodification and commoning.

CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY, POSITIONALITY and ETHICS

4.1. An Unusual PhD

This is an unusual PhD for urban geography. It draws heavily on situated and embodied practice and reflection and utilises a range of voices changing over time throughout the research (Clandinin and Connelly 1994: 423). These subjective I's (Peshkin 1985, 1988, 2001) reflect the variety of roles of both the authorial 'I' and the active 'we' in the conceptualisation and concretisation of self-renovating neighbourhoods. Subjectivity may be a garment that cannot be removed (Peshkin 1988: 17) but we all have many selves that we bring to the research setting (Reinharz 1997) so reflexivity is key but not always comfortable (Bradbury-Jones 2007; Pillow 2003; Brewis 2014).

The thesis is unashamedly autoethnographic, imbued with prior experience and embedded within an intense and sustained praxis which never once let up in the six years of study. Throughout that time I attempted to weave the reading, research and writing into the already-stretched fabric of my working life. This has only been even remotely possible because of my *position*: my specific spatio-temporal coordinates; my non-PhD roles as convenor, project-starter, fundraiser, adviser, grant-maker, story-teller, snap-photographer, commoner-at-large; and the power, agency and independence that comes from running my own business. The resulting thesis is a hybrid of academic foray and reflexive practice. As Sarah Wall puts it "I could share my experience… and, in the text, co-mingle me and it" (2006: 146).

The research itself is also unusual for ethnography in that it is not generally based on interviews. Even in Granby my recordings were less like traditional qualitative research interviews and more a capturing of *reflective time spent together*. In my multi-roled Hastings context, it was uncomfortable and inappropriate for me to be an interviewer especially with those closest to the SRN work (Brewis 2014). I had to find other ways to gather and record data (see figure 4.6). The empirical basis of this thesis is what I saw, heard, felt, experienced, helped to create and grew to understand, rather than a coding of a set of bounded interviews (Portelli 2020; Wall 2006; Duncan 2004).

Most obviously my work is highly normative, value-backed, world-making. I will locate this embrace of the normative within the wider literature in the section on Nurturing Change below. I am fully aware that the positions I take – both practically (investing, renovating, leading) and discursively (speechifying, storytelling, branding) – are choices that have impact: they help to enact specific, partial and highly fallible alternatives. The PhD has made me more aware of the impacts in choosing methods, analytical frameworks, ways of thinking, frames of reference. My choices are for worlds of possibility comprising weak theory (Gibson-Graham 2014), thick time-space alive with multiplicity (Massey 2005), and strategic agents tackling the strategic selectivity of structures (Jessop 2005).

I first outlined a descriptive hypothesis in relation to Self-Renovating Neighbourhoods three years before I began the PhD (Steele 2012). This simple idea – that there might be such a thing as SRN – and the first-draft of possible characteristics arose from: the Crossfield/Upper Brockley experiences, my own regeneration experiences in Deptford and Hastings, and my privileged viewing point at the heart of national membership organisations comprising in total thousands of active local stakeholders. By 2015 my lifelong aim to make regeneration different, combined with the curiosity to go deeper, see clearer, and locate these 'speculative hunches', led to starting the PhD. Since then I have been both piloting and interrogating the concept of SRN in practice in White Rock and checking the validity of the hypothesised characteristics. I have undertaken empirical research in Granby and White Rock and located the concept in relation to academic and practitioner literatures.

Cutting through the widespread confusion about the relationship between hypotheses, theories, and laws, Eastwell defines theory as "a set of statements that when taken together, attempt to explain a broad class of related phenomena" (2014: 18) and clarifies that a hypothesis "does not become a theory if it subsequently becomes well-supported by evidence. Rather, it becomes a well-supported hypothesis" (ibid: 20). To separate descriptive from causal hypotheses, he suggests that we call the former instead a 'tentative or trial law', where a law is defined as "a statement that summarises an observed regularity" (ibid: 17).

Figure 4.1: Concept, Theory, Law, Hypothesis, Framework (adapted and expanded from Eastwell 2014)

CONCEPT	THEORY	LAW	HYPOTHESIS	FRAMEWORK
Abstract	Explanatory – complex	Summarising	Proposed explanation	Way of looking Way of thinking
Need not be tested	Must be able to be tested	Continually tested	Ready for testing	Tested for utility through use
Tendency to morph and change organically and responsively	May be challenged, refined, evangelised	Likely to remain stable while becoming better understood	May be supported or rejected	May be adapted for improved utility
Can be unorganised	Must be organised	Coherent	Clear proposal	Multiply organised
The idea of SRN	Not within scope	My conclusions on SRN as descriptive hypothesis/ tentative law	The proposed SRN characteristics	S / R / N – 3 lenses to explore a phenomenon

SRN is a *concept* that I am developing – the notion that local people might take charge of change in their own neighbourhoods. The proposed characteristics of SRN are a descriptive hypothesis (*tentative law*). The thesis presents a *framework* which is both conceptual and analytical. It is a conceptual framework because it is a *way of thinking* about the dynamics of poor neighbourhoods. Analytically, it is a *tool* – a method of organising research, a lens to undertake the analysis through, and a presentational approach for the thesis. Normatively, it is a *theory of change* (see Appendix C4) and a call to action (see Appendix C3).

In this chapter I discuss how I designed and operationalised this approach, starting with a statement of my positionality before considering the research aims and the methodology that resulted, then the analytical aims and the corresponding analytical frameworks that I chose. Clarifying the normative aim of nurturing positive change, it concludes with a summary of the ethical framework, the values I brought with me to this endeavour and those I have learned along the way.

4.2. Who am I? Positionality, personality, practice

> "The right to try takes risk to a new level. It meets market failure head on and refuses to put up with the consequences. It insists that something is better than nothing, that failure is a development cost of the next success, that the riskiest thing of all is leaving our common future in the hands of the powerful." (Steele, speech to launch DTA community rights campaign, Nov 2010)

I grew up in the south east London suburbs in the 1970s. Both parents were originally teachers but my father became a journalist and worked as a parliamentary lobby correspondent for more than 40 years. After a late sociology degree at Goldsmiths College, my mother left teaching to work in the field of street homelessness and was awarded an OBE in 2000 for these services. My parents separated, fairly acrimoniously, when I was 12. I went to school in New Cross, which opened up a world of urban diversity and tolerance missing in suburban Eltham. Despite studying three sciences, I was inspired by excellent history teachers to the extent that I took an extra history A-level in my year off before heading to university to study biology. Within a week the dream to become a marine biologist was abandoned; I converted to history and happily gave up on the idea of a fixed career plan.

My life as an 'independent regen-watcher' began in 1991 with an undergraduate history dissertation on community networks and boundaries in Deptford 1930-1990 that later grew into the book *Turning the Tide: the History of Everyday Deptford from the Romans to the Present* (Steele, 1993). The research was an early taste of autoethnography, an experience captured in 'A Historian Among the Anthropologists', the MSc dissertation I wrote in parallel with producing a popular history book:

> "My towers are made of concrete not ivory and that makes a difference. Living on a four-lane highway which is also the Roman road from Dover to London, one can mimic the ethnographer's smugness and say one knows the world outside in a 'concrete' fashion. After years of historical research there is no desire to ignore the processes by which that world was formed. When the field is also home and the sounds of police sirens permeate the write-up, the distancing tactic is avoided and the dichotomy of Self and Other is resolved" (Steele 1993: 25).

In the years since then I have been a community entrepreneur, playing a range of roles, often simultaneous and overlapping, always flying between the scales of neighbourhood and the national. I believe in 'neighbourhoods' the way some people believe in 'family'. I have an intense affinity for places – first for Deptford (1980-2002), then for Hastings (2004 to date).

In Deptford I founded and led over a dozen enterprises including a publishing company, a citizenship charity, a number of alternative consultancies, and a children's nursery. I campaigned, ran groups, chaired a community newspaper, managed two multi-project regeneration programmes, and taught 'Citizenship and Urban Change' for the Professional and Continuing Education department at Goldsmiths. As my attention turned to big issues like childcare and the benefits system it became clear that the critical intervention points were at a level beyond the neighbourhood. I was appointed to the National Community Forum – a 'sounding board for ministers' as they implemented the 2001 National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal – where I met 23 other people who lived and worked in 'deprived neighbourhoods' and realised for the first time that I also cared viscerally for other people's places.

From 2004 to 2013 I worked for national membership organisations in the field of regeneration and community development. At Locality, a national network of community anchors, this included supporting councils and communities to work together on asset transfers and designing and delivering the £22m national Community Organisers programme. I have played leading roles in developing practical policy initiatives such as the Community Allowance, the Meanwhile Project, and the Campaign Against Delinquent Ownership.

I have worked in and between the public, private and voluntary sectors. While my 'home turf' is the independent voluntary community sector, I have direct experience in local government (Heritage Officer for Croydon Council 1994-6), the civil service (seconded to DCLG for 7 months in 2009), universities (partnership projects with Manchester, Keele, Brighton), and funders (especially through roles with Power to Change and the Architectural Heritage Fund).

In 2004 I moved with my partner and 4-year-old daughter to Hastings. At first I commuted to London and around the UK but from 2007 I was able to work from home in a sympathetic organisation which actively supported my local engagement.

Figure 4.2: Hastings Pier 2010-2018

For many years that engagement specifically focused on the totemic asset[17] of Hastings Pier. In June 2006, the pier was closed for safety reasons by Hastings Borough Council when it became obvious that the owners, an off-shore company called Ravenclaw registered in Panama to avoid English company law, were failing to invest the money they were making back underneath. I was the Treasurer of the Hastings Pier and White Rock Trust that was ultimately successful in the long process of rescuing the pier, bringing it into community ownership, and raising £14M for its restoration.

I left the board in good hands in 2014, but re-engaged in 2017 to assist the difficult transition from renovation to operation. When the trustees decided late that year (just a month after winning the Stirling Prize) to put the charity into administration, I worked with other local people to bring together those who wanted to be 'active and constructive' and attempt a rescue. This was ultimately unsuccessful and the pier was sold in June 2018 to an individual businessman.

In 2013 we had split the Hastings Pier and White Rock Trust into the Hastings Pier Charity to achieve the pier restoration and the White Rock Trust to focus on the rest of the neighbourhood through intensive community engagement. The significant dereliction in the heart of the town centre led me to develop a partnership (White Rock Neighbourhood Ventures) to buy an empty 9-storey office block, Rock House, which we converted to a mixed-use creative space with 6 affordable flats and 40+ creative enterprise and community spaces, all with capped rents to lock in affordability. In 2016 I helped to establish the Heart of Hastings Community Land Trust (HoH) to extend the work of bringing property into community freehold in order to cap the rents in perpetuity as a bulwark against gentrification. A mile away in Ore Valley, HoH supported a bottom-up development process aiming to use the Organisation Workshop approach (described in Chapter 8) as the pivot for a community self-build of 77 houses plus workspaces, green space and community facilities. After three years of occupation and developing detailed plans, HoH was evicted from the site in March 2019. However, by that point the work in White Rock was coming to fruition with the

[17] Something that feels like it belongs to everyone, something that draws people together

purchase of the massive Observer Building so both the Organisation Workshop and many of the Ore Valley participants were able to relocate.

Since the purchase of Rock House in 2014 I have been a key player in an ecosystem of intertwined organisations that have acquired a community real-estate portfolio comprising 8,000 square metres of variously difficult, derelict, and eccentric properties, all within 100 metres of each other. Collectively these physical spaces, the people and organisations involved, and the emergent social relations that constitute them have become known as the Hastings Commons.

* * *

Feminist theorists have led the challenge against the universality of objectivist social science (England 1994; Rose 1997; Bondi, Avis and Bankey 2002). Haraway (1988) in particular argued that observation from a distance – seeing everything from nowhere – is an illusion, a 'god-trick'. The knowledge we produce is always situated and never disinterested: "we all speak from a particular place, out of a particular history, a particular experience, a particular culture, without being contained by that position" (Hall 1992: 258). Instead of "viewing self as a contaminant" (Wall 2006: 147), transparency about positionality can contextualise our observations and interpretations (although see Rose 1997). Autoethnography goes beyond transparency and allows the researcher "to speak as a player" (Wall 2006: 148), linking the personal and the cultural through the conduit of "a unique and uniquely situated researcher" (ibid: 149). Reflexivity ("the self appraisal in research") differs depending on the researcher's position (Berger 2013; Bradbury-Jones 2007). Pillow (2003) urges us towards 'uncomfortable reflexive practices'.

The PhD has been affected by:

- my identity - well educated, middle class, white female, late 40s/early 50s, homeowner, long term DFL (down from London 2004), supportive family
- my prior experience - family influences, Deptford, Locality, community organising;

- my current position and recognition - key role in Hastings, director of Jericho Road, awarded an OBE 2016 for services to community assets in the UK; highly connected within the community business sector, more loosely so to the wider social economy world
- my value base - communitarian, entrepreneurial, concerned with social justice; my need and willingness to put my own practice and its driving narratives under scrutiny; and my personality.

Moser argues that the focus on positionality has shown a lack of attention to personality and challenges the assumption that power relations emerge solely from a complex structure in which we are all positioned differently (2008: 385). She urges more understanding of how the emotional intelligence of researchers and their "internal lives and capacities" (ibid: 387) influence the outcomes of research. In that sense, this thesis might be seen as a textual version of the Pompidou Centre in Paris with its multiply-connected innards on display, giving visibility to the productive interconnectivity of my various selves. This is why the authorial voice is (both deliberately and inevitably) different between the two case studies as will be discussed below.

The research has been vulnerable to the bad behaviour of other stakeholders. This could be noted and interrogated in private but when the social aims of the work itself are threatened such behaviour must be challenged head-on, despite the potential 'contamination' of the research. There have been times when local conflicts have made me miserable, but my response has been 'this will be interesting for the PhD'. This academic distancing from the practitioner field proved a useful coping mechanism, a survival strategy. In the other direction, this thesis could be seen as a move towards a practice-based PhD, that is an inquiry by a professional practitioner into an aspect of their own practice, still relatively rare in geography.[18] When scholars undertake rigorous analysis of their practice, which itself becomes the field of their

[18] Although see Butler (2006) for an example focused on methodologies, in this case "an exciting hybrid of sound art and walking".

expertise, their theses can include "an evocation of practice at its most intense" (Winter, Griffiths and Green 2000: 29), seeking fresh insights that can support improvements to practice (our own and others) and searching for better questions that become part of the outcome of research. Concerned with "emphasising the uniqueness and complexity of each particular", such work is less focused on answering specific research questions but seeks rather to "uncover some of that web of complexity" (ibid: 30).

Figure 4.3 Additional criteria for practice-based work

Winter, Griffiths and Green (2000) found that the de facto criteria for assessing academic theses could be equally applied to practice-based work, while additional aspects of the latter might include:

- Critical and innovative insights into practice and personal/professional identities
- Evocative, detailed description of professional creativity, sensitivity and responsibility
- Clear evidence of professional development and an articulation of the relationship between the research role and practitioner role
- Valuable insights to help other practitioners improve their performance
- Deploy design-led approaches to offer evidence-based solutions to complex professional challenges that are relevant and transferable across different contexts
- Apply advanced research knowledge and skills to influence policy, strategy, and leadership

(Adapted from Winter, Griffiths and Green 2000: 32)

While recognising some of these features in my work, I conclude that it is a hybrid – an academic thesis seeking to contribute to knowledge about neighbourhood regeneration in which the research is rooted in my direct experience of praxis. Being so close to the process has made it challenging to differentiate between research data and management data, between friends, collaborators and research subjects, between work on the ground and work in my head.

> The word criteria is a term that separates modernists from postmodernists… empiricists from interpretivists… Both agree that inevitably they make choices about what is good, what is useful, and what is not. The difference is that one side believes that 'objective' methods and procedures can be applied to determine the choices we make, whereas the other side believes these choices are ultimately and inextricably tied to our values and our subjectivities" (Bochner 2000: 266).

4.3. Autoethnography and action research

I had spent all my life watching, studying and participating in neighbourhood regeneration before I began this PhD. I wanted to position my thinking within the urban geography literature while continuing to drive forwards the self-renovating neighbourhood work in Hastings, and share the emerging conclusions with my practitioner peers locally and across the country. The body of existing and emerging knowledge relevant to this research project included my own experiential knowledge and expertise gained from relations in multiple time-spaces (Massey 2005: 177-80) over several decades. This prior wisdom, know-how and competence was gained through direct experience and reflection, which "serves as a primary source of truth in self-help groups and… competes with professional knowledge" (Borkman 1976: 446). My pride in *what I already knew* from three decades of community work sometimes got in the way of my openness to various academic literatures and protocols. Over time I overcame that hubris and sought more self-consciously to balance the two kinds of knowledge in the development of the concept of SRN.

In addition to the baggages of positionality and prior learning, the chosen focus on my own life-world would inevitably raise residual positivist concepts of objectivity and 'rigour'.[19] I am familiar with such challenges in regard to my practice which has always required the management of multiple interests. From the academic perspective, early in the research period I was delighted to come across the term *autoethnography*, originated by Hayano in 1979 to explore how anthropologists could conduct ethnographies of their "own people" (1979: 99), and now meaning an approach that seeks to describe and analyse ('graphy') personal experience ('auto') in order to understand cultural experience ('ethno') (Ellis, Adams and Bochner 2011: 273). Typically of my personality, I felt the emancipatory promise in the "relentless nudging of autoethnography against the world of traditional science" (Wall 2006: 148).

[19] One policy scientist said she would not expect me to be involved in any study of Hastings Commons – "what are you doing there? you can't be neutral!' [211028 Zoom]

Autoethnography enables 'witnessing', testifying first hand on behalf of an experience. Gina Wisker gives an example of a woman working in the Chinese takeaway industry and studying the experiences of 'immigrated Chinese women' in that industry. Using herself as one of the case studies she recorded her own experience and reflections as well as systematically addressing the same questions she applied to the other women. Not only did she make use of her own experience in her research but that experience helped her establish rapport with the other women (Wisker 2008: 219). "Being part of the group under study means 'simultaneously being an onlooker in the stalls and a member of the cast" (Shaw 2016: 11). I thought that this might be a possible approach but I hadn't reckoned on what it means not to be 'one of the studied', sharing an identity with others and able to stand as witness, but instead to be leading a team, participating in the collective self in ways that determine the success or failure of the collective effort; not just on stage and in the stalls but also conducting. I imagine Wisker's researcher found her waking hours all full of Chinese takeaway, but I doubt she worried that the (in)adequacy of her thinking might topple the industry! Not only have work and research been intertwined spatially and temporally for me, but they have been mutually constitutive, with significant ontological (physical, economic and cultural) impacts in the fine-grain world of White Rock.[20]

Both method and style in autoethnography vary widely (Wall 2006, 2008). While highly personal and located at my precise coordinates, the version of autoethnography in this thesis contrasts with those of Muncey (2005) about her teenage pregnancy or Sparkes (1996) about the loss of his elite athlete body, focusing less on me as an individual self and more on the practices and institution-building in which I have been immersed and instrumental. In this way it is closer to Duncan (2004) whose research question was simply 'how can I improve my practice?'. But my interest goes beyond my own contribution, instead looking out from where I stand (Duncan 2004: 38), bringing 'the enlightened eye' (Eisner 1991) which is not a mechanical device but "a particular kind of attention to nuance and details, to multiple dimensions or aspects, that comes from intimate familiarity with the phenomenon being examined" (Schwandt 1994: 129).

[20] I have raised over £16M in grants, loans and programmes for the White Rock area since 2014.

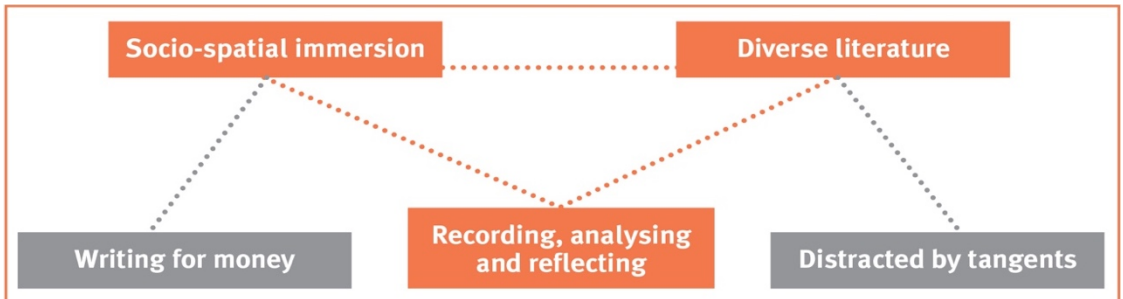
This is heuristic inquiry – an internal search to discover the nature and meaning of experience (Moustakas 1990). The self is present throughout. As understanding of the researched phenomena deepens, the researcher also grows in self-awareness and self-knowledge. "The initial 'data' is within me; the challenge is to discover and explicate its nature" (ibid: 13). Heuristic research demands "total presence, honesty, maturity and integrity of a researcher, with a strong desire to understand…, willing to commit to endless hours of sustained immersion and focused concentration…, to risk the opening of wounds and passionate concerns, and to undergo the personal transformation that exists as a possibility in every heuristic journey" (ibid: 14). Identifying with the focus of inquiry is key to heuristic research. Salk (1983: 7) imagining himself in the position of the object of interest (a cancer cell, the immune system) strikes me as how I think of the White Rock neighbourhood. Other traits of heuristic research such as self-dialogue, tacit knowing and 'indwelling' have been features throughout (see figure 4.6). My 'reflections in the woods' comprise c20% of the total 'sound-cloud data' and it is tacit knowledge – "the act of knowing based on indwelling" (Polanyi [1966] 2009: 24; Straw 2016) – that enables me to play the role of 'commoner-at-large'.

By working in Hastings and undertaking PhD research simultaneously I have been trying to *make SRN happen* at the same time as understanding what it is and what it means. Is this 'action research'? Guided and shaped by my interactions with the key players in the case study areas, aiming to bridge the divide between research and practice and to make a difference by bringing about actual improvements in practice, it matches Somekh's (1995) definition of action research, although this research project did not start from other people's "felt need… to initiate change" (Elliott 1991: 53) but rather from my own. Another link to action research is that "the findings are fed back directly into practice with the aim of bringing about change: (Somekh 1995: 341). It seeks to generate 'practical wisdom' (Elliott 1991: 52-53) or 'situational understanding' (Dreyfus 1981) in the form of insights as a base for practical action. This may be further validated through communicating to other practitioners who can judge the work worthwhile or not by how it compares with and illuminates their own repertoire of experience. In other words 'does this account work for us?' (Sparkes 2000: 29).

A third link is the highly pragmatic orientation. Action research is always limited by the time available and my PhD activity has been fitted within and between day-to-day pressures, not only of my role/s within the Hastings ecosystem but also my need to continue working with paying clients, and indeed, as a mature student, bringing up a teenage daughter. The 'economies of time' identified by Somekh are inevitable in autoethnographic action research – "an interview with a colleague can be used as a means of moving that colleague's thinking forward, as well as a means of collecting data" (1995: 342). My conversations sought progressive leaps for me as practitioner, my interlocutor as practitioner, and for me as researcher – a tripling of utility for any given hour of work. My research is "grounded in the culture and values of the social group" with a "momentum… towards collaboration, because the emphasis on social interactions and interpersonal relationships has the effect of drawing other participants into the research process" (ibid: 342). It is "impossible to draw a line between data collected as part of the research and data available to the researcher as part of the job" (ibid: 342). I wonder if we need a new term – 'autoactionography' – the study of social action told and understood in real time from the perspective of those directly involved and used to inform and inspire further action?

In 2015 there was no getting away from the light of prior learning, especially in Hastings where my own held data, and my experiential familiarity with the fine grain of the place, had been accruing for a decade before the 'research' began. Six years of heuristic research later I feel and think differently. "Having made a discovery I shall never see the world again as before… I have crossed a gap, the heuristic gap, which lies between problem and discovery" (Polanyi 1962: 143).

Figure 4.4: Crossing the gap between problem and discovery



'Crossing the gap' (Polanyi 1962; Moustakas 1990) has required the sustained simultaneity of en-roled socio-spatial immersion, exposure to diverse literatures, and the praxis of recording, analysing and reflecting. 'Writing for money', by which I mean fundraising and fund management, plays a role, as do the sometimes miraculous discoveries and thought-worlds opened up by a (semi) random click-through on Google Scholar.

In the following sections I describe the evolution of the methodological approach, initially in terms of research goals and then considering the analytical, normative and ethical aims.

Research aim	Analytical aim	Normative aim	Ethical aim
To explore the characteristics of SRN in the context of real neighbourhoods.	To create and nuance the concept of SRN.	To nurture positive change in the face of destructive dominant models.	To be honest, to be myself, to be both a leader and a listener, to be grateful, to be useful.

4.4. Research Aim

To explore the characteristics of SRN in the context of real neighbourhoods

4.4.1 A Case Study approach

In my research design I began with a comparative case study approach to explore the concept of self-renovating neighbourhoods (SRN). Yin (2003) defines the case study as an all-encompassing method which includes the logic of design, data collection techniques and specific approaches to data analysis. It involves an empirical inquiry, relying on multiple sources of evidence, in which the phenomenon is investigated in real-life contexts, and is especially useful "when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (ibid: 13). It benefits from the prior development of propositions to guide data collection and analysis (ibid: 14). My proposition was simply that SRN exists and could be an alternative to gentrification or decline, but my case studies were exploratory so I set out to 'discover' SRN and to map its landscape and contours (Moustakas 1990).

Case studies have been "stereotyped as a weak sibling among social science methods" (Yin 2003: xiii). Advocates of case study research tend to begin by addressing the negative stereotypes, summarised by Flyvbjerg (2006) as five misunderstandings:

Figure 4.5: Negative stereotypes of case study research (Flyvbjerg 2006: 221)

Misunderstanding 1	General, theoretical (context-independent) knowledge is more valuable than concrete, practical (context-dependent) knowledge.
Misunderstanding 2	One cannot generalise on the basis of an individual case; therefore, the case study cannot contribute to scientific development.
Misunderstanding 3	The case study is most useful for generating hypotheses; that is, in the first stage of a total research process, whereas other methods are more suitable for hypotheses testing and theory building.
Misunderstanding 4	The case study contains a bias toward verification, that is, a tendency to confirm the researcher's preconceived notions.
Misunderstanding 5	It is often difficult to summarise and develop general propositions and theories on the basis of specific case studies.

Flyvbjerg argues that the context-dependent knowledge gained from case studies is essential "to allow people to develop from rule-based beginners to virtuoso experts" (2006: 221). Furthermore the impossibility of general, context-independent theory means that social science "has in the final instance nothing else to offer than concrete, context-dependent knowledge" (ibid: 223). This mirrors Donald Campbell's later work in which he claimed "This is not to say that such common sense naturalistic observation is objective, dependable, or unbiased. But it is all that we have. It is the only route to knowledge – noisy, fallible, and biased though it be" (Campbell 1975: 191). Flyvbjerg (2006) shows that even the single case has potential to assist generalisation, hypothesis testing and theory building. In fact the dense case study can be more useful and interesting for both practice and theory than the high-level generalisations of theory.

Other positive benefits of the case study approach include the proximity of the researcher to the studied reality, the depth and warmth of the vicarious experience, and the opportunity to speak to and expand the 'naturalistic generalisations' formed by readers from their own experience (Stake 1995: 85-88). Only the case study can capture what Nietzsche called "the whole marvellous uncertainty and rich ambiguity of existence" ([1882] 1974: 76), the intricate and messy detail of the specific, complex, functioning thing that is the case subject.

The case study approach has its own rigour with the added advantage that "it can test views directly in relation to phenomena as they unfold in practice" (Flyvbjerg 2006: 235). Geertz spoke of "The Field" as a "powerful disciplinary force: assertive, demanding, even coercive" (1995: 119) that cannot be evaded. Subjectivity is an issue in all research. It can influence choices of categories and variables for a quantitative investigation which are more likely to survive without being corrected during the study because such research does not 'get close' to those under study and is unlikely to be corrected by the study objects 'talking back' (Flyvbjerg 2006: 236; Flyvbjerg 2014: xi).

Krehl and Weck identify an "unmet need for transparency and critical reflection in the practice of doing comparative case study research" (2020: 1861). They note the recent epistemological challenge to 'traditional' deductive case study research that prioritised the ability to generalise from cases against *a priori* defined variables. This is especially relevant for me since there is no 'universal yardstick' for SRN – only some emergent attempts that can be explored. Within this broader focus on a contextualised, relational understanding of the production of space and place, Robinson argues for comparative urbanism: "[t]hinking with variation and repetition" (2015: 188), that allows for the "space-specific emergence and reproduction of a place… [and pays] attention to constitutive process and practices" (Krehl and Weck 2020: 1860). Elwood, Lawson and Sheppard have shown that this geographical relationality is both an ontological stance that "spatiality can and must be theorized through diverse webs of causal relations… that mutually constitute space" and an epistemological stance that "knowledge is always situated, partial and produced through relations of power" (2017: 749, 752). It seems to me inevitable that I would position myself within this relational stance since it allows "for actions that could produce other possible worlds… If space is the expression of multiple processes restlessly coming together and apart, it follows that they might do so in unexpected ways, beyond those prefigured by prior explanations" (ibid: 752).

The standards laid out by Krehl and Weck include "the choices and decisions underlying the final research design need to be transparent" (2020: 1862). During the 6-year period of research (2015-21) there were several changes in my approach to the

case studies. Hastings was always going to be one of them but initially I planned also to investigate SRN possibilities in Liverpool, Luton and Bristol. After preliminary research, and considering questions of access and overload, I shifted focus to research in depth two pairs of neighbourhoods in Liverpool (Granby and Anfield) and Hastings (White Rock and Ore Valley). In November 2018, I decided to drop Anfield and focus on the comparisons between Hastings and Granby. By the following May, the eviction of Heart of Hastings from the Ore Valley site and the Organisation Workshop underway in the Observer Building, led me to focus specifically on White Rock and Granby as well-balanced case studies with clear comparables such as the importance of the public realm (the Alley in White Rock, the street in Granby).

Flyvbjerg lists strategies for the selection of cases that include: 'extreme' (unusual), 'critical' (if this is valid here it must apply to all cases), 'maximum variation' (multiple cases that vary in one dimension), and paradigmatic ("to develop a metaphor or establish a school for the domain that the case concerns" (2006: 230)). My cases could not be 'critical' – I never expected to be able to state that what happens there must be able to happen anywhere. They were neither 'most likely' nor 'least likely' cases. The ways in which they vary from each other (location and history) are crucial to their uniqueness but there was not a specific variable that I sought to explore. Rather my two cases were *extreme* because self-renovation was actually being attempted, and potentially *paradigmatic* in that I hoped they may have both metaphorical and prototypical value. They could be seen as fitting Lijphart's 'deviant' or 'hypothesis-generating' case-study method, which he suggests can have 'great theoretical value' (1971: 692). As Merrifield says of Lefebvre, "[t]he political utility of a concept isn't that it should tally with reality, but that it enables us to experiment with reality, that it helps us glimpse another reality, a virtual reality that's there, somewhere, waiting to be born, inside us" (Merrifield 2011: 473).

* * *

I became involved in Granby in 2014, helping them with fundraising after an introduction by Chris Brown of igloo regeneration. I already knew Hazel Tilley, one of

the leaders of the community land trust, because she is married to an old friend of my partner, and had heard her talk over the years about the actions and frustrations of being involved in 'Granby Residents'. My first visit in May 2014 was inspirational, arriving at 11pm after a long day visiting the derelict Victoria Pier in Colwyn Bay. Hazel was in London but had arranged for me to collect keys and stay in her house. The place was eerily quiet; I woke to the sound of bird-song in inner city Liverpool. After meeting with Eleanor Lee (Hazel's neighbour and the CLT's main fundraiser), David Haime (project manager) and Assemble (the architects), I worked intensely on a range of funding bids and supported them more broadly through this early phase of development.

Granby became a 'founding case study' for my PhD the following year. My research there kicked off with three taxi drivers. TD1 (9/11/15) was very vocal about the degeneration of the area and amazed that I wanted to go there. TD2 (26/11/15) was more interested in urban change, describing how parts of Liverpool had "all gone to flats and by the time I was 20 they were all burnt out, and then a woman came along and bought them all for 50 pence each and now they're worth £150,000". TD3 (26/11/15) was the most brutal:

> "We lived in one of these type of houses and people are saying 'save them and revamp them' but them kind of houses, in my opinion right and it's just my opinion, them houses should have been bull-dozed 50 years ago. All terraced houses, they're all shit as far as I'm concerned. People want front and back gardens and somewhere to park their car, do you know what I mean, and somewhere for the kids to play. Some families have two and three cars – where you gonna park them? Terraced houses was good when there were no cars on the road but today's a different world. There was a girl on the radio talking about she used to live in the Welsh Streets which are over 100 years old. Can you imagine what their bits must be like, they must be rotten. She said one morning she went into her daughter's room and there was a slug, a slug! on her daughter's face, with all the damp. They need blitzing and brand-new properties putting up… but everyone's got their own opinions on it."[21]

[21] In a strange coincidence, TD3's friend, James Ashley, was killed by the police in Hastings, shot dead in a botched raid in 1998. He was working as a doorman but "because he was from Liverpool, police had him down as a drug-dealer". They burst in and shot him while unarmed and naked. Sussex Police were forced to pay out in 2009 (Liverpool Echo 2009).

An initial interview with resident Eleanor Lee and supporter Ronnie Hughes [151109] updated and expanded on the core background I had been absorbing for the past 18 months. Assemble had been shortlisted for the prestigious Turner Prize and Eleanor was excited about the Granby Workshop for the "beautiful things" it was making. Returning a few weeks later, the change was noticeable. Newsnight had been in the area that day; the Turner Prize decision was due in any day. Granby was about to become famous (Higgins 2015).

In total I made 17 visits over the next four years, interviewing 12 people altogether but with a strong focus on Hazel Tilley (24 interviews) and Eleanor Lee (8 interviews), as well as multiple conversations and other connections with Ronnie Hughes and Erika Rushton. I usually stayed over one or two nights. Mostly I hung out with Hazel, chatted to the neighbours, bought tea and Jamaican ginger cake from Granby Continental Store, and got involved in whatever was going on. I attended site inspections, participated in meetings in the street, helped out with the Winter Garden consultation at a street market, door-knocked for the 2017 AGM, toured Granby Workshop (buying light-pulls cast from Granby dereliction), and made a special trip for the Winter Garden launch in March 2019. I took lots of pictures, recorded interviews and reflections, made field notes. For the latter part of the research period I was also working for Architectural Heritage Fund (AHF), as programme officer for the North West. This included supporting Granby 4 Streets CLT to access funding from AHF, and made it easier to justify spending time in Liverpool.

As well as my own research trips 'cross-pollinating' between Granby and Hastings, there was shared learning and solidarity-building: 'field trips' to Granby by members of the Hastings team and Hazel visiting in return; Hazel and I giving talks together, visiting projects together and appearing on Isolation Station Hastings together; artefacts transported (an old Observer Building beer keg and part of the old pier fencing taken to Liverpool for reuse; scarves and tea and all kinds of gifts from Hazel; me bringing Chanel No7 from duty-free, chocolates from Euston station). These interconnections, and their positioning within the wider evolving networks of community-led regeneration, could be seen as a grassroots version of 'policy mobility/mutation' and

the “relational interpenetration of policy-making sites and activities” (Peck 2011: 774). This is less a question of transfer or diffusion “beginning with an immaculate moment of local infestation… It more closely resembles a multipolar regime of continuous (re)mobilisation” (ibid: 790). These connections are “circulations — multidirectional, co-constituted and emergent mobilities” (Robinson 2011: 15), carried through “the seemingly banal practices of institutional actors” (McCann 2011: 112).

During the 5-year period of my research Granby 4 Streets CLT received a great deal of publicity and became something of a ‘classic case’ in the UK, held up as good practice, both in community land trust networks and more widely in community-led regeneration. Matthew Thompson, in particular, who began to study Granby in 2011, has published a detailed and multi-faceted case study of the Granby CLT (see Thompson 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2020a, 2020b).

Throughout my initial thesis write-up during 2019, I was determined to have Granby and White Rock as two equal, comparable, contrastable case studies of self-renovating neighbourhoods. I created a symmetrical framework and tried to push the data and analysis into that mould. I wrote 50,000 words. But throughout 2020, I was uncomfortable with the imbalance and failing to make progress. The quotidian experience of living, working, developing, and taking risks inside one of the case study pair highlighted how much of a distant outsider I was to the other. So in late 2020, I decided I needed a different form of comparison. Therefore, in this thesis I use Granby – both my own research into Granby 4 Streets as a self-renovating neighbourhood *and* Matthew Thompson’s very valuable ethnography and analysis – as inspiration and jumping-off point to explore, explicate and elucidate another assemblage-collision-entangling of abstract and social spaces in Hastings. “Geographical relational models read places through one another (rather than cataloguing similarities and differences)” (Elwood, Lawson and Sheppard 2016: 749). I had been reading Hastings through Granby and vice versa for the past six years, underpinned by a series of hunches about self-renovating neighbourhoods, not least that they would grow rhizomatically through ‘circulations’: “the seductions of ideas or the sustainability of mutual understandings generated across distances” (Robinson 2011: 16).

By changing the comparative design I hoped to contribute something original: a 'classic case' (Granby) viewed through a new lens (SRN) and used as a comparator for a deep empirical dive in a fresh context (Hastings). Here the 'classic case' is by no means simply given, it is also in part constructed by me, in conversation with Hazel and Eleanor and by engaging with Thompson's and other research.

There remains a risk in the 'new comparative' approach that refuses to privilege particular places by allowing them to exemplify world-systemic processes, that the study can collapse into 'radical particularism' (Beswick, Imilan and Olivera 2019: *passim*) leading to depictions of "kaleidoscopic combinations of discrete contingencies at the expense of recurrent, underlying structures and processes" (Scott and Storper 2015: 11). Beswick, Imilan and Olivera (2019) tackle this issue by focusing on the common effects (in their case of neoliberalism on access to housing) despite the epiphenomenal differences. I take a similar approach by acknowledging the differences – between the neighbourhoods and their SRN activities – but focusing on similarities in the work of SRN and in its effects in terms of agency, ownership, and the construction of new kinds of neighbouring.

4.4.2 Methods

My research questions *(what are the characteristics of self-renovating neighbourhoods and how might they constitute an alternative to false choice urbanism?)* required an in-depth understanding of the people and their organisations ('self'), the processes (broadly and deliberately cast as 'renovation') and the outcomes (a special kind of 'neighbourhood').

Different methods can provide different kinds of information about different aspects of the self/renovating/neighbourhoods framework, and can help to identify patterns, for example through price or deprivation statistics, that might emerge only anecdotally from ethnographic methods. I was aware, following Law (2004), that different methods also enact different realities. Given the mutually constitutive relationship between my research and the Hastings Commons, the result of these method choices could be ontologically significant.

I had originally hoped to triangulate my research findings with a full study of the socio-economic changes in the case study neighbourhoods tracked through quantitative time-series data (census, IMD, house prices and rents) and illuminate what makes SRN different from gentrification or decline by undertaking a full discourse analysis using the library archive that I have kept in my attic since 2007 for just this purpose… Considering these ambitions now, the cliche 'eyes bigger than your stomach' comes to mind! However, while the core of my thesis rests upon participant observation, interviews and direct first-hand experience, I have added some additional methods, primarily for reasons of *complementarity* – to provide context and fill in gaps – and *expansion* – to improve the richness and detail and establish underlying patterns that cannot be explored qualitatively (Greene, Caracelli and Graham 1989: 255).

Frustrated that data from the 2021 UK census would be released too late and having decided in any case that my task was not to evaluate changes in the case study neighbourhoods, I focused my use of quantitative data on the Indices of Multiple Deprivation 2015 and 2019 and a series of bespoke data on house prices and rents in the White Rock area collected over six years from automated RightMove bulletins responding to a drawn area map. These 2,000 sale offers and 1,300 rentals [EMP: WR Housing Costs Dec 2021], have enabled me to track changes in house prices and rents within the main case study area over the full period.

In Granby, the majority of the research focus was in-depth and iterative interviews and 'being alongside' for phone calls, advice and support as the CLT experienced its various triumphs and tribulations. When it came to writing up I found it essential (and fascinating) to place the Granby neighbourhood in its full historical context and especially to understand the 40-year period from the Shelter Neighbourhood Action Plan, via the 1981 Uprising and the long punishment, to the eventual cancellation of Housing Market Renewal in 2010 (see Appendix B). It might seem that this is all 'prior story' but to quote Jane Jacobs: "lively, diverse, intense cities contain the seeds of their own regeneration" (2011: 585).

In Hastings the research focus has always been on 'sucking it up', being visible, engaged, listening, arguing, co-creating, commoning. I have sought to turn these experiences into a set of 'empiricals', a dated mixture of photos, audio recordings, meeting minutes, emails, and fieldnotes gathered into a folder called 'Various Snapshots of SRN in Hastings'.

It might be assumed that my methods would vary between 'inquiry from the inside' in Hastings and 'inquiry from the outside' in Liverpool (Evered and Louis, 1981: passim). In fact in both locations they were "characterised by the experiential involvement of the researcher… and an intent to understand a particular situation" (ibid: 385), though not displaying the "absence of a priori analytical categories" said to be a feature of the "messy, iterative groping" of the 'inside' approach (ibid: 387). I brought some categories in terms of my particular hunches about the characteristics of self-renovating neighbourhoods, but, at least in Hastings, much of the knowledge gained came from everyday 'coping/sense making/ survival' activities. (ibid: 388 Fig 1: Alternative Modes of Inquiry).

The research focus prioritised the voices of those grassroots activists who were trying to achieve self-renovation. During the pilot phase I built strong relationships with the 'key access point contacts' in Liverpool, while in Hastings these were already in place from my own long and ongoing involvement there. While my track record, profile and contacts facilitated access, those assets could become liabilities in shaping the overt responses of my informants away from issues and perceptions that might have been more easily shared with a more distant researcher. Being a community practitioner gave me more access to certain informants but excluded me from other spaces. While such dilemmas shaped the knowledge I have been able to produce, I overcame some of these constraints through relationships with other researchers, such as supporting Bec Lester, one of the participants, to download her first-hand experience of the Hastings Organisation Workshop and sharing interview recordings with Martina Gross, a German radio journalist who was able to access key figures in Liverpool City Council.

Alongside repeated individual conversations, I participated in many on-site group

discussions – at and around Rock House in White Rock, and making use of the sociable street furniture in Granby. I explored the governance of the SRN groups through attending meetings in each area and participated in public processes – fliering, door-knocking, public meetings and consultation events. I became notorious for taking photographs (600 of Granby, over 5,000 in White Rock). These have been bolstered by the collection of historical photographs, in Granby through the wonderful photographic archive curated by Ronnie Hughes ('A Sense of Place') and in Hastings through the support of local historian Steve Peak. Both the archival pictures and my own ever-growing collection helped to track small changes over time, locating the physicality of the emerging neighbourhoods in their diachronicity to better understand how they are constructed and reconstructed as 'time-spaces' (Massey 2005: 177-80). This kind of ethnography "lets us see the relative messiness of practice… the often ragged ways in which knowledge is produced in research" (Law 2004: 18-19).

4.4.3 Turning action into data

After a pilot phase which included initial interviews with key players in Granby, I chose to collect data in the form of in-depth iterative interviews, recorded meetings, field notes and photography, as well as my own written reflections. Interviews were transcribed and NVivo was used for some of the analysis. I coded many of the transcripts and this played a key role in the iterative process of research and data analysis in which I returned to the same key interviewees over and over, building a 'saturated' picture of how their involvement and perceptions changed during the research period (Marion 2002). "The phenomenon always overflows our initial perception of it. As we attend to the phenomenon over time, we revisit our experience, and as we revisit it, we re-experience it in different ways" (Timmermans and Tavory 2012: 176).

In contrast, throughout the research period I struggled to find the most effective approaches in the engagement with the 'Hastings selves'. Doing interviews in Granby, however unconventional and iterative, I was asking my informants to reflect on their experience so they were saying things about the SRN activity underway. I didn't want

to ‘interview’ the key Hastings people because I knew it would change my relationship with them (Brewis 2014). Instead I wrote copious fieldnotes, recorded meetings wherever possible and then asked colleagues to respond to a framework of headings emerging from the writing up, using ‘a piece of paper’ as my talking and asking them to ‘talk back’.

I had to keep reminding myself my aim was not to write a thesis about what other people think about what’s happening in these neighbourhoods. Rather I have a concept (SRN) and a set of hypothesised characteristics that I am trying to both test and develop by putting them through the wringer of Hastings and Granby. To get a ‘rounded view’ of those neighbourhoods one would talk to lots of people and one would have some distance. Whereas, I’ve always been right in the middle both theoretically – doing the thinking – and practically – trying to do the renovating, experiencing it, making it happen. This makes the analysis a constructive ‘knowing-in-action’ (Schon 1987) that differs from analysis by those who “remain outside the situation they are investigating and with no opportunity to create change directly in the research setting” (Duncan 2004: 33). I have had hundreds of conversations – both within the team and with diverse others – about the ecosystem, the Commons, our shared values and goals. Autoethnography legitimises the study of a field you are deeply involved in, and the focus on your own perspective. Since my interest is developing these three lenses to look through – SELF /RENOVATING / NEIGHBOURHOODS – the question is not what everybody thinks about the thing that we are doing, but whether the people inside and close to the process find my headings interesting. Is this framework, as nuanced by Granby and Hastings, useful for thinking both in these places and with other places? Does it help us and them to develop, do good things, understand what we/they are doing and be more confident in speaking about it?

Given the immersive character of the research, one of the most challenging aspects has been defining parameters for what counts as research data (Wall 2008: 50). In Hastings I have lived the experience including the conversations and interactions. I have records of many of these but the extractable data is different – it is not usually ‘a

quote' because the participants are deep in a meeting and the interesting point is how the meeting moved things along rather than a specific thing that was said. So the data record is my fieldnote which is inevitably 'pre-chewed'.

Figure 4.6: Raw data for White Rock case study

SOUND	A vast array of audio recordings (reflections, site visits, meetings, chats, parties, learning events, conversational interviews) creating a 6-year sound-cloud of SRN in Hastings.
VISUAL	Over 4,000 WR-relevant photographs and 50 short videos showing the shifting focus of my gaze as each new aspect of SRN came into play.
DOCUMENTARY/ TEXTUAL	I am surrounded by the documentary relicts of my day-to-day working life over the past 8 years. I have received and sent (and archived) over 150,000 emails (not including spam) since July 2013 when the process that led to the Hastings Commons began (with a White Rock Trust application for pre-feasibility funding for the Observer Building). My Dropbox includes 29 White Rock-relevant folders, with many hundreds of sub-folders, holding over 70,000 individual files taking up 160 Gigabytes. There are meeting agendas and minutes, ideation, strategies, business plans, financial models, funding bids and monitoring reports, development updates, Gantt charts, cost plans, tender documents, campaign materials, results of listening and engagement, organisational bureaucracy, architectural drawings and images of all kinds. I have also mined the Loomio (a platform invented by the Occupy movement to support and track decision-making), which WRNV and our tenants have been using since the purchase of Rock House in 2014 and which is now an important internal comms tool for the ecosystem. In paper format, my own handwritten material (mainly notes of phone calls and meetings) is stored in a series of notebooks. In times of particularly intense discursive activity (eg during a property purchase or a conflict), I have tended to take copious notes on refill pads kept in reverse date order. Since the start of lockdown 1 in March 2020 the pile has grown to 15 inches deep. This approach, along with my archived calendar enables me to pin down the timeline. About 20% of the material comprises reflections of various kinds which could be seen as a set of 'interviews with myself', as well as a number of interviews of me by other people. I also have a pile of index cards that captured all kinds of field-notes, reflections, references and other thoughts.

I spent months (time 'stolen' from my role in the ongoing creation of the Hastings Commons) re-living the inside of this data, coding it according to my framework and pulling out hundreds of 'snapshots' of SRN in Hastings, ranging from quotes from others and an earlier me to particular emails, meeting notes, documents and

photographs, that captured the evolving story. It is these snapshots, and the contextual material that they evoke, that form the core of my empirical data explored in depth in chapters 7-9.

4.5 Analytical Aim

To create and nuance the concept of SRN

> "Weak theory does not elaborate and confirm what we already know; it observes, interprets and yields to emerging knowledge" (Gibson-Graham 2014: S149)

My hypothesis (Steele 2012) **–** that SRN could be an alternative to traditional regeneration and would have *xyz* characteristics **–** emerged from reflecting with others on the stories of Crossfield and Upper Brockley and from my own, perhaps unique, experience of regeneration programmes since 1992 at both local and national level. Uplifted by my engagement across the country with development trusts and the community organising programme, at that point I had no knowledge of Granby and was still focused on rescuing Hastings Pier. By 2015 everything was different. Granby was emergent, triumphant, beautiful. White Rock was weird, scary, exciting. Both were clearly at the start of a journey.

In the period 2015-21 I have been <u>both</u> piloting my SRN concept in practice in White Rock <u>and</u> reflecting on the validity and deepening understanding of the hypothesised characteristics. This has been <u>triply</u> through empirical research in Granby and White Rock, <u>and</u> by locating SRN in the literature on urban commoning, <u>and</u> by the 'generation of novelty' (Massey 2005: 71) through encounters that happen, whether we record them or not. The result of this work is the S / R / N framework which is neither a prediction nor a theory but a way of looking and a vehicle for future-forming in practice on the ground. For me, it tethers well to Massey and Gibson-Graham. I hope that others might pick SRN up and position it in other spaces and literatures.

Krehl and Weck (2020) ask scholars to reflect on our frame of reference and be transparent in our analytical approaches as well as our research design. Using abductive analysis generated a creative tension between the speculative hunches from

my experiential knowledge and preliminary literature review and the time spent in the neighbourhoods creating empirical materials for evidence-based analysis to challenge and reshape those hunches into propositions, what Eastwell (2014) might call a 'tentative law'. Focusing on "socially located, positional knowledge" is an advance on the crude inductive-deductive binary (Timmermans and Tavory 2012: 172; see Ince and Hahn 2020 for a relevant use of this approach). However, it is revealing that Timmermans and Tavory (2014) refer to an established body of knowledge as being *based on the literature*. I wanted to advance the abductive methodological approach by integrating my own (ongoing) experiential knowledge with relevant academic literatures as the *source* of the 'speculative hunches'. My participant observation in the field(s) and ongoing reflections, informed and inspired by continuous reading, were the *process of challenging* those hunches. Flyvbjerg reminds us that case study researchers very often find their early propositions confounded ('falsified') by what they experience in the field (2006: 228). In my case those early propositions have more or less held true but become increasingly (out)dated by my ongoing learning in terms of new experiences and reflection (see figure 10.1).

I agree with Stake that "[g]ood case study is patient, reflective, willing to see another view of *theta*… [It] tries to preserve the multiple realities, the different and even contradictory views of what is happening" (1995: 12). These contradictions are located even within my own multiple realities and different views (from day-to-day or year-to-year) of 'what is happening'. Following Jessop (1996, 2005), I am interested in the strategic-relational approach (SRA), not least because it explicitly allows for strategic action by agents to address the strategic selectivities of structures that privilege unevenly (Jessop 2005: 50-52). Secondly it introduces the idea of retroductive analysis: if this is the real world and this is actually happening, what must be going on? There have been many moments in the last six years where I have seen behaviours and reactions that shocked, frightened or delighted me. In each case I have had the privilege of reflecting reproductively (locally, with other practitioners, and in conversation with the literatures).

A third connection with SRA is that I use my categories S / R / N as *abstract-simple* entry points from which *concrete-complex* accounts and analyses can proceed. "Rather than seeking to resolve concrete-complex issues of practical action in specific conjunctures through abstract epistemological or methodological fiat, the 'strategic-relational approach' leaves these issues underdetermined on an abstract-simple level and permits their resolution through appropriately detailed conjectural analysis" (Jessop, 1996: 127, see also Fisker et al 2019: 4). This simple subject-verb-object framework enables me to investigate the key concepts discussed in Chapters 2 and 3 (worlds of possibility shut down by dominant models of ownership and regen, the false choice and its alternative – decommodification and commoning), alongside and through the empirical and analytical material in Chapters 7, 8 and 9.

4.6. Normative Aim:

To nurture positive change in the face of destructive dominant models

The notion of 'self-renovating neighbourhoods' was a thread of thinking that first emerged in an intense conversation with friend and former business partner Richard Walker in June 2010. He reminded me about the 'accidental regeneration' of Crossfield and Upper Brockley, suggested blurring the lines between 'private' and 'community' assets, and urged a return to DIY in the regen process. My notes of the conversation reflect the excitable sense in the early recession that we could begin to imagine 'the new normal':

> "It's about people getting together to get stuff done. That takes courage and conviction as well as confidence. There are certainly enough people with the right kind of skills and muscle and time on their hands, for us to characterise this as literally 'rebuilding Britain'" [100608 Richard Walker].

In the long decade since then, while the world has experienced astonishing changes, I have continued to try to "make hope possible, rather than despair convincing" (Williams 1989: 118).

Methods are not innocent or purely technical; they are performative; they produce realities. "The issue becomes how to make things different, and what to make" (Law

2004: 143). Gibson-Graham describe how “the performativity of knowledge… has placed new responsibility on the shoulders of scholars… and their power to bring new worlds into being… alongside other world-makers” (Gibson-Graham 2008: 614).

My case studies are living, dynamic places where change is being nurtured, both in terms of specific projects that create new physical, cultural and human assets and in their attempt to challenge ontological understandings of the ‘realities’ of land ownership. Inspired by Law (2004) and Lowndes (2016), I set out to explore what new realities are enacted when people say ‘these streets are ours’ or ‘this land is ours’. These are more or less mobilised and heavily contested narratives that both use and go beyond any story to challenge fundamentally the hegemonic institutional norms and practices of land ownership, urban regeneration and local governance – not just politically, though that is important, but ontologically, which is more radical. They try to redefine what is or could be real, through the very act of bringing into being something new under the radar of the powerful (who do not see them as having the agency to make realities of any description).

I embrace Olson and Sayer’s arguments for normative thinking: that values are “forms of reasoning about the world”; that “radical or critical social science’s most basic claim is that social phenomena could be otherwise and can be changed” (2009: 184); but also that ‘objectivity’ in the sense of things whose nature is independent of our beliefs about them is compatible with fallibility whereas if nothing was objective we would be infallible (ibid: 185) which seems both unlikely and undesirable. The question we face in social science is one of ethics and what constitutes human flourishing. Our claims about the objective elements of wellbeing or illbeing are fallible but necessary because “if we reduce people to products of discursive construction… we can’t expect to understand why they flourish or suffer, or why they often resist” (ibid: 187).

Ethnographic thick description is hyperconscious of its own performative effects – “the large issues to which small facts are made to speak” (Gibson-Graham 2014 after Geertz 1973). To give two small examples of my own performative practice and effects from one day in February 2021. First performing (in the Goffmanesque sense) for a local

owner who felt we were 'requisitioning' the 2 square metre concrete slab marked as his property on the title deed through its use as part of the pathway between Hastings Commons property either side. Then, more Butlerian, being criticised for giving 'instructions' (by sharing my notes after watching a 3-hr zoom meeting recording): "Because of who you are, the word 'actions' is interpreted as specific instructions" [EMP 210210 JB email]. Each of these was a mini-performance of power relations.

Geertz said "[d]oing ethnography is like trying to read (in the sense of 'construct a reading of') a manuscript—foreign, faded, full of ellipses, incoherencies, suspicious emendations and tendentious commentaries, but not written in conventionalized graphs of sound but in transient examples of shaped behaviour" ([1973] 2000: 10). Transient examples of shaped behaviour are the subject of praxiography – attention to practices as the core analytical unit, a method to "stubbornly take notice of the techniques that make things visible, audible, tangible, knowable" (Mol 2002: 33).

While I am fully committed to relationality and performativity I am also interested in 'material politics', the ways in which politics is caught up in and reproduced in material arrangements. And also how the articulation of politics, its enactment in words, relates to and is embedded in non-discursive material practices. Law and Mol (2008) take the fascinating story of the 2001 Foot and Mouth Disease outbreak in England and show how the practice of boiling pigswill was 'a political technique'. "Boiling pigswill did not take the form of an argument" and yet it set boundaries, protected the rich from the poor, made long-distance links and practised 'metabolic conservation' and did not push people in Argentina off their land (unlike other forms of pig-feed) – all of these things "intertwined together and in tension" (2008: 141). The example from my research that this conjures up is the cleaning, care-taking and patrolling of the Alley, the core of the Hastings Commons. The quality and values of these practices sends messages that set in train and continually reproduce "a material ordering of the world in a way that contrasts with alternative and equally possible modes of ordering" (ibid: 141). What otherwise appears to be self-evident may be undermined through *articulation* in all its senses: make connections, join, give voice, put practices into contrast with their others, open up a space of contestation. A full praxiographic study

of the Hastings Commons is beyond scope but would be fascinating to explore.

Gergen captured the challenge in moving the scholar's objective "from mirroring to world-making" (2014). He takes the 'enlightenment effects' (Gergen 1973) and 'looping effects' (Hacking 2000), in which exposure to social scientific accounts has been seen to alter social behaviour and patterns of cultural life, and offers the productive response of "research as a future forming practice – a practice in which social change is indeed the primary goal" (Gergen 2014: 292).

> "[I]n conducting research on what exists, we lend inertia to conventional forms of life. We do not readily ask about what does not yet exist, or about ways of life that could be created. In effect, the mirroring tradition of research favors the maintenance of the status quo" (Gergen 2014: 293).

I am both delighted and daunted to be conducting research on worlds emergent, the potentiality of 'not-yet'. The concept of 'status quo emergo', became a sharper interest during the Covid lockdowns: what is coming next? what is trying to be born? and how can I help?

4.7 Ethical Aim

To be honest, to be myself, to be both a leader and a listener, to be grateful, to be useful, to do justice to Granby and White Rock, to help them and others be more confident, capable and credible to progress towards self-renovating neighbourhoods that disrupt dominant capitalocentrism and make common wealth for the future.

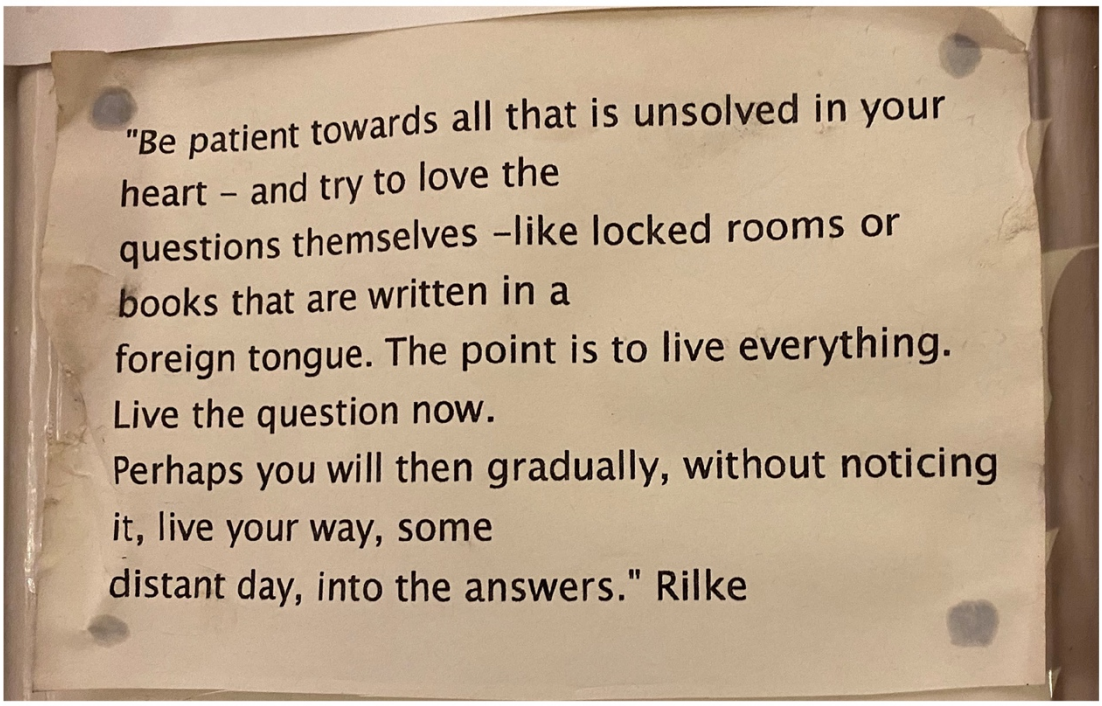
Figure 4.7: Empathy in qualitative study (after Stake 1995)

Empathy in qualitative study (Stake 1995: 47)	**Ethical and honest choices** (Stake (1995: 103)
Attends to actor intentionality	How much to participate personally in the activity of the case
Seeks actor frames of reference, value commitments	How much to pose as expert, how much comprehension to reveal
	Whether to be neutral observer or evaluative, critical analyst
Although planned, the design is emergent, responsive	How much to try to serve the needs of anticipated readers
Issues are emic, progressively focused	How much to provide interpretations about the case
	How much to advocate a position
Reporting provides vicarious experience	Whether or not to tell it as story
	How much to be oneself

Stake's final 'ethical and honest choice' – how much to be oneself – is far more fraught in the 2020s than the 1990s. In a world of identity/post-identity, polarisation and 'culture wars', with social media maximising visibility and connectivity, 'being oneself' can feel more precarious than ever (Baddiel 2021; Ronson 2021). Despite this different time-space context, Stake is right that others help to negotiate the role and "we work these choices out with experience, long range and immediate. The chameleon too is something of a role model" (Stake 1995: 104).

I am acutely aware of my own multiple privileges, especially through Covid, and of the obligation to use them to make things better. For me, committing to honesty includes not just truth-telling but also honest doubt, self-challenge, staying with the trouble (Haraway 2010).[22] Working and studying in an emergent field it is essential to be open to live with uncertainty.

Figure 4.8: "Live the question now" (Rilke 1903)



Rainer Maria Rilke, Letter to Mr Kappus, Worpswede, near Bremen, 16 July 1903.
This has been on my wall for more than a decade, reminding me of the value of uncertainty.

[22] "Staying with that kind of mundane trouble requires facing those who come before, in order to live responsibly in thick copresents, so that we may bequeath something liveable to those who come after" (Haraway 2010: 53)

Nast described how “mis-fitting and the resulting discomfiture are commonly effaced from fieldwork narratives” (1998: 71) whereas I found the research uncomfortable a lot of the time. Although I love the work and am used to meeting lots of different people, my specific and contradictory position as both leader-expert and researcher-thinker was hard to navigate. The half-digested knowledge and insights from endless reading were hard to translate into pub-talk and even more agonising to try to share with others in this commons-creating journey. Some colleagues, fellow trustees, and even my partner would more or less patronisingly imply “you’ve been doing a lot of reading but it’s not like that in the real world”. They may be right.

Ethnography traditionally emphasises *emic* issues, those arising from within the study subject. Stake suggests that researchers shouldn’t interfere with the lives of others, that we should be non-intrusive, quiet, “as interesting as wallpaper” (1995: 59). He reminds us that Geertz’s thick description “is not complexities objectively described; it is the particular perceptions of the actors” (Stake 1995: 42). Erickson (1985) argued that the key interpretations presented should be those of the research subject and called the personal views put forward by the researcher ‘assertions’ rather than ‘findings’. And yet… again autoethnography offers a way through – if I am the research subject then my assertions are findings?

Some of the drawbacks to my methods have been mentioned above – the limiting of quantitative triangulation to house prices and IMD statistics, the lack of discourse analysis, and the challenges of finding appropriate ways to gather data. Perhaps the greatest drawback, and it is an inherent flaw, is what Parry (2008: 35) calls the “completely contradictory dynamics” of intimacy and research. She was speaking of an extraordinary intimacy (she encountered Iris Murdoch’s preserved brain) but her conclusions and concerns resonate with mine in the context of neighbourhood. Parry describes the creation of ‘spaces of intimacy’ where a shared object (or neighbourhood) comes to embody a relation of intimacy, reminding us that intimacy is always relational but not always synchronous (ibid: 43). The main methodological concern is that intimacy concerns the private and personal whereas research is “primarily revelatory” (ibid: 35). If I were a novelist perhaps I could capture the

amazing array of people involved. Instead I have walked a wobbly line between reveal and conceal, making decisions in each instance as to what can be said and what would be “some sort of transgression” (ibid: 37). Ellis, Adams and Bochner (2011) admit the difficulty of maintaining privacy because autoethnography necessarily reveals the author and in doing so inevitably touches on people around them. I am grateful for the support and patience of my hosts-allies-informants-collaborators, particularly the ecosystem team in Hastings and the ever-generous Hazel Tilley in Liverpool. Stake’s barb rings true: “The researcher may be delightful company, but hosting delightful company is a burden” (1995: 58).

CHAPTER 5: GRANBY: A CLASSIC CASE STARTING POINT

Figure 5.1: Assemble image of the Granby 4 Streets

> "What was beautiful about it was – you lived in the world. The whole world lived here. As well as being educated by seeing all these different people, it was sort of stretching your life out between you" (long-time Granby resident Josephine Burger, quoted Granby Workshop Catalogue 2015: 29)

> "You walk into what feels like a tomb… The eerie streets are all but deserted. Victorian terraced houses of good solid stock condemned, abandoned and empty.. As though to obliterate any family or human life – any memory of Christmas, love, argument or sex the household may once have held" (Ed Vuilliamy, *The Guardian* July 2011)

> "I've never lost the delight of knowing that people live there now. We missed a few things. We were too busy. So much to do and so few of us to do it. I'm very pleased with what we've achieved, we've done incredibly well with virtually bugger all. So now I feel that stepping back is no sin" [210706 Hazel Tilley]

This chapter 'constructs' the Granby 4 Streets (Ducie, Cairns, Jermyn, and Beaconsfield) as a classic case of community-led neighbourhood change to be used in comparison with White Rock in the analytical chapters. It does so by drawing on historical material (see Appendix B), as well as the storytelling of Granby's leaders, Matthew Thompson's research and writing, and the empirical data I collected over a 5-

year period. This data is interwoven to analyse Granby as an emergent commons, ready to illuminate the concepts of SELF / RENOVATING / NEIGHBOURHOODS.

My research in Granby was different from Thompson's. His drew on "original and secondary data, including semi-structured interviews and participant observation, conducted between 2012 and 2015 for doctoral research which looked into Liverpool's recent post-war history of experimentation with collective alternatives to public housing" (Thomson 2017: 105). In 'Beyond Boundaries' (2015) he used this material to consider how mutual housing alternatives can provide "institutional blueprints for the democratic stewardship of place" and explore "how legally recognised forms of collective land ownership can be successfully institutionalised out of grassroots activism" (2015: 1022). In 'LIFE in a ZOO' (2017), Thompson played with the acronymic abstractions of the 'regeneration game' to undertake a serious Lefebvrean analysis of Granby in terms of the discursive dialectic and the pitched battles between abstract space and social space. This focus on playful innovation versus conventional regeneration was extended in 'Playing with the Rules of the Game' (2018). In 2020 he traced the historical evolution and policy mobilities of collaborative housing movements, showing how the CLT idea took root in Liverpool.

Mine was a more immersive experience, building deep relationships with my 'research subjects', especially Hazel Tilley and Eleanor Lee, and a powerful felt experience of the place from the first visit onwards. I wanted to understand what was happening in those four streets from a regenerative perspective rather than through any specific policy lens. This was surely a self-renovating neighbourhood and I wanted to get under its skin. Who are these people, what drives them, how do they work together, who do they pull in? How were they making change, how did they get ownership, where did the money come from, did they know what they were doing? What impact would it have to darn the shredded fabric[23] of the four streets, what new neighbourhood would emerge? Could I help at all along the way?

[23] Margaret Walker, who came to Granby in the mid 1960s told the Gifford Inquiry: "When I first came to Liverpool 25 years ago this was a very close-knit community. But I feel, all of a sudden, that this community is like shredded paper. We can't put it back together again" (Gifford 1989: 63-4)

5.1 Granby as history

I came to realise that to understand Granby as a case study of community-led regeneration it is essential to grasp the neighbourhood's unique history. Neighbourhood history specialises in what Witmore calls "folded, chiasmic and entangled time" in which "[t]he present is always a rich aggregate mix of multiple times which are not necessarily linear in association" (2006: 280). Figure 5.2 shows that as far back as 1993 I intuitively understood this messiness, "the becoming otherwise that is folded with the actual" (Anderson 2017: 594).

Figure 5.2: Preface, Turning the Tide: the history of everyday Deptford (Steele 1993)

> *Local history is a bugger to write! It slips and slides between neighbourhood and nation. Its single threads cross centuries with disarming disregard for the conventional rules of historical periods. They tangle with each other mercilessly: disappear; reappear; lie forgotten, rise unbidden. In the end, it is up to the writer to decide on a structure, to put down anchor and tether up the good ship Deptford so the world may have a look.*

Appendix B provides a detailed analysis of the historic threads that offer relevant insights about the shape of what emerged in Granby. Each story-thread intertwines with the others to contribute a legacy into the present and the possible futures for the neighbourhood.

Figure 5.3: Granby historical headings (see Appendix B)

- Richard Owens and the Liverpool estates
- The historic focus of the Black community
- Slum Clearance and SNAP
- The 1981 riots and 'managed decline'
- The Impasse 1992-2002
- Housing Market Renewal 2002-2011
- Neighbourhood Housework
- The end of HMR and the formation of the CLT
- Ten Houses, Four Corners and a Workshop
- The Street that won the Turner Prize
- The Winter Garden

Here I would highlight three major factors that shaped Granby's history in the century to 2011 and thereby the context for the activities of Granby 4 Streets community land trust: *endemic spatialised racism* which reproduced the walling-in of diversity within a small part of the city (Gifford 1989; Merrifield 1996); *state attitudes to spatialised poverty* which focused on clearance, kettling and managed decline (SNAP 1969-72; Saumarez Smith 2019; Parker and Atkinson 2020); and the *territorial stigmatisation* (Wacquant, Slater and Pereira 2014; Tyler 2013) which characterised Liverpool 8 as a symbol of the city's wider decline and depravity, particularly after the 1981 'disturbances'.[24]

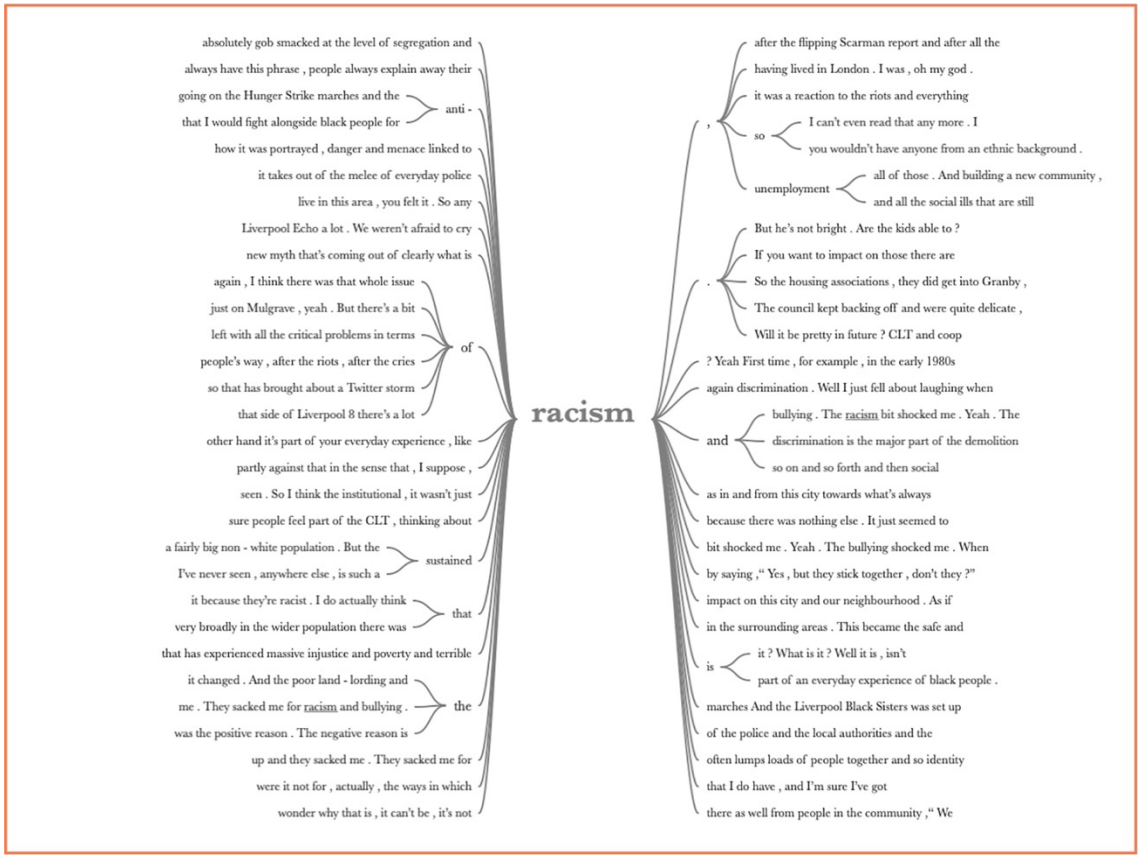
Liverpool has one of Britain's oldest Black communities, perhaps three centuries old, with some Black Liverpudlians able to trace their roots in the city for as many as ten generations. The 'mixed-race' Liverpool-born Black community is the second largest group in the City after UK White, yet it "feels invisible… an almost homogenous people, derived from many nations, eking out their existence as a secret under-culture in a state of suppression for over two and a half centuries" (Costello 2012). Until the inclusion of an 'ethnicity question' in the 1991 census, as recommended by the Gifford Report (Gifford 1989: 39), this large group was statistically invisible.

Despite the challenge of finding the right words, it is essential to understand Granby's specific kind of diversity. People had been coming to Liverpool from all over the world for generations, mixing together as people do and creating a natural blending of genetics and cultures that was both longstanding and continually renewed. In the 19th century, Black people tended to settle in the area of the south docks, not an unusual pattern; the strangeness is in how this spatial segregation has been sustained for over 200 years. All three of the factors listed above were involved in the active reproduction of this isolation. Such "distinctively polyglot" (Merrifield 1996: 206) diversity, in any world unscarred by racial and class prejudice, would be recognised as community

[24] Here I use 'disturbances' because it was this disruptive aspect of the 1981 events that was stigmatised and punished. Elsewhere I have used "uprising" and "riots" interchangeably to recognise that both terms are true in their own right. These were violent riots in the streets as a tactic in a rising up of people suffering injustice.

resilience. Yet the 'pernicious' attitudes behind the term 'half-caste', already visible by the mid 19th century, "undermined the very process which ought to have integrated Black Liverpudlians in the stream of common humanity" (Gifford 1989: 27). Instead, those small areas where Black people lived became stigmatised and their populations of all backgrounds were subject to extreme prejudice from the rest of the city. Gifford's Liverpool 8 Inquiry team found the racism in Liverpool "uniquely horrific" (Gifford 1989: 22). Black people were effectively kettled, facing racist taunts, threats and violence if they moved any distance outside Liverpool 8. White people known to be associated with Liverpool 8 also "suffered deeply from this racism" (ibid). Three decades later, my research informants stressed the special and spatialised character of Liverpool's racism from the very first interview.

Figure 5.4: Word Tree of 'racism' from my Granby interviews



Alongside and intertwined with the racial *segregation* described above, is the tendency of the state to respond to spatialised poverty with 'clearance'. Karen Till has given us the term 'wounded cities' to describe "densely settled locales that have been harmed and structured by particular histories of physical destruction, displacement, and

individual and social trauma resulting from state-perpetrated violence. Rather than harmed by a singular 'outside event', these forms of violence often work over a period of many years, often decades, and continue to structure current social and spatial relations, and as such also structure expectations of what is considered 'normal'" (Till 2012: 5). This point about the continuity of harm that justifies the term 'wounded' is illuminated in Granby's post-war history, which also shows the diversity of violence from the withdrawal of services to actual bulldozers.

The third feature of Granby's story is the territorial *stigma* associated with the neighbourhood, dating back at least into the 1960s and intact when Hazel arrived 20 years later, only to worsen as the post-1981 punishment played out its slow violence. The fragments of place-shaming – the attitudes of police, cab drivers, bank managers, and the wider public, fed by punitive press and political discourses – speak to the specific topography of disrepute identified as 'spatial taint' (Wacquant, Slater and Pereira 2014).

Figure 5.5: Summary of spatial taint

"Spatial taint" differs from older topographies of disrepute

1. Disconnected from the specifics of poverty, ethnicity, poor housing, imputed immorality, street crime – to become new generic labels like 'banlieu', 'sink estates', Problemquartier, etc.

2. Nationalised and democratised. In every country a small set of urban boroughs have become universally renowned and reviled, equated with social hell. "This sulferous image prevails not just among social and cultural elites as with their predecessors a century ago – but among the citizenry at large, including those who dwell in these damned districts and those entirely removed from them."

3. Seen as vortexes of social disintegration, dissolute and disorganized, compared to the highly organised counterworlds of the past

4. Racialisation – exaggerating cultural difference, especially religious, at the expense of vulnerable class position. Incidents of violence etc are turned into alleged intrinsic feature of the sociocultural traits of the residents.

5. Overwhelmingly negative reactions – corrective, punitive reactions that use the state (and/ or private power) to "penalize urban marginality". No longer ambivalent fascination and lurid attraction by the elite (slumming it).

Summarised from Wacquant et al (2014: 1273-75)

Part of the reason Granby is such a classic case is the extreme and exemplary nature of its mistreatment by the state from 1981 to 2011 from post-riot punishment that combined managed decline with intervention by helicopter, through the long impasse of the 1990s, to the hubris of Housing Market Renewal and then the collapse of the last top-down solution.

However, 'tainted' and abused areas often build strong internal bonding capital (Putman 2000; Halpern 2005; DeFilippis 2001) and, against all efforts to wipe out the neighbourhood, this is a story of *(partial) survival through collective action*. Appendix B describes the work of the Shelter Neighbourhood Action Project (SNAP 1969-72) and concludes that this three-year project half a century ago was a significant contributor to Granby's exceptional survivability. By the 1990s Liverpool City Council laid out the options for Granby as "do nothing or find a common sense compromise that allows a meaningful regeneration plan to go ahead" (Report of Joint Meeting of Policy and Resources and Housing Committee, Nov 1994, quoted Merrifield 1996: 210). "Do nothing" is clearly the decline side of the false choice while the "common sense… meaningful regeneration" meant the obliteration of the existing neighbourhood. In Granby "no conception of legitimate compromise" (Merrifield 1996: 211) was established, which led to inaction. Merrifield seems to blame local groups for this, with their "diverse demands and vested interests" meaning they "failed to pinpoint commonality within their own community differences", leading to "a stubborn stalemate" (ibid). Could it have been otherwise? The various groups did not realise that they might have had the power to generate a shared vision: that option was never on offer. Merrifield has a great paragraph about how the institutional and bureaucratic decision-making process – "itself defective and riddled with its own place-specific ineptitudes" – is constrained within a broader national context, embedded in a European and global capitalist system, "all of which takes place, as it were, 'behind the backs' of residents in Granby and is so abstract that it's immediately out of reach within their daily life practices, even though it weighs down terrifically upon it" (ibid). Yet the dogged persistence of local people over nearly 30 years testifies to their survivability while acknowledging those who were lost from the neighbourhood.

Together these threads of segregation, clearance, stigma and survivability weave a picture of a highly-contingent 'result'. Many other outcomes were theoretically possible at every stage but the narrative that eventually caught hold was of "the Liverpool locals who took control of their long-neglected streets[25]" (Wainwright 2014).

5.2 Granby as commons

The discussion above, drawing on the historical analysis in Appendix B, establishes the context for the work of Granby 4 Streets community land trust but I would suggest that the neighbourhood already had strong signs of a social commons, built on historic social stewarding of the terraces, neighbourly relations and reciprocity. Indeed it could be argued that both Granby and White Rock became commons by default because others had given up on them. Those people that survived/stayed put/took notice became de facto commoners, nurturing a precious resource back to life through use and care.

I use the term 'neighbourhood housework' to describe the work that Eleanor began in 2006 when she started gardening and cleaning up the street, and when neighbours joined in to paint the tinned-up fronts of the empty houses, creating planters and furniture in the street.

> "It can take many small acts of courage, but it has turned out to be a powerful thing. We started to take some very small actions, which began with cleaning and clearing rubbish, and endless brushing and painting, and the very female, undervalued domestic activities that normally take place in the home but now moved out into public spaces and started to stretch over entire streets. This breaks taboos" (Eleanor, quoted in Waterson 2019: 16)

Alongside this domestication of the 'public realm' to create the Granby commons, there was a drive to embed creativity into neglected neighbourhood spaces – from the coloured pigeons on the window sills to the upcycling of Granby rubble into light pulls,

[25] The word 'streets' means two things in Granby – the roadways themselves, now with their benches and planters, but more widely the neighbourhood of these four streets including homes, workspaces, greenery, furniture, vibe and behaviours. (cf Portelli 2020 description of *en calle* in Bon Pastor, Barcelona)

tiles and mantelpieces by Assemble and the Granby Workshop, to the Winter Garden as an injection of beauty into ordinary space.

Figure 5.6: The Winter Garden, Cairns Street, Granby. April 2019

There had never been an agreed plan for Granby since SNAP. Not agreeing a plan, not letting any plan stand as legitimate, was a critical piece of resistance throughout the Granby Residents period. In late 2012, for the first time, there was a temporal-spatial confluence of a *vacuum of policy* (cancellation of the Housing Market Renewal programme and then the last private sector option collapsing, leaving Liverpool City Council with no alternatives) and *agency at grassroots* (the confidence of CLT founders rooted in their activities in the space of the streets and their revolutionary suggestion of a 'creative mix of development' in which they would take a leading role). This pivotal moment was part of a broader mobilisation that drew on grassroots virtues of thrift (as thriving), impatience and sociability, alongside learned skills

The survivors of Granby have fought the demon of 'comprehensive renewal' and in its place made something recognisably special. I am always keen to celebrate Granby 4 Streets achievements but I do not agree with Thompson's stress on mutual housing alternatives as "institutional blueprints for the democratic stewardship of place". He was exploring "how legally recognised forms of collective land ownership can be successfully institutionalised out of grassroots activism." (2015: 1022). For me that is neither the only nor the main question and I don't believe Granby has demonstrated it.

What it has shown is the ability of grassroots activism to be successful – first in delaying demolition and then in achieving the turnaround. Some institutional form was a necessary condition of this broader success, but the institution is, in itself, neither the most successful part of the Granby process, nor (arguably) the most interesting. My interviews rarely focus positively on the board and governance processes; power and engagement in the CLT remains, rightly, a thorny subject. Thompson, like most CLT scholars, accepts the ideal of "a democratically elected tripartite trust, whose rotating board representatives are equally split between member-residents, expert stakeholders, and the wider community" (2015: 1026), as laid down by the US CLTs. While this appears to balance the 'subject' interests and arguably facilitates greater external collaboration (as Thompson returns to in 2020a), the formulation leaves out questions of character, personality and chemistry ('the selves') that will make all the difference. Additionally, we are so obsessed with 'good boards' (for managerial and

power relations) that we lose sight of both the Athenian ideal – that democracy has to involve (or at least be engagingly open to) all the people – and the actual practice of making change, the 'doing' in Holloway's (2010) sense.

Nevertheless, this approach allows Thompson to ask whether CLTs, within a broader movement for local autonomy and collective ownership of the means of social reproduction (DeFilippis 2004), might be "institutional articulations of the commons" (Thompson 2015: 1024). As we saw in Chapter 3, commons are simultaneously material resource and social practice and this is mirrored in the ideal CLT form which describes both the social practice and physical assets held in trust (ibid: 1025).

Thompson says "the [Granby] CLT seeks a greater stake in the area… aspiring towards a 'stewardship' role as the over-arching democratic decision-making institution through which all other stakeholders and residents may come together to negotiate and pool resources" (ibid: 1023, my emphasis). Even by September 2016 my marginalia queried 'do they want to be that?'. To me it appeared much more complex: shifting, negotiated, remade every day because constituted by daily life and social relations. What the CLT would do was clear; what it would become will remain contested because it is about power.

> "We started with a load of empty houses and no people so what we did then was right. Now there are people the CLT needs to properly discuss with them and find out what they think is right. It's easy when there's a few of you to just make it up" [210706 Hazel].

Thompson has always positioned Granby within Liverpool's wider role as "a laboratory for innovation in mutual housing experiments" (2015: 1029-30). I would place it in another lineage, as a story not of 'the institutionalisation of commons' but of the haphazard and improvised collective harnessing of resources, moments of fortune, and rooted knowledge to undertake the decades-long story of survival, protection, land-care, the enacting of property, the jumping of hoops. At its core, Hazel's plaintive refrain: "I just want neighbours. Even more than I want central heating."

As we will see, White Rock has a very different story, yet the neighbourhoods have two characteristics in common – a spirit of independence and an experience of extreme neglect. In both places these led to grassroots DIY responses rooted in campaign experience, using agency, survivability and emotional commitment to propose and implement piecemeal, phased organic development.

While the analytical chapters primarily focus on White Rock, their backdrop is the Granby story seen through the lenses of SELF (survivability, agency, DIY, succession), RENOVATING (housework, piecemeal, creative, experience with builders and funders) and NEIGHBOURHOOD (rescued, transformed, ongoing).

CHAPTER 6: THE CASE OF WHITE ROCK, HASTINGS

Figure 6.1: Map of the core White Rock area (Erica Smith)

> "Our part of Hastings town centre is saturated with stories which have left it with many names – Trinity Triangle, White Rock, the America Ground, the Alley Quarter, Priory Valley. Local people love this place but it is something of a secret" [EMP: HAZ Expression of Interest July 2019].

In this chapter we will dive deep into the White Rock neighbourhood of Hastings, drawing out its *genii loci* and exploring the self-renovating work underway, before moving into the analytical chapters to probe the data systematically with regard to the collective self, the renovating process, and the continually emergent neighbourhood.

Arising from the nested histories, topologies and morphologies of the various neighbourhood elements that make up the area, the abundance of names is a minor frustration but also a cause for celebration. It creates an environment layered with meaning and inspiration. The naming of place as an act of power will be explored in Chapter 9.

6.1 Historical formation

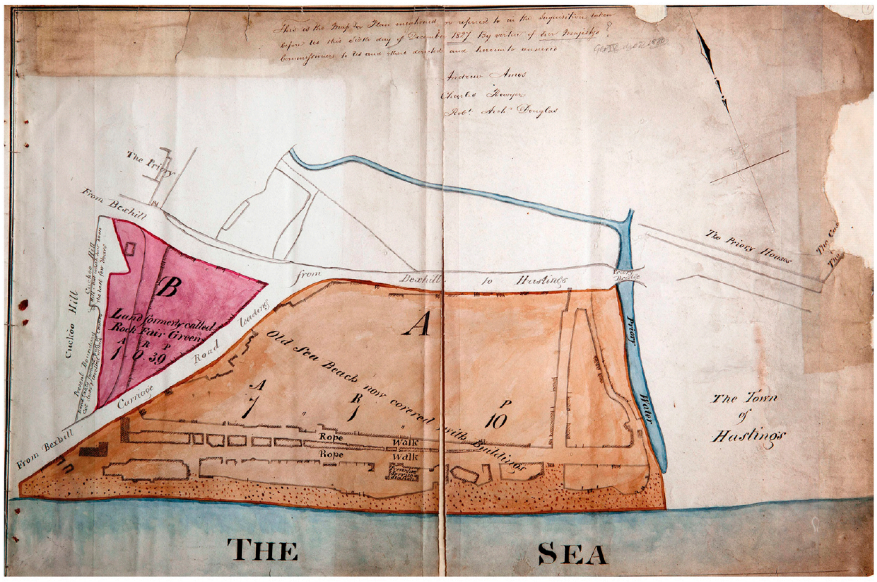
Hastings is a town of 90,000 people on the South Coast of England, 60 miles south of London, with more than a millennium of inhabited history. This began on the headland now known as White Rock but by the 13th century the town had expanded to the east (now called the Old Town) and this became the focus, with the White Rock area used mainly as farmland though still providing shelter to the Priory Valley immediate to its east where the notorious Rock Fair was held every July until the mid-19th century.

Hastings became fashionable from 1814 onwards, but travellers heading west along the coast had to follow a track rising up the headland and skirting a mass of piled boulders perhaps 40 feet high. This roadway was dangerous or unusable in gales and high tides; the only option was to struggle up and over the 90 feet high White Rock along what is now Dorset Place. In 1834 prominent local businessmen began to cut back the cliff to create the seafront road and stabilise the cliff face with large-scale brickwork. A mud-spoiled visit by Princess Victoria that November focused the local establishment on completing a proper highway between the two towns but, with a mile-long gap between them, neither local authority would pay so the speculators set up a fund with Charles Eversfield as main investor. They blew up the White Rock headland with gunpowder, cutting back the cliffs and using the excavated rock to create a raised and protected road and parade. Over the next few years another huge earthworks cut into the inland hillside towards Priory Farm, depositing the spoil at what is now the end of Claremont to create the new turnpike road Cambridge Road, necessitating the construction of Brassey Steps and setting in place the distinctive level-changes that define the current case study neighbourhood.

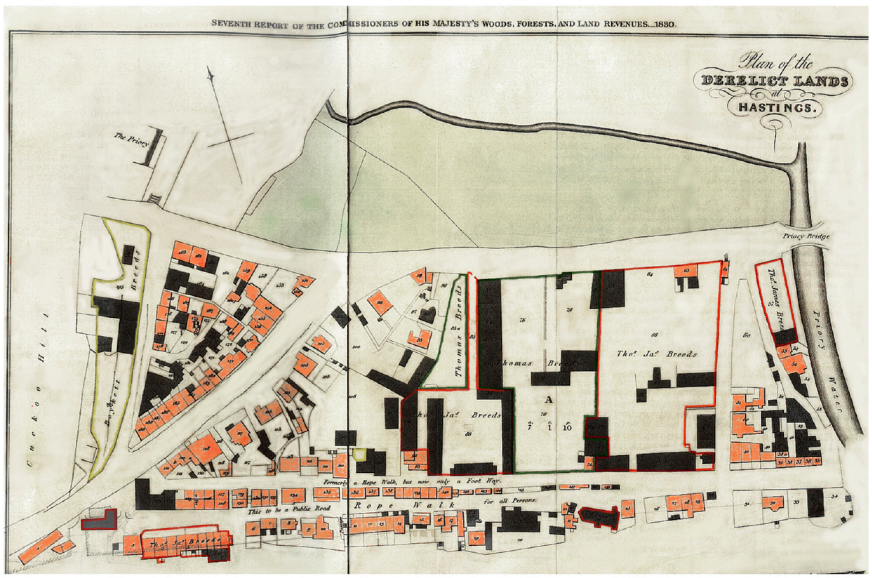
With the natural harbour at Priory Valley prone to silting, over the centuries this 'sea beach' sheltered by the White Rock headland became unowned land occupied by around 1,000 people, living and working informally and nicknamed the America Ground for its independent claim to the land (and apparent 'hard living') (Peak 2021: 49, 74).

Figure 6.2: Maps of the America Ground from 1827, 1830 and 1852

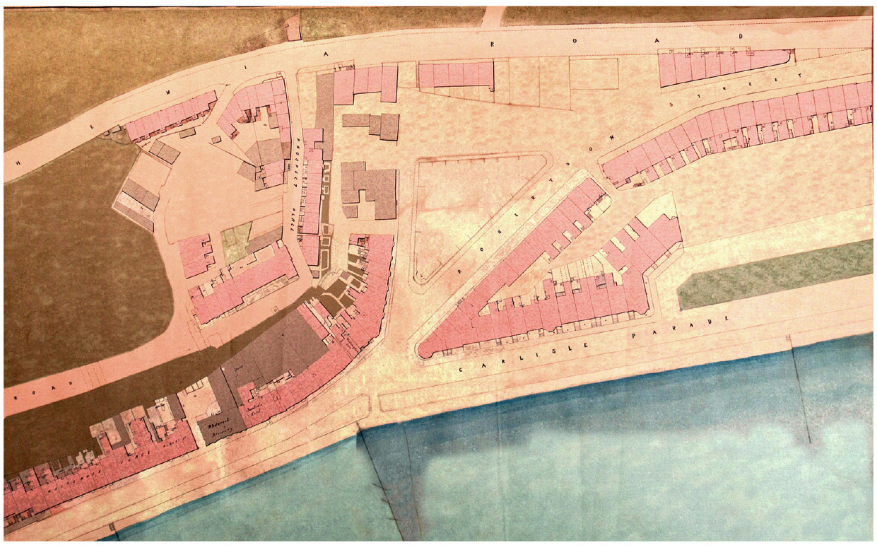
1827



1830

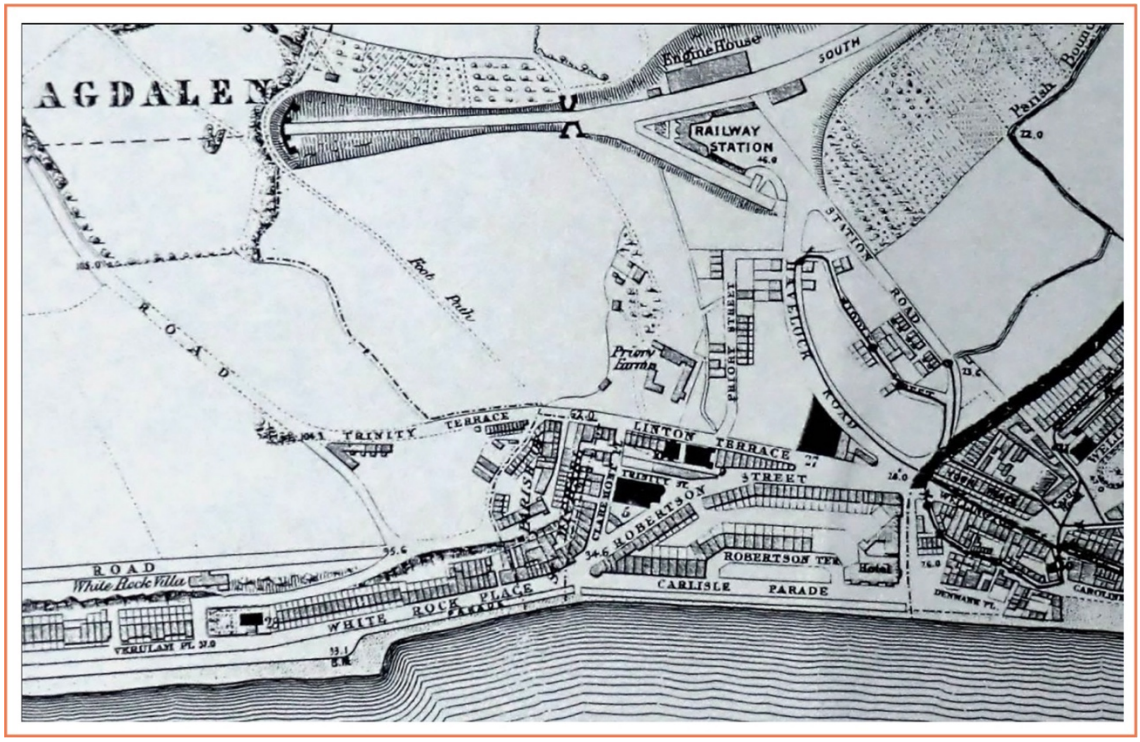


1852



After a public inquiry in 1827 declared the land owned by the Crown, the urban myth holds that they raised the 'stars and stripes' flag and declared independence.[26] The land was surveyed and rental charges set – though many were never paid. The inhabitants were cleared from the land in the mid 1830s after which it remained 'the Derelict Lands' until being leased to Patrick Robertson in 1849. He developed it rapidly, with all the key streets laid out by 1859, as shown in the map below.

Figure 6.3: White Rock detail from map of Hastings in 1859



> "Robertson Street, Claremont and Trinity Street as well as Linton Terrace (now part of Cambridge Road) became the commercial centre of the new town during the 1860s. The distinctive radial pattern, with Havelock Road curving north to the railway station, established a central focus for the town. It also provided opportunities for key corner buildings, of Italianate and Neo-Classical influences, rising to 4 storeys. This saw the emergence of a new approach to town planning with set-pieces of townscape and curving street patterns reminiscent of the fashionable redesign of a number of European cities" (Hastings Borough Council 2017: 28).

[26] There is only one report of flying the Stars & Stripes, in 1832 at a major carnival event (Peak 2021: 74-6)

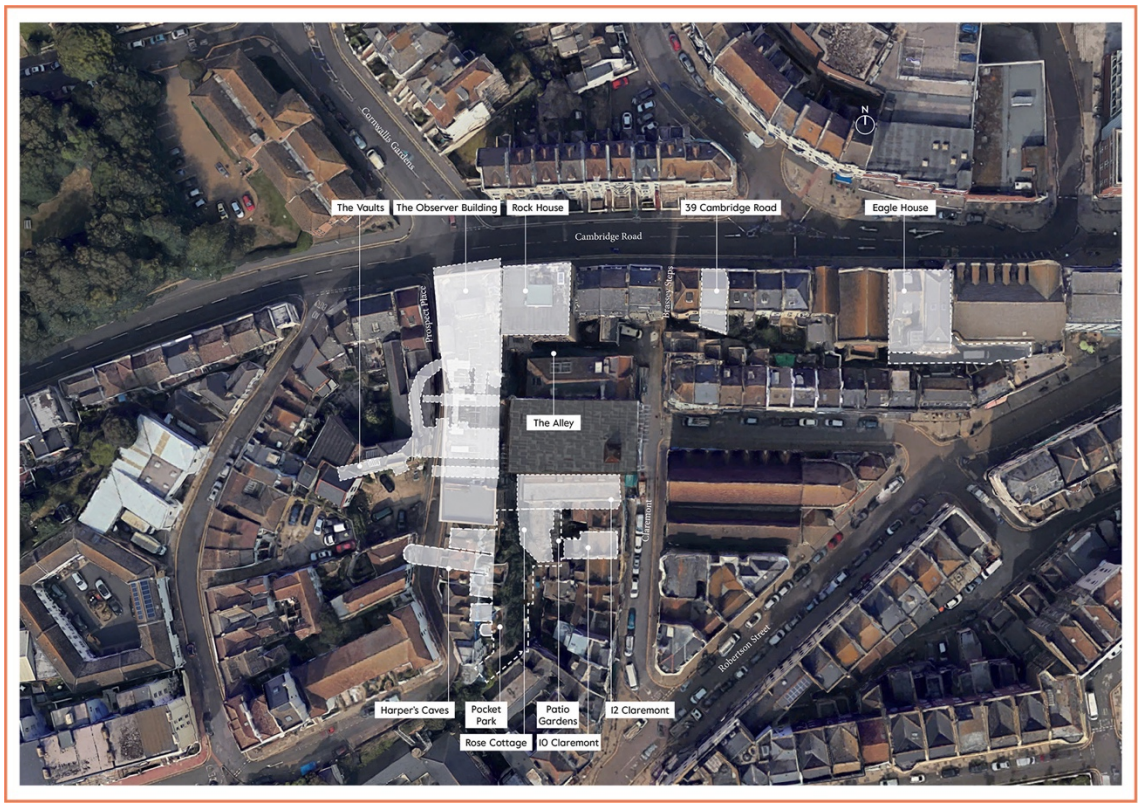
In the west of the area the FJ Parsons newspaper empire began initially at 12 Claremont before building, in liaison with Thomas Brassey, the superb collection of Grade II buildings that now form the Library and the Printworks. When the latter ran out of space, FJ Parsons was advised to move out of town. Instead in the early 1920s they carved the massive Observer Building into the White Rock cliff face, creating a 'talkative' façade (see figure 6.4) and brick-lining the ancient tunnels in the cliff face for storage.[27] The firm continued to expand – extending the building southwards and adding another floor, and then in 1969 adding the 9-storey block that is now Rock House. They had plans[28] to continue these blocks eastwards down Cambridge Road but, with the seismic changes in the newspaper print industry, they sold out and in 1985 the whole complex was abandoned, losing 500 jobs and leaving a massive rotting space in the heart of the neighbourhood.

Figure 6.4: The talkative facade of the Observer Building

[27] Anecdotally, this last was an employment scheme that Parsons deployed in the 1930s
[28] Planning drawings held at The Keep in Lewes were inspected and copied in March 2015

The buildings remained empty and derelict for decades until a family bought the old Printworks in 2006, followed by community purchases first of Rock House (2014) and later of Harper's Caves (2018), the Observer Building (2019), Rose Cottage (2019) and 12 Claremont (2022), with the Claremont Garage to the east of Rock House currently under negotiation (Jan 2022). The Alley that links these spaces is the sole remaining commons space from the America Ground. Unowned and unadopted but with most of the adjacent freeholders having rights and responsibilities over 12 feet of roadway, it is both physically and metaphorically central to the invention of the Hastings Commons.

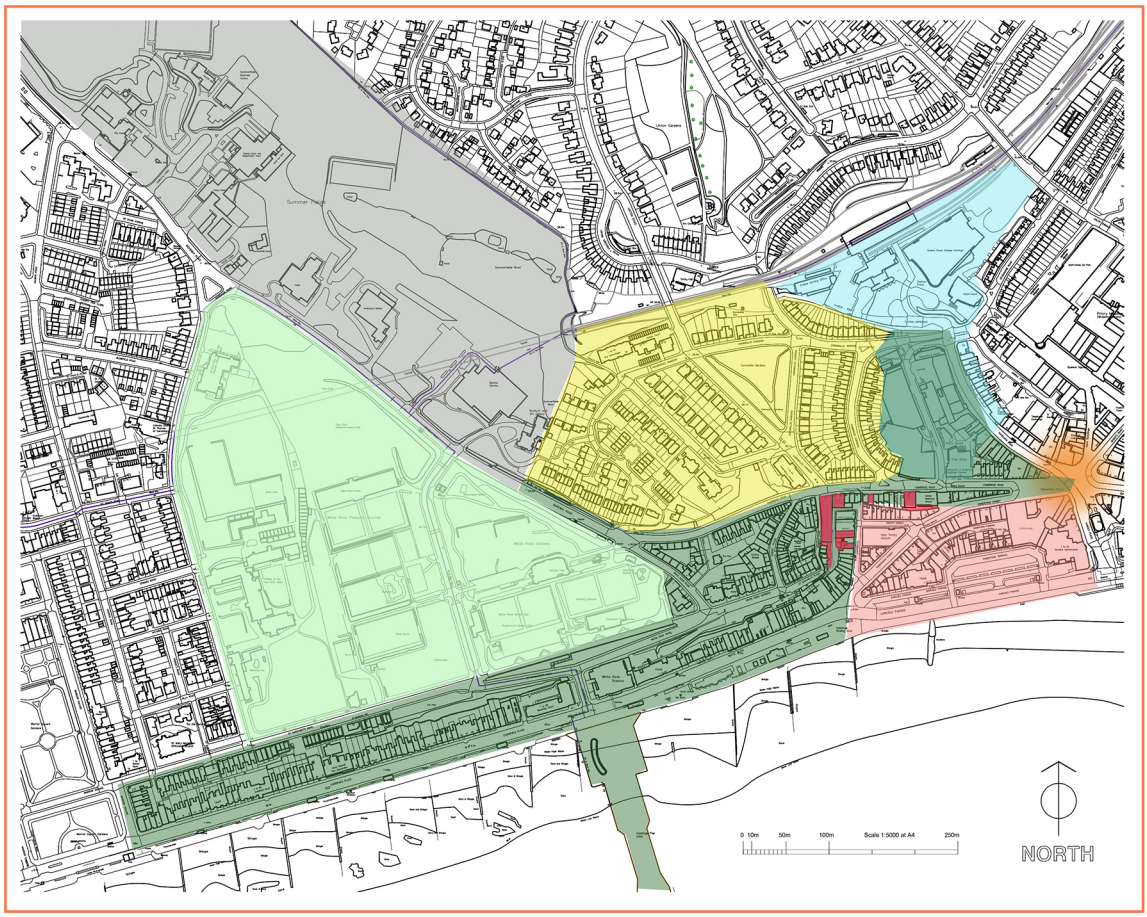
Figure 6.5: The Hastings Commons buildings clustered around the Alley



6.2. Neighbourhood elements

The White Rock neighbourhood contains several parts, which bleed into each other yet remain distinctive, connected together by the topography – natural and man-made. The Observer Building, for example, has ground level entrances on three floors separated by more than 20 metres of Victorian made-ground height. Once restored, people will be able to enter the building at Prospect Place and descend four floors to exit into sunlight in the Alley.

Figure 6.6: Map of the Hastings case study area, showing the different neighbourhood elements



Broadly White Rock is a name for the whole area, although most people would see it as focused to the west of Prospect Place and south of Cambridge Road (coloured dark green), including the sea front and the White Rock Gardens (light green). To the north west (coloured grey) is Bohemia. The key distinction across the neighbourhood is both topographical and functional, between the flat land reclaimed from the sea and the higher ground to the north west. The America Ground (coloured red) is the flat sea-level space in the shelter of the White Rock cliff, claimed by the Crown in 1827 and laid out by Robertson in the 1850s.

The Trinity Triangle refers to the western section of this area clustered around the Holy Trinity Hastings church, although the Trinity Triangle Heritage Action Zone (a community-led regeneration programme that began in April 2020) has stretched this as shown by the black boundary line. These low-lying areas comprise a dense mix of independent businesses – cafes, bars, shops, and churches, with some flats above but

much empty space. Local businesses suffer from an historic and enduring lack of footfall. Pedestrian flows along the promenade, which themselves suffered from the 10-year pier closure (2006-16), were not diverted through the area, while the station to seafront route is unclear and generally avoids this area. The evening economy is poor, there are high levels of crime and antisocial behaviour, within an environment challenged by pigeons, rats, air pollution and a lack of open/green space. The orange circle shows the radial hub in the middle of Hastings town centre. The dark pink buildings are all owned or proposed to be owned by organisations within the emerging Hastings Commons.

The area between Cambridge Gardens and Havelock Road (coloured mixed blue and green) has been the focus of various municipal schemes over the past half-century. A bustling part of the historic town centre, with guest houses, entertainment venues and shops, it was hollowed out in the 1960s and a large multi-storey carpark built in the middle. Further clearance was undertaken in the 1980s and the area was named 'Priory Quarter' (coloured light blue) by Sea Space in their 2004 masterplan (Sea Space 2004; Grant Thornton 2008) as they set about channelling regeneration funds into a process of physical destruction and renewal. This included rebuilding the railway station, with a new FE College and a new health centre alongside. It also involved replacing the 'lacuna' or 'gap site' with a series of Grade A offices, rather weirdly named as Lacuna Place. These quickly failed and were bought out of administration by the University of Brighton. Welcomed enthusiastically at the time and given positions of power within local regeneration (including chairing Sea Space), the University decided to leave Hastings in 2017. In the face of a vociferous local campaign, they behaved as so many institutions do – they kept quiet and waited, sitting out the 'clawback period' in which public funding could be legally reclaimed. By early 2020 the freehold buildings were on the market for over £5 million.

To the north of Cambridge Road (coloured yellow) is primarily residential with 62% of households in the private rented sector[29] (Census 2011), many Houses of Multiple

[29] Compared with 29% Hastings, 17% England (Census 2011)

Occupation (HMOs) and acute poverty. Facing particular challenges in accessing housing are those on housing benefit (until the recent court case (Moore 2020) clarified that discrimination on the basis of benefit status is unlawful under the Equality Act 2010, most local letting agents would not consider them) and those with irregular earnings (creatives, freelancers, project workers).

Change has been underway in this part of the neighbourhood since 2015, evidenced by rising rents and house prices (see figure 6.7) but felt more viscerally in the incremental changes. Not long ago this was a place of peeling paint and rusted railings, 10-bell front doors and angry rows in the street, half-tins of baked beans in the corner shop, rotting shopfronts, noisy pubs, the daunting scruffiness of Cornwallis Gardens, mobility scooters struggling among motorway-scale signage mounted on pavements, and massively overgrown trees creating a dark canyon where cars speed uphill on Cambridge Road as if they are rushing to get out of town, oblivious to the sheltered housing residents trapped on a dangerous corner. Many of these features remain in part but the overall impression has shifted.

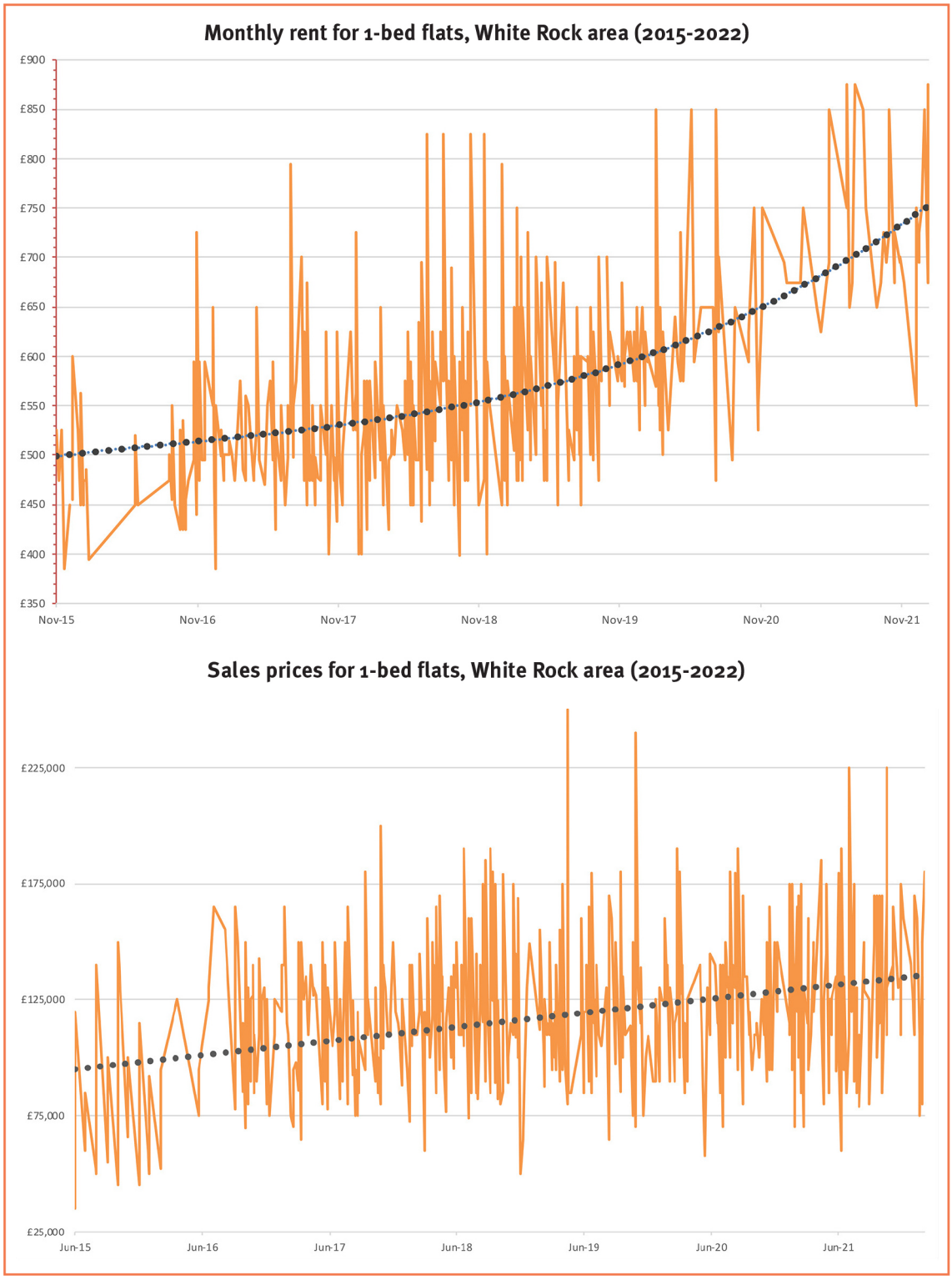
As the values rose, the effects of buy-to-let tax reforms bit, and with growing demand from people squeezed out of London and Brighton, the grand houses were spruced up – some converted back to single-family occupancy, others 'improved' simply because the price of the flats no longer targets residents on the edge of homelessness or the musicians that used to come from London for a gig and decide to stay.

The fear of social displacement, "the replacement of cultural, social, and economic institutions of the poor and working class by those of the gentrifiers" (Brown-Saracino 2004: 138), appeared in the pilot interviews in Hastings from the start and both anecdotal and quantitative evidence of this displacement has increased significantly since the Covid crisis [EMP: Hastings Rental Health Group 2021; WR housing costs 2021]. The chilling phrase from a White Rock community member in 2016 – "those who are coming now have the resources to make their own community"[30] – illustrates

[30] Ali Graham in field notes (July 16)

the concern that these incomers will not just raise prices but by overlaying their version of community they will crush or obliterate the existing (authentic) neighbourhood.

Figure 6.7: White Rock house prices and rents, 2015-22



In the two years since Covid-19 hit (from March 2020) there has been a 'pile-in' to Hastings very similar to the phenomenon in the coastal town of Whitstable 20 years earlier. The market is 'hot' – not only are prices and rents rising but there is intense competition and therefore stress. One key member of the White Rock team was among those relocating from London. Her experience – renting off a local friend and trying to find a place to live as well as oversee a varied and ambitious work programme while she saw herself priced out of swathes of Hastings as the weeks went by – sits at one end of the spectrum. For local renters the picture is bleaker. Rents continue to push upwards and it is difficult to see where or when they will stop. There was always a huge rent gap between Hastings and elsewhere – both the surrounding areas and London itself. For as long as few people from those places wanted to live in Hastings that has been protected. A long process of destigmatisation and the seismic disruption of a global pandemic have blown that fence down.

Although the change has been rapid and accelerating it is far from complete. Indeed local deprivation has been worsening. This is the second poorest part of Hastings and close to the most deprived 1% nationally. The Index of Multiple Deprivation 2019 showed it as 333 out of 32,844 neighbourhoods in England (worsening from 398 in 2015). Over 15 years Hastings as a whole slipped from 39th most deprived in 2004 to 13th in 2019. Widespread zero-hours contracts, poorly-managed private rented housing, and hardship that extends to hunger are all features of contemporary Hastings that are immediately recognisable from Robert Tressell's (1914) 'Ragged Trousered Philanthropists', written and set in the town in the first decade of the 20th century.

Despite all these challenges and changes, as a whole Hastings remains a diverse town with a mix of income and educational levels and a strong community spirit. It is self-consciously "a dressing-up town", in which the key events (Jack-in-the-Green, Pirates Day, Bonfire Night, and Fat Tuesday) tend to involve high levels of participation. The town centre role of the White Rock area means it is more widely relevant than its specific resident population. Its superlative historic fabric and heritage story are finally being recognised.

The key themes I draw from this story are of a subaltern, consciously marginal identity strongly focused on independence and distinctiveness yet facing two major forces that have shaped the neighbourhood. First, Hastings has a long history of poverty in work. The 'gig economy' was locally prefigured in Tressell's (1914) descriptions of the precarity of work, in the seasonality of the traditional seaside economy, and in the high numbers of musicians, artists, and other project workers literally living gig-to-gig. Second, significant de-industrialisation, specifically the precipitous and coterminous decline of the newspaper print industry and the British seaside holiday in the decade after 1975, led to physical dereliction, not just of the FJ Parsons buildings and the former guest houses but more widespread as values and rents stayed low, discouraging landlord investment in maintenance. Indeed, there has been a 'farming of dereliction' involving the abstraction of physical assets into financial commodities, abandoning buildings to deteriorate while milking proprietorial rights through title deeds, planning permissions and degraded lettings (Westbury 2015: 35). As Watson describes of 'the economy' (in inverted commas), "difficulties arise because outwardly the abstraction and the reality are described using exactly the same word" (2018: 27). For most of its life since the late 1970s, the Observer Building was manifest as a series of numbers, whether spreadsheet or fag packet, and a redline on an Ordnance Survey map. The address 53 Cambridge Road was de-listed. The material mass of concrete, faience and rotting steel may as well have been part of the White Rock cliff it cuddles up against. Even, perhaps especially, the local regeneration agency is implicated through its activities of 'clearance', liquidations, and the creation of new ruins.

Figure 6.8: White Rock buildings and spaces created by regeneration agency Sea Space

6.3 Constituting the White Rock neighbourhood: conscious SRN

> "What has come together in this place, now, is a conjunction of many histories and many spaces" (Massey 1995: 191)

The specific socio-historical-spatial circumstances that enabled the local innovation in community-led regeneration that is at the core of my case study are outlined below.

Figure 6.9: Features of White Rock enabling SRN

• Central location yet historically a strategic blind-spot
• Spirit of independence, both as a town (with its array of idiosyncratic festivals etc) and specifically in White Rock (with its history of smugglers, pirates, and the America Ground story)
• Poverty and creativity with high levels of overlap given the precarity of the creative life
• Extensive unsolved dereliction from 1980s industrial abandonment
• High proportion of private rented property including houses of multiple occupation (HMOs)
• DFLs and gentrification – being able to see the lessons of Old Town and St Leonards and being just ahead of the same effect in White Rock
• Experience of saving the pier fed a sense of agency and momentum that led directly into White Rock Trust, then Heart of Hastings CLT, and now the Hastings Commons.

The different names for and within the White Rock area are partly descriptive of nested and overlapping geographies, and partly constitutive – signs of deliberate attempts to establish moral ownership. By the early 21st century the town could be seen to comprise four zones – Old Town, New Town, White Rock, St Leonards. However, White Rock was more of a *missing zone* until 2006 when the community response to the closure of Hastings Pier began to use the name as a way of focusing attention on the neighbourhood. The history outlined above was little known and the space between Hastings Town Centre and St Leonards had been strategically ignored, red-lined with the idea that one day it would be dealt with as part of whatever would happen next with the pier. The emerging pier trust deliberately chose the name Hastings Pier and White Rock Trust in 2008, putting up with a dreadful acronym (HPWRT) in order to make the point that their focus was not simply the preservation of an historic pier but the transformation of a neighbourhood.

I will be arguing in Chapter 9 that there are three key elements to SRN:

- Understanding the place and making plans for its future
- Acquiring, developing and sustaining a property portfolio
- Maintaining the neighbourhood through commoning and organising

These lessons have emerged from my direct experience in White Rock, as well as my research in Granby. The sections below outline how each of these threads emerged in the White Rock area.

6.3.1 Neighbourhood planning – understanding the place

While HPWRT had asserted the importance of the neighbourhood as context for the pier, it was not until the separation of the Trust into Hastings Pier Charity and the White Rock Trust [EMP: 130624 WRT minutes] that the neighbourhood itself became the focus. The Localism Act of 2011 had established the practice of neighbourhood planning and government funding for local areas to make their way through this heavily-defined process.

At the first White Rock neighbourhood planning meeting in October 2013 the link with the pier was explicit, including the need to take action rather than just talking.

> "As you can imagine, we're pretty proud of having sorted the ownership and funding for the pier! And we know for certain that it would never have been possible without real and abiding community support – not just people saying 'yes we want the pier' but people willing to do all manner of things... Most importantly, it was people willing to be optimistic, to believe that it might just be possible… So now the pier is underway... There is major potential from increased footfall. 325,000 visitors a year changes everything for the existing businesses. But also it will bring people to Hastings and some of them will think about investing… This should be welcomed of course, but also be planned for so that it's not a complete displacement" [EMP: 131010 JS at NP meeting].

The purpose of a neighbourhood plan was "to fill in the fine grain detail of the Local Plan to make it real and specific and useful…[and] to build our own neighbourhood knowledge, skills and capacity to do stuff… Now that everything is difficult, anything is possible! That's why it makes me laugh when people or politicians say 'but there's no money to do anything' – as if money ever ensured good regeneration!" [ibid].

WRT hosted a series of walkabouts and workshops, including one-to-one listening focusing on loves, concerns, vision and possible projects, and working in groups on themes about NOW, WHAT'S COMING and FUTURES: THE BIG DREAM. These provided rich detail about local priorities as well as a carefully-consulted boundary. WRT volunteers developed a coding framework and summarised all the material from the events and extensive door-knocking [EMP: 141108 WR Data Review]. A series of requests were made to Hastings Borough Council to designate White Rock as the Neighbourhood Area and White Rock Trust as the Neighbourhood Forum. After a protracted period of checking where our members lived (see figure 6.10), the eventual response from the senior officer described "the Council's plans to develop a town centre Area Action Plan" including 'extensive public consultation exercises', offered 'close involvement' in the development of the AAP, and asked WRT to consider withdrawing its application for Neighbourhood Area and Forum status [EMP: 150414 HBC letter]. An excruciatingly long process began and the eventual document, renamed 'Bohemia and White Rock AAP' has still (Feb 2022) not been ratified.

Figure 6.10: White Rock Trust members with proposed neighbourhood plan boundary

By the summer of 2015 most participants were feeling “that it's more important to make progress on the issues identified than to put the time into developing the neighbourhood plan itself. We are still keeping that option open but we have focused more on… taking direct actions (eg the purchase and refurbishment of Rock House, the production of a 3D neighbourhood model, and taking a lease on the derelict tennis courts)” [EMP: 150725 WRT minutes].

While the formal Neighbourhood Planning approach had hit a dead end, it was really just part of our wider commitment to understand the place. In 2014/15 this was operationalised and funded through participation in the national Our Place programme. Our core aim was “to develop better shared understanding of the neighbourhood, based on local knowledge, technical expertise, creative input and political will” [EMP: Our Place Operational Plan 2015: 1]. Two pieces of development-action-research were feeding our thinking. A collaboration with some early Rock House tenants had developed a proposal called ‘Walk This Way’, using psycho-geography through public art to encourage people into and through the White Rock area. In the meantime, WRT’s experience of activating the tennis courts had shown how little known and underused the massive White Rock Gardens were. Together these got us thinking about ‘footfall and flow’ and we began working with UCL Space Syntax to map the flow of pedestrians.

Later the same year we made use of two further plan-creating funding sources[31]. indeed it began to seem as if ‘plan-creating’ was the key output required by funders. As Rock House filled with tenants selected specifically to ‘contribute’, our ambition grew. In 2016 a collaborative group developed a ‘Townscape Heritage’ funding bid. We were already beginning to think of the neighbourhood as single structure and, for me at least, of the neighbourhood as enterprise. This bid was scuppered at the last minute because the council refused to back it; three years later, with Rock House a recognised success and the Observer Building in WRNV ownership, we were successful with a

[31] We used the Community Economic Development (CED) programme to develop plans for the emerging community land trust and the Coastal Communities funding from government to register WRT as the Coastal Community Team with a strong focus on community engagement.

community-led bid for the £2M Trinity Triangle Heritage Action Zone. In parallel we became involved in the development of the Hastings Town Deal, a £25M council-led scheme. All of these entanglements with local regeneration were fundamentally about two things – building a collective understanding of the place and taking DIY action to shape its future.

Wargent and Parker's review of Neighbourhood Planning policy foresaw three trajectories – policy decline if communities stop coming forwards, policy stagnation as the best-resourced communities continue to utilise identikit materials from consultants, or policy innovation in which it "evolves into an innovative, responsive and even radical tool of local democracy" (2018: 2). They point out the lack of an 'image of success' in the field and provide a normative framework for a re-imagined neighbourhood planning including more equitable distribution of plan-making, deeper co-production, greater social inclusion within the plan-making, improved quality of plans, the reconciliation of hyper-local and strategic concerns, and enhanced community control that extend neighbourhood governance beyond land-use planning. In the absence of these 'reformulations' (ibid: 23), SRN has taken a less constrained and more holistic approach to 'understanding and making plans for the place'.

6.3.2 Property acquisition: assembling the Commons

In parallel with these processes of situated knowledge-building, we were starting to put together the property portfolio. We were assembling the commons though we hadn't yet thought of it in those terms. Rock House and the Observer Building are next door to each other but in the five years between their purchases the narrative developed significantly – from 'doing meanwhile in a permanent asset' to 'building the Hastings Commons'. The notion of 'assemblage' developed from Deleuze and Guattari (1988), describing the "composition of diverse elements into some form of provisional socio-spatial formation" (Anderson and McFarlane 2011: 124), is useful to capture the eclectic mix of buildings and spaces. Using this term also draws attention to the work of construction and makes visible the fragility of what has been assembled (Newman and Clarke 2009: 15; Brownill 2017: 148).

It began in the Alley in summer 2013 when Meanwhile Space helped the White Rock Trust to achieve a 'meanwhile lease' of the basement and lower ground floor of what was then called Rothermere House for £200 a month. Out of the blue in early 2014 the agent called asking if we wanted to buy the whole building! At the same time, I had been working since 2012 with Hastings Trust to explore the potential to acquire the Observer Building (OB). This increasing confidence, despite a complete lack of development experience, was bolstered by mentoring from Chris Brown. When the agent suggested £400k for Rothermere, Chris said 'offer them half'. The processes for the two buildings ran alongside each other and right up to mid-June 2014 it was not clear whether we would end up with either or both.

> "This is by the skin of your teeth, seat of your pants, but it's not entirely stupid! There are a huge number of balls in the air. You're very scared, but carry on!" [EMP: 140609 Chris Brown email].

Figure 6.11 Chris Brown (right) and Hugh Rolo in the Observer Building. August 2013

Pre-auction negotiations on the OB continued and the council agreed to underwrite our bid, but the day before the auction we were informed that it had been sold to a private bidder. Two weeks later the conveyancing of Rothermere House to White Rock Neighbourhood Ventures (WRNV), jointly owned by Meanwhile Space and Jericho Road Solutions, was completed. We immediately granted 10% of the shares in WRNV to the White Rock Trust. The story of how we later equalised the shares and the conflict with WRT that led eventually to the transfer of one-third of the shares in WRNV via Power to Change to the Heart of Hastings CLT, is told from my own experience in Appendix C2.

Now we had a 9-storey office block, a cost consultant's report saying it would cost £1.9M to refurbish, and about £80,000 in the bank! We renamed the building Rock House, binned the report and got on with achieving fit-out of two floors in the centre of the building while carrying on fundraising. The detail of these processes – the enactment of property, the harnessing of resources, the practicalities of renovation, will be analysed in Chapter 8. Suffice for now to say we 'took vacant possession' in October 2014 and the whole building was completed in July 2019. It includes six 'Living Rents' flats and 42 diverse workspaces with over 100 employees.

Meanwhile the 'monster next door', the huge and beloved Observer Building, had been sold to the flamboyant but elusive Richard Upton under the company name Basement Endeavours. He was the 13th owner since the building closed in 1985. All but one had made money on it, simply by buying it, getting planning permission (or just waiting for the market) and selling it for more. The only loser was Investec Bank who repossessed it from a convicted mortgage fraudster after the global financial crisis of 2008. They had it on their books at over £4.2M but ended up putting it to auction with a guide price of £150k. This depressing cyclical history had been a key driver behind our efforts at community acquisition from 2012 onwards. Apart from pigeons, key recurring themes to note from this story are: the artificial shortening of time within the pressure of sales negotiations; the abdicative behaviour of most local, county and

national politicians[32]; and the multiple possibilities continually in play, until the spinning stops (temporarily) and we are left with a specific snapshot portfolio of liability-assets.

Basement Endeavours seemed different from previous owners. Their story epitomises a particular flavour of post-2010 development (see Tonkiss 2013, and 210823 Chris Brown). For many months after the purchase, *nothing happened.* Individual property processes experience hiatus of various and irregular frequency and length (Meanwhile Project 2010; SQW Consulting 2010). These 'fits and starts' become hidden with hindsight where it can seem as if it all just fell into place a chunk at a time as if (but not) pre-planned. However, these seemingly passive delays cause serious detrimental impacts and lost opportunities, such as the collapse of the building on the fourth Corner in Granby or the rainwater pouring through the OB eating away at the concrete reinforcement.

Then *something happened.* Jeff Kirby arrived in Hastings early in 2015 as Upton's new developer with a flash of light and mirrors and a new company called Flint. For a while his approach seemed to embody many aspects of the cutting edge of 'good regen': locating fully and visibly on site and in the neighbourhood; inviting and taking seriously the involvement of local people and businesses in delivering exciting meanwhile uses; reaching out to offer opportunities to 'excluded' people; talking up the town. Many of us were certainly taken in and did everything we could to help, renting him office space in Rock House and letting him punch electricity and water connections into the OB through the wall from Rock House. We linked him with our local networks and supported the public consultation around his emerging plans. Two local women were convinced to lead the meanwhile use of the building and it became at last an active space, with exhibitions, cinema, markets and gigs, popular in the daytime as a safe space for parents with young children. Jeff's apparent ethical/local stance, and our

[32] A series of senior politicians visited and made the right noises but no useful input. The late Cllr Jeremy Birch (leader of Hastings Council 2010-2015) deserves a special mention for believing enough to agree to underwrite us at auction, although, as it turned out, too late to make a difference.

desperate willingness to believe that something good could happen for the building, led Jericho Road to undertake the community consultation for the initial planning application, an active process of listening and trying to shape the application in response, despite the widely-unpopular five storey extension to the roof.

Figure 6.12: Basement Endeavours' plans for the Observer Building, 2016

The proposed 'student lofts' were doomed by Flint's failure to achieve any kind of partnership or even a meeting with University of Brighton, and then by the University itself withdrawing from Hastings. In parallel, Flint's failure to pay the rent, electricity and other local bills led in August 2016 to their eviction by bailiffs from Rock House. There was a great deal of mud-slinging that drew in many Rock House tenants and this was in the middle of the parallel conflict with White Rock Trust: it was a stressful time.

With Flint's reputation damaged, Jeff renamed the organisation 'All Living Things' seeking "to develop a 'London quality' product outside of the M25… 'wow' the 'London-leavers' and to achieve premium pricing for our product" [EMP: ALT Strategy 2016: 33]. But during 2017 it became obvious that he was looking for buyers for the building. By the end of the year Flint had been "stood down" [EMP: 171205 RU emails] and a more traditional property agency engaged to push forward a standard planning application for 50 flats for "millennials from London". This went to planning committee in December 2017. My objection speech focused on four types of harm – no affordable housing contribution, the gentrification impact, the prevention of Rock House from building additional affordable housing, and the inappropriate location of residential on the lower floors looking into the Alley. One after another councillors expressed their doubts and concerns about the scheme and then voted to grant permission.

The history of speculative profit and the bad taste left by Flint made several Rock House tenants want to make low offers. But it made me determined that this time we would not lose. It was a moment of possibility and the stakes felt very high indeed.

> "We aim to take it out of the 34-year cycle that has witnessed repeated speculative profits despite social and economic failure, and kickstart a shift from zero productivity to intensive economic and social productivity" [EMP: OB Feasibility Study, Oct 18].

From our perspective, price and timing were almost equally important negotiating pieces. Our initial offer, based on the lower amount given in the prospectus (£1.5M) with six months to completion, was rejected by the estate agent. We had the building valued by Savills and went back with 'we can't pay more than £1.25M but we'll try to speed up'. Finding the negotiation unbearable, I handed over to WRNV's General Manger, John Brunton, who made a series of low offers while in the background I was frantically attempting to raise the funds in order to be able to firm up the offer.

> "I had never negotiated on this scale before and our offers were going down based on what money we could raise rather than going up like the agent expected. The agent became particularly unpleasant as time went on and accused us several times of wasting time and not being serious about buying the building. In order to cope and keen sane, I had to treat it like a game and actually enjoyed it in the end as I was playing them at their own game. It was

however very risky and some of the things I had to say could have caused us to miss out on purchasing... but I truly believed they had no other offers so ours was the best they would get!" [210722 John Brunton].

We ended up agreeing a price of £1.15M with £50k of this deferred by 12 months (and in the event reduced to a £25k final settlement). We finally took possession of this beautiful, crazy, terrifying building on Valentine's Day 2019!

6.3.3 Organising and commoning

I mentioned in Chapter 5 the notion that Granby and White Rock became 'commons by default' through neglect and bad treatment over the four decades from the 1980s to the 2010s. In Granby's case this was bad treatment by the state and abdication by the market. In White Rock it could be seen to be the opposite with the market actively farming dereliction while the local authorities made no attempt to intervene. Whereas Granby's breakthrough was to convince Liverpool City Council to give piecemeal a chance, in White Rock the work was always going to require direct engagement with the property market.

Figure 6.13: The formation of the community land trust in 2016

From early 2014 White Rock Trust was having monthly meetings with council officers, which included the idea for a Community Freehold project and by March 2015 one of the agenda items was 'America Ground Community Land Trust [EMP: 150331 HBC meeting]. A series of open conversations with WRT members asked: Is gentrification happening? If so, is it a problem? If so, is there anything we can do about it? The conclusions were yes, yes and maybe. The proposal was to expand what we had begun at Rock House, to bring property into community ownership and cap the rents forever.

> "We believe that Hastings is experiencing a rent-price rise that is not stoppable and brings some benefits but that, left unchecked, will devastate the current diverse, independent character of the neighbourhood" [EMP 160919 12C proposal].

Heart of Hastings Community Land Trust (HoH) was incorporated as a community benefit society in March 2016. We made progress both on securing the transfer of 12 Claremont from East Sussex County Council and in purchasing the first CLT property (39 Cambridge Road) but from August 2016 the White Rock area became subsidiary to Heart of Hastings CLT's other project at Ore Valley (2016-19) in terms of staff time, board focus and investment. Here the 'DIY Regen' project was an explicit attempt to harness the wealth of available knowledge about what's wrong with regeneration to create a holistic, bottom up development approach, a good process seeking a good outcome – a nurturing neighbourhood that connects and balances people, land and planet. One special feature of the project was the opportunity to occupy the land under licence which enabled the accretion of familiarity, belonging and ownership. Despite the impatience of the team to convert this precarious licence into a freehold stake, their return to the site week after week enabled the inclusive development both of interim project ideas and of long term aspirations for the future development of a new neighbourhood. However this combination of stability and uncertainty may have had a negative impact on the momentum behind these dreams (Lester 2019). The loss of the Ore Valley site, for 'market-testing' and then by Sea Space agreeing a sale to a private developer, was felt in various ways in White Rock. It consolidated our understanding that ownership is everything and resulted in the Organisation Workshop happening in the Observer Building, that is in a space we could control, which sustained some form of hope.

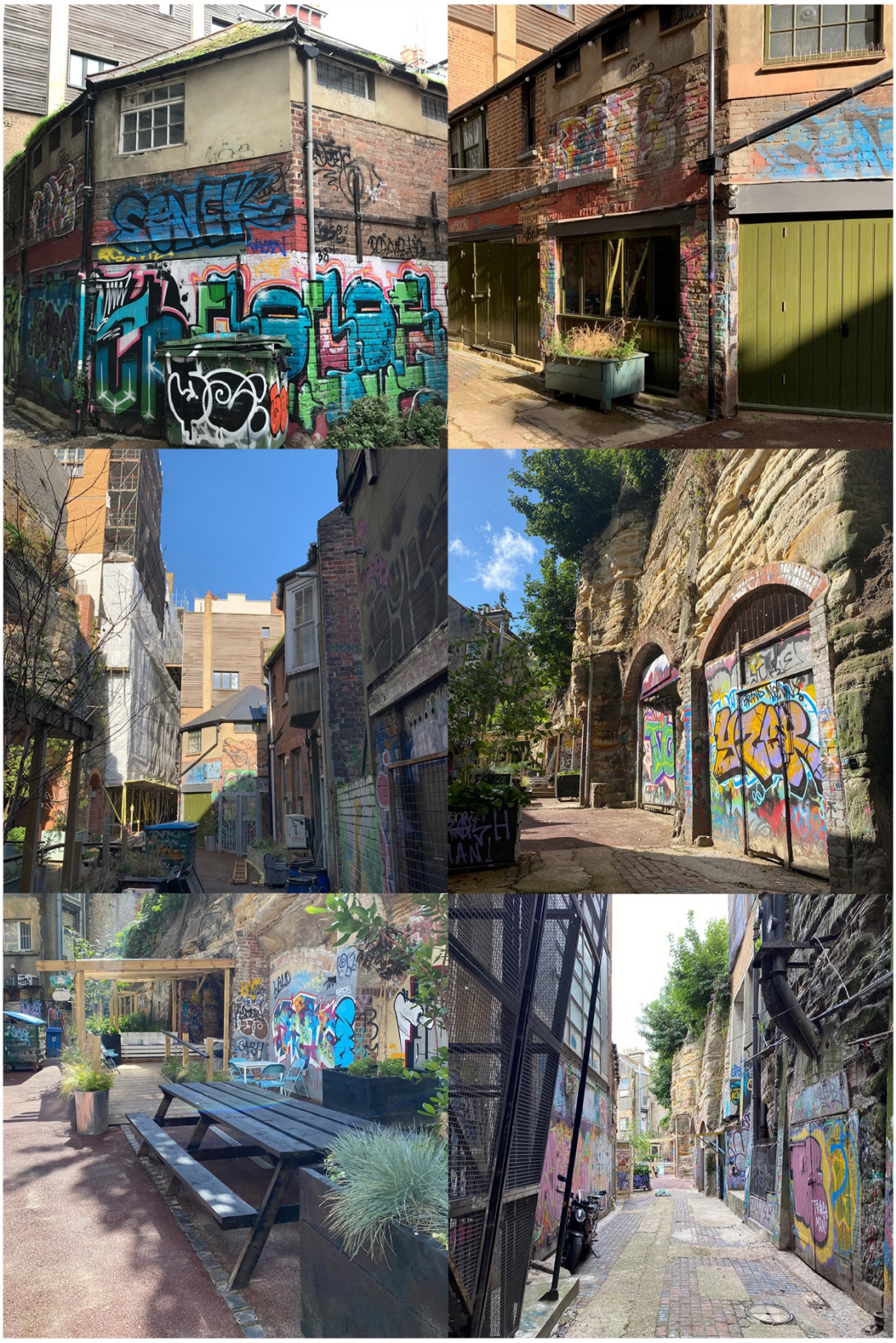
During this period after the end of the conflict with White Rock Trust, WRNV came into its own as a social enterprise property developer. Entrepreneurial and slimline we initially resisted growing any kind of staff team. Meanwhile Space took on early project management and staffing grew very slowly indeed. One of our 'old-timer' tenants, John Brunton had always been an enthusiastic and reliable contributor. When our part-time coordinator walked off the job in February 2018, John took over and has grown in experience, responsibility and confidence ever since. The tenants say he is "the rock of Rock House" [EMP 210720 Fieldnote].

One of Jeff Kirby's innovations had been bacon-butty breakfasts with local stakeholders around the Alley. Once he was gone we restarted this as the Alley Association and WRNV began to ramp up its attention to and role within the hyper-local area, with Rock House tenants deciding that the 'area of benefit' should be 150m radius of the building. We secured grant funding to finish Rock House and extend into the Alley with basic infrastructure works. This led to the purchase of Harper's Caves and the development of the Pocket Park. When Rose Cottage, an ironically-named, tumble-down stables in the Alley, came on the market in July 2019 WRNV had its hands full with the Observer Building and HoH with 12 Claremont, so Jericho Road stepped in, harnessing investment support from two local couples as well as family members to secure the purchase.

The Alley Association achieved enough consensus to enable WRNV to press forwards with improvements but never became the hoped-for 'forum for the commons'. This was partly due to a tension between those who saw the space as a lawless secret wasteland and those who wanted to improve its use-value for the wider common good within a transformational place-based intervention (Foster 2011) in the discursive production of alternative representations of community and of the urban (Eizenberg 2012: 774). Both these propositions subsist – precarious and systemically disempowered – within the maelstrom of the dominant development model with its "sharp-in/sharp-out" approach (Tonkiss 2013: 313), and the *distracted patience* of local government that produces long, frustrating periods of inaction. During 2020 WRNV secured further funds to complete a wide range of works in the Lower Alley and

stabilise the White Rock cliff face. These investments and the transformation they enabled happened in the midst of Covid lockdowns, making it challenging to sustain the ongoing community engagement characteristic of our work.

Figure 6.14 The Alley and Rose Cottage



(Clockwise): Rose Cottage - Sept 2018; Rose Cottage - Feb 2020; Caves - July 2020; Alley looking south - July 2020; Bench and park - Sept 2020; Alley looking north - Feb 2022

6.3.4 Emergence of the ecosystem

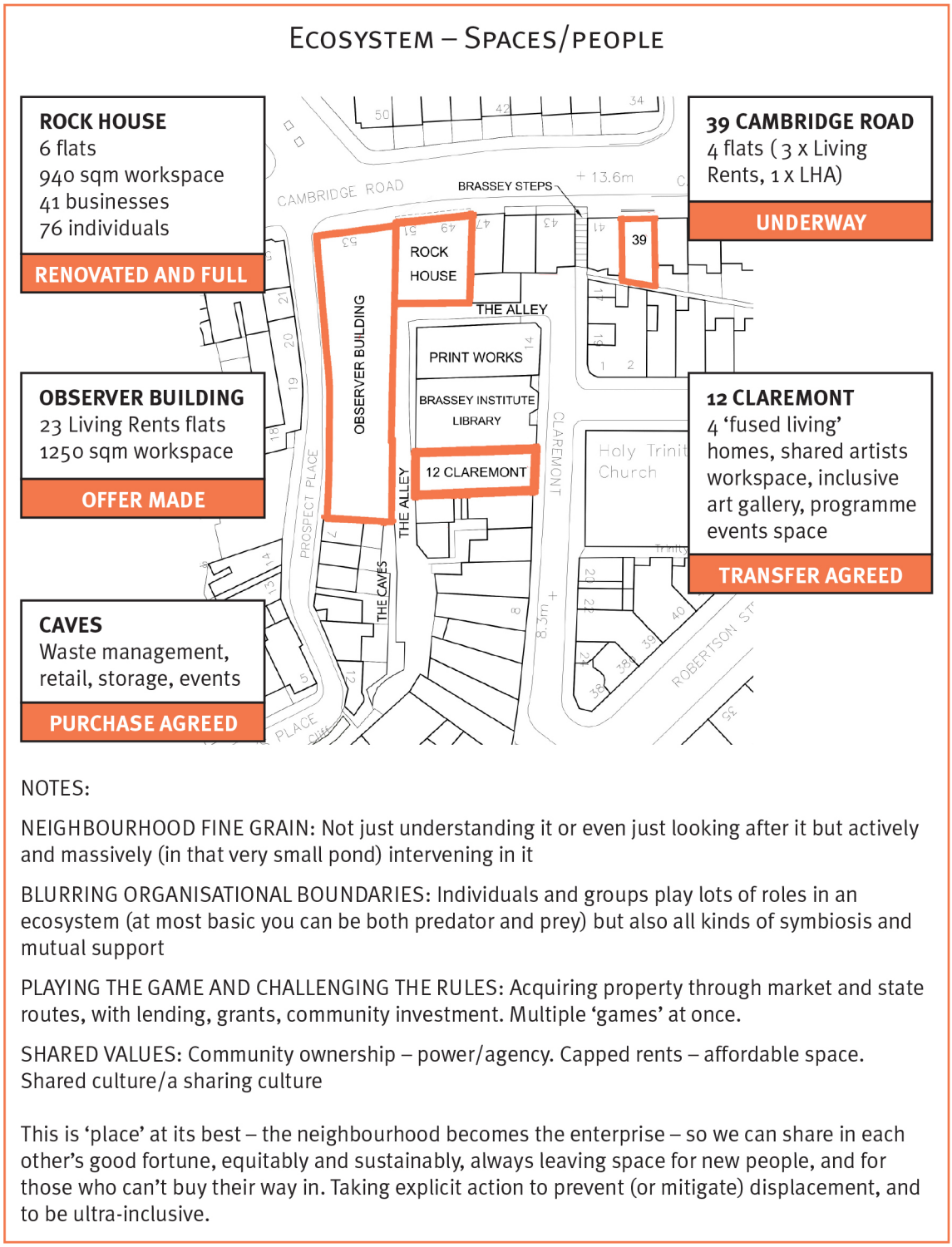
In White Rock the various community-led actions to bring property into community freehold created and indeed still are creating an ecosystem of distinct buildings and spaces with common values and shared resources. These resources include not only physical spaces and facilities but also key personnel (staff and volunteers), and tools for discussion and decision-making (eg Loomio[33]). This ecosystem is continually blurring the boundaries between organisations, creating porosity and mutual service obligations, and reshaping the discourse from organisations as proprietorial empires to 'the tools in the box to create the shared vision'.

A proposal to Power to Change in May 2015 spoke of "local eco-systems… in which the neighbourhood itself becomes the enterprise, and individuals become entrepreneurs and contributors rather than recipients, customers or beneficiaries" [EMP: 150531 PTC EOI]. At this stage the word 'ecosystem' was generic and insubstantiated but it evolved to describe how the various organisations had emerged over time and then to intimate the blurring of organisational boundaries and the ideas of 'bricolage' and 'assemblage'.

We began to work more closely as a 'joint working team' between the core organisations: to support each other; to further our reach in existing priorities; to share resources and wisdom; to find efficiencies [EMP: 181219 Joint working team]. In early 2019 a discussion on 'White Rock ecosystem: establishing a clear identity' reviewed all the 'differing messages' we were putting out and called for "a one page doc with our mission, values, achievements, priorities in one place for everyone to draw on", along with brand guidelines and a 'celebratory launch' [EMP: 190203 Ecosystem identity].

[33] A decision-making and tracking platform that came out of the Occupy movement. https://help.loomio.org/en/user_manual/getting_started/what_is_loomio/

Figure 6.15: Ecosystem notes and diagram, September 2018 [180919]



NOTES:

NEIGHBOURHOOD FINE GRAIN: Not just understanding it or even just looking after it but actively and massively (in that very small pond) intervening in it

BLURRING ORGANISATIONAL BOUNDARIES: Individuals and groups play lots of roles in an ecosystem (at most basic you can be both predator and prey) but also all kinds of symbiosis and mutual support

PLAYING THE GAME AND CHALLENGING THE RULES: Acquiring property through market and state routes, with lending, grants, community investment. Multiple 'games' at once.

SHARED VALUES: Community ownership – power/agency. Capped rents – affordable space. Shared culture/a sharing culture

This is 'place' at its best – the neighbourhood becomes the enterprise – so we can share in each other's good fortune, equitably and sustainably, always leaving space for new people, and for those who can't buy their way in. Taking explicit action to prevent (or mitigate) displacement, and to be ultra-inclusive.

Throughout 2019 we continued to speak of the idea of the ecosystem [EMP: 190430 JB/BW meeting]. In parallel, we were feeling the need for a collective descriptor for the growing collection of buildings: the first file name using the term Hastings Commons dates from July 2019:

> "An ecosystem of buildings and spaces, people and organisations has grown organically from a set of shared values and many years of community engagement. The Hastings Commons will become a destination because it's a great place. By labelling it as 'commons' we introduce ideas about community, collaboration and social equity every time someone says the name. The ecosystem is the process and tools by which the Commons are being created" [EMP: 190729 The Ecosystem and the Hastings Commons].

In January 2020 an ecosystem awayday involving staff, trustees, directors, and members of the Independent Advisory Group drew some consensus about vision, mission and goals, as well as beginning to build and share a common language [EMP: 200120 Awayday post-its]. It considered the spectrum of organisational options from complete separation to full merger, agreeing to view the ecosystem as 'connected autonomy' and focusing on the mantra 'internal solidarity/external clarity'. The two words that captured most people's views were 'scary' and 'exciting'.

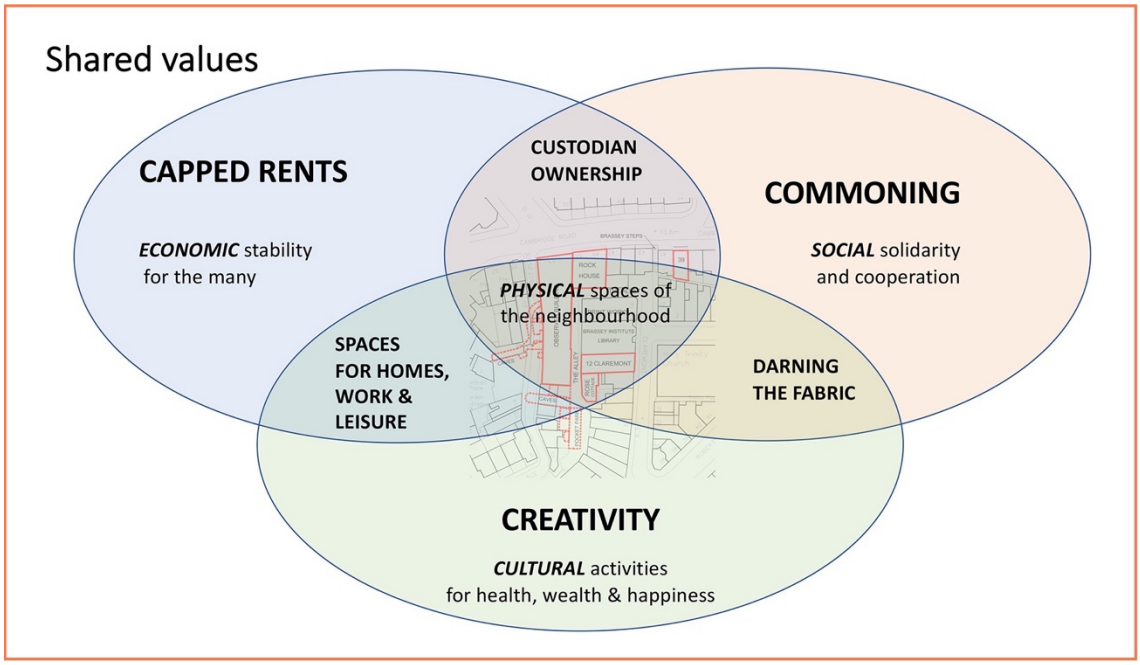
6.16: Conclusions and discussion wordle from Ecosystem awayday, January 2020

FEATURES OF THE ECOSYSTEM

OPPORTUNITIES	IMPROVE
Appeals to certain grant funders A different way that works Distribution of energies Flexibility Opportunities to learn/fail and refine	Don't lose the character Look after staff – do we have enough people/ collection of knowledge and skills Broaden funding base External understanding
EXCITING	**SCARY**
Innovative empowerment Connected autonomy Depends on relationships and trust Not safe but stretching	So 'out there'/exhausting Relationships can go wrong Where to get funds/resources Grant management burden RH suffers while attention elsewhere Priorities confused/too much

TOPICS CAPTURED FROM THE DISCUSSION

Figure 6.17: Values underpinning the ecosystem [190829]



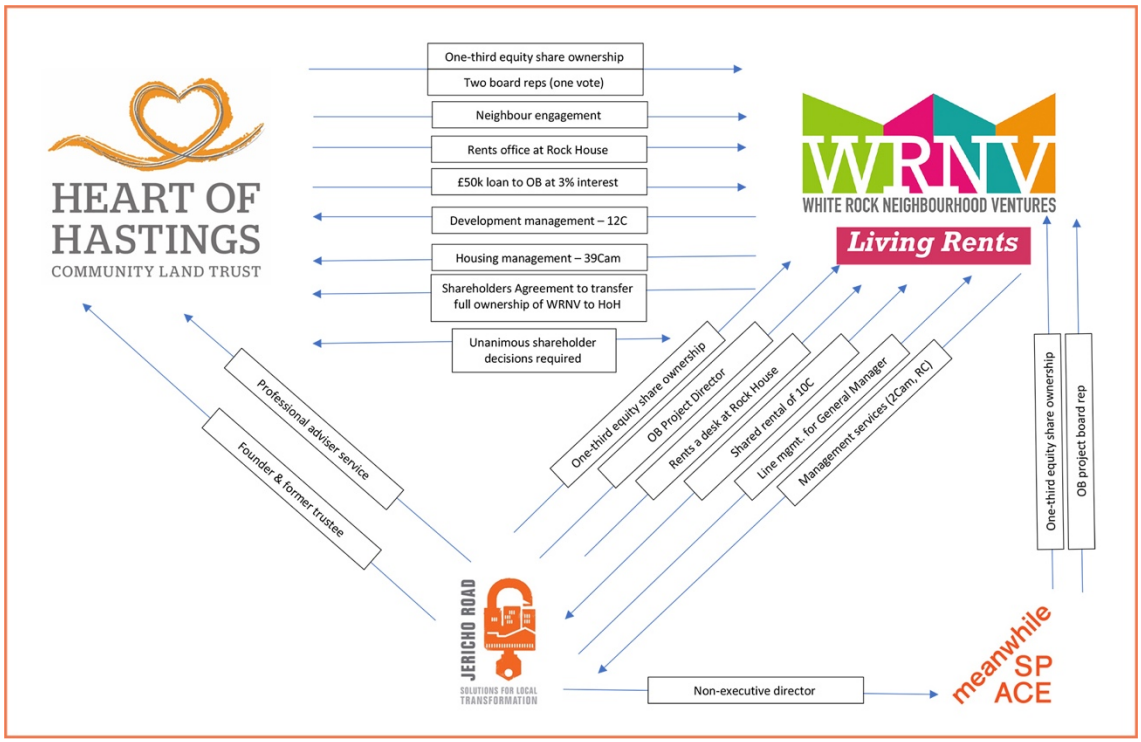
It was 2020 that really solidified the ecosystem ways of working. When the first Covid lockdown began we started weekly zooms for the whole ecosystem staff team. From July 2020 we began to hold Commons 'senior management team' meetings, although a year later two members of that team had gone. A working group oversaw the development of the Commons branding. The Independent Advisory Group, originally set up to support the Observer Building development, expanded to consider the Commons more widely and support the Heritage Action Zone. I sent out regular Commons Updates to staff, directors, trustees, and key funders. By the end of 2020 I had begun to think of myself as 'commoner-at-large' (see figure 7.11). All of these actions both reflected and constituted a shift that kept the essential cultures of the separate organisations while tethering them to a wider commons-thinking.

> "The ecosystem is the only reason we've got where we've got. It's given us speed, scale, and resilience. Made us move faster than any one organisation would have moved, which has given us scale. Also scale in the sense of the capacity of the team. Covid showed the resilience – because there's different organisations in the mix. They all got different money, down to Darren getting £10k for his Cave and putting it into further renovations to the Pocket Park. That 'swirliness' of it helps to spread the resources around and make the whole system more capable" [EMP: 210315 JS conversation with RL].

This process of organisational innovation has been much more explicit and openly discussed in White Rock than in Granby. The reflection below shows how local specificities shaped the outcome.

> "We might be odd because HoHCLT was established after and as a result of community-based property development rather than as a precursor and vehicle for it. Once the CLT was in place we could have sought to merge WRNV into it. Why didn't we? First, WRNV was entangled in the WRT conflict which HoH understandably didn't want anything to do with. Later, it would have felt like a loss of flexibility. Since 2019 we've framed the collection of the organisation types as a virtue, a veritable ecosystem with all the resilience that offers" [200126 Reflection].

Figure 6.18: Organic relationships built into a complex picture



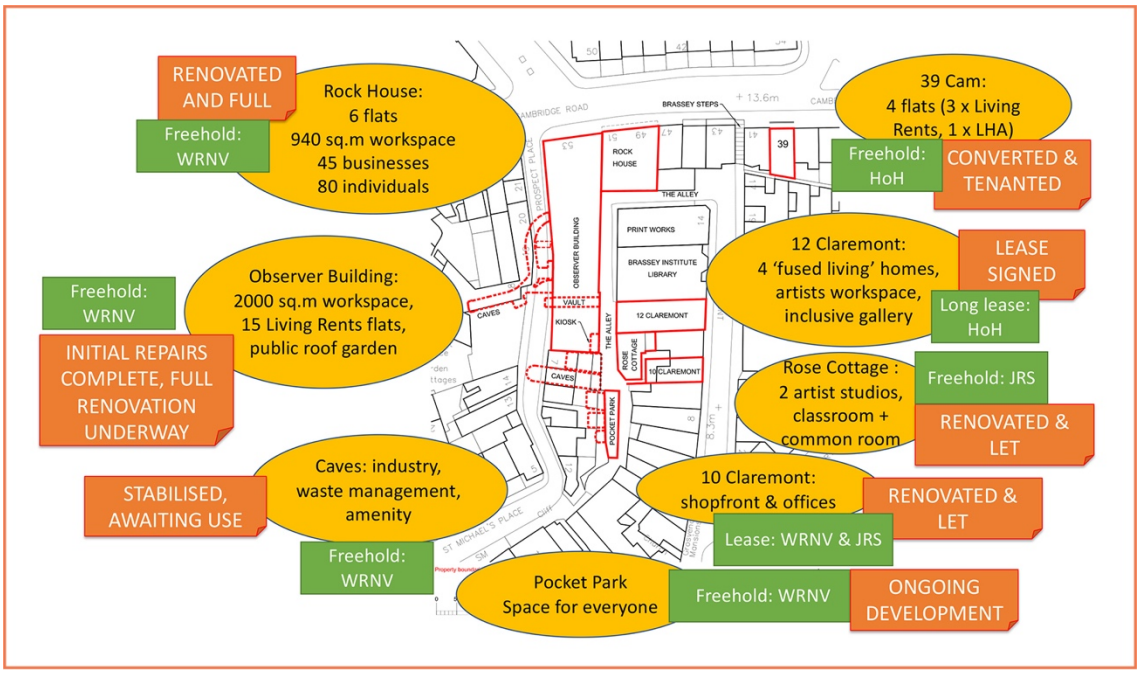
As I complete this writing in February 2022 the ecosystem continues to shift, this time towards more integration, and to evolve with new people and new challenges. Significant progress has been made with 8,000 square metres of floorspace now in the ownership of the ecosystem organisations

The time-lined description of the emergence of the ecosystem above aims to capture the contingent outcome of many parallel and intertwined processes underway. These

are always relational and performative – co-produced, contested, constituted by actions and discourse, meetings and non-meetings (the things that happen and the things that might have happened but didn't). For me at least, the embodied experience of social innovation is one of a joyful *grabbling* in the unpredictable darkness, guided by a normative but not stagnant value-base, towards a better world in three key time-spaces – here and now (meanwhile); community life (lifespan/transition); and the 100 year horizon (positive legacies for the neighbourhood after we are gone).

This chapter aimed to provide an empirical narrative of the complex SRN work underway in White Rock over the past seven years. It could never capture all the interesting things that happened and it is impossible to write anything but idiosyncratically from inside the moving eye of the storm but it has at least created a record and set the scene. Having laid out the contours of the two neighbourhoods and considered their role as commons, the next three chapters attempt a dual analysis in which I apply the SELF / RENOVATING / NEIGHBOURHOODS framework to the neighbourhoods *and vice versa*. The aim is *both* to gain a deeper understanding of these cases *and* to adjust and refine the SRN framework. Throughout I use White Rock as a lodestar, continually read through and alongside Granby as a 'classic case'.

Figure 6.19: Hastings Commons – spaces/ownership/progress (Note: Eagle House is not shown here, it is 50 yards to the east of 39 Cambridge Road)



CHAPTER 7: SELF – the subject

This chapter focuses on the *subject* of the self-renovating neighbourhood [subject-verb-object] clause. *Who* is doing it, and what is it doing to them? The concept of 'self' in SRN has several interconnected meanings. On one hand it focuses our attention on power, making plain the entrenched powerlessness of (poor) neighbourhoods and laying claim to the potential for a locally-led approach to local change (a claim imperfectly captured in the concept of 'landscape democracy', see Jones 2018). On the other it refers to the local people who take action collectively for the common good and aims to understand them as individuals, as collectives, and as constituting the place, the 'neighbourhood self'.

Therefore, the chapter considers the question from three perspectives. First expanding on the fundamental question about the locus of power in place-shaping, I then consider whether (or not) there is conceptual mileage in seeing the neighbourhood as a 'self', or at least as an enterprise with some kind of embedded agency. The main part of the chapter uses the analytical frameworks – motivation, agency, emotion, attitudes, and capacitation – to explore aspects of the individual and collective selves engaged in self-renovating neighbourhoods in Hastings and Liverpool, seeking to understand what makes people work together for their neighbourhood and what factors and attributes influence their success. These are core questions for commons literature (Ostrom 1990; Noterman 2016; Huron 2018; Bollier and Helfrich 2019), as well for as wider debates on social movements and collective action (Goodwin, Jasper and Polletta 2000; Castells 2015; Underhill 2019).

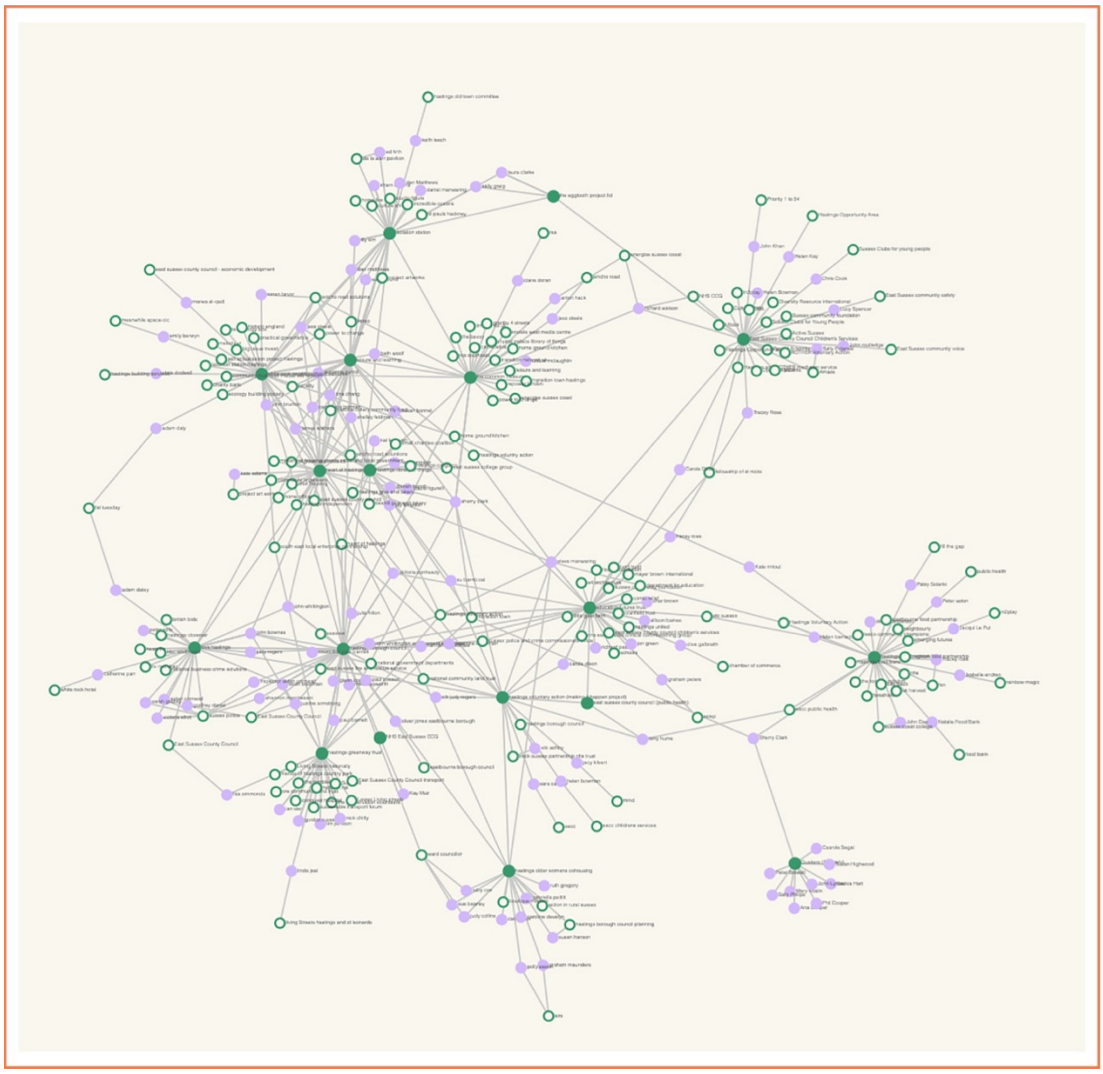
While this thesis is very much from my own perspective, the 'self' in SRN is always collective and relational. This is not individual household DIY to add value to a personal asset base. It is collaborative action for common and mutual good. Within the scope of that collective and plural self, in this *autoactionography* I am the storyteller, weaving a first person narrative as actor, advocate, and analyst from the raw material of mutual action. I bring to these roles continuity, credibility, and some capability but there can be no SRN without the 'we'.

So who is 'we'? We is any group who choose to step forward to take ambitious action in the name of the neighbourhood, ask others to join in and commit to the long term. In Granby's case this was a group of women who really had been 'left behind', staying put as freeholders in a condemned territory. In White Rock it was entrepreneurial communitarians congregating interests around a set of buildings that had been left to rot. In both there is an embracing of subaltern identities, of eccentricity and marginality, even of the territorial stigma that the areas have suffered. As the analysis of the empirical material will show, in both areas the core group was overtly committed to:

- The fine grain neighbourhood
- A collective DIY approach
- Building agency
- Openness, inclusion, neighbouring
- Locking in affordability forever.

The participants in my case studies demonstrated Matt Wilde's point that "at a deeper level, beneath these constructed divides, there is, and has only ever been, one *us*" (2011). Committed to the openness of multiplicity, I adapt Mol's concept of fractionality in which "[neighbourhood] enacted is more than one but less than many. *The body multiple* is not fragmented. Even if it is multiple, it also hangs together" (2002: 55, emphasis in original). Diving into Granby and White Rock, swimming alongside as they changed over the years, I have tried to show the complexity of that 'hanging together' as a relational process impacted by the dynamics of power and shaped by affect. Collective agency, capacitation and care can generate versions of 'the body multiple' which explicitly seek to make neighbourhood resources work for the common good at the three temporal scales of meanwhile, lifespan, and the 100-year horizon.

Figure 7.1: Initial Hastings network map co-created with Free Ice Cream in a blended event in the Observer Building and on zoom, September 2020



7.1 'Self' as Power

While the idea of SELF is useful to explore many aspects of the collective self (the 'who' that is driving SRN), in the original formulation and in my empirical findings the 'self' prefix is really a statement about power. In valorising renovation from the inside, from the grassroots, from the broad base – rather than outside, top-down, narrow expert/political decision-making – SRN is a disruption, a taking of power over our own collectively shared piece of ground. Throughout the data for both Granby (see figure 3.1) and Hastings [EMP: 191127 OV meeting] there is pervasive evidence for the sense of powerlessness and the drive to DIY as empowerment (Holtzman, Hughes and Van Meter 2007) if not insurgency (De Carli and Frediani 2016).

The prefix 'self' in SRN is an explicit drawing-down into the neighbourhood of power to shape the neighbourhood (Brownill and Bradley 2017; Wargent and Parker 2018). Building on the traditions of the development trust and settlement movement/s (now combined in England as Locality), SRN takes a particular approach to power. By bringing together positive DIY action with open, sustained and ambitious community engagement and sometimes, but unevenly, engaging with 'the powerful', it is possible to build a *power-to* base (Law 1990, Sharpe 2014: 32-3) that can be explicitly focused on sustaining and expanding the commons (Huron 2018). What does such a power-to base entail? In community organising (CO) terms it means relationships with people in large numbers, where those relationships are based on mutual trust, respect and understanding. CO training points out that Jane Doe's contact details are data but they are not powerful unless you know what will make her take action. My own experience having led me to combine CO with asset development, I would add (*pace* Allen 2003) that the power base also includes *resources*, alongside credibility, confidence and the capacity to take action.

Grammatically, the 'self' prefix in the reflexive verb 'self-renovating' performs the role of 'intensifier'. Such self-forms are "phonologically prominent, i.e. they are focused and therefore stressed. The semantic effect of such focusing is *the evoking of alternatives*" (Konig and Gast, 2002: 2, my emphasis). This 'emphatic use' is generally associated with "establishing a contrast… bringing alternatives to a given value into the discussion" (ibid: 8) and emphasising "the agentive character" (ibid:10).

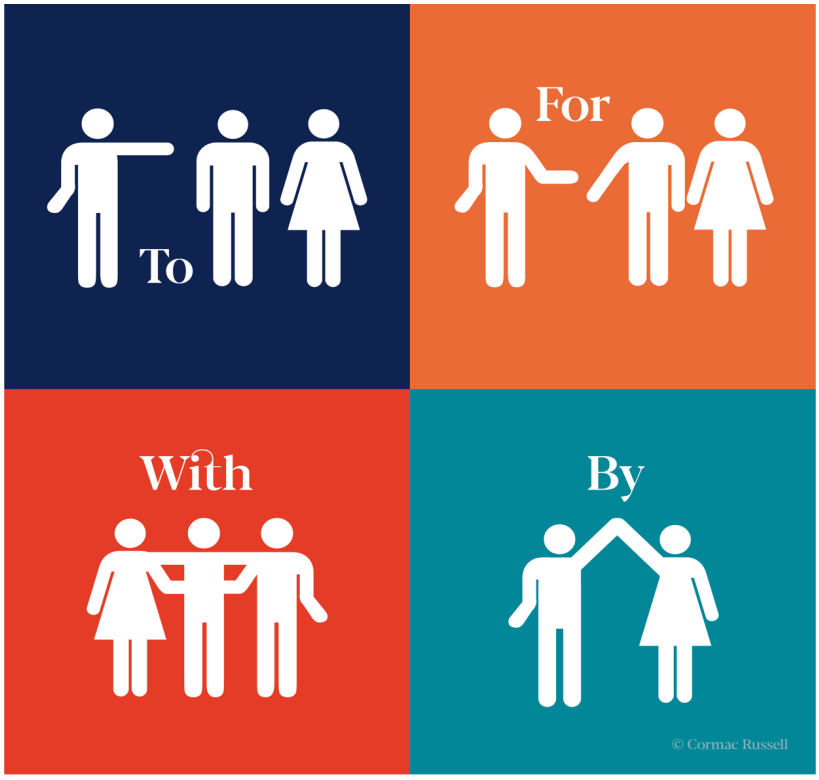
Thus the term self-renovating neighbourhoods highlights the normative alternative and expresses an option for agency. It deliberately sets up an opposition between those Selves tethered to place, deep-rooted insiders who take DIY action based on intimate local knowledge and know-how, and the mobile, external and unfocused[34] Others – politicians, state officials, private consultants, land agents, and speculators – who neither belong to nor adequately engage with the neighbourhood yet have such influence. Stickily situated within structures and systems that appear incapable of

[34] In the sense that they are not specifically focused on the particular neighbourhood

neighbourhood empathy, such actors are full of agency that is systemically denied to local people who are discursively positioned at best as 'final beneficiaries' and more often as part of the problem that needs to be solved [EMP: CRF Tech Note 2021: 11].

The neighbourhood renovating itself rather than being renovated by others captures the difference between 'done to' and 'done by'. Cormac Russell (2019, 2020, 2021) has identified four modes of change: To, For, With, By. The TO mode is an 'authoritarian' form where change is done to us, without us, often to serve a distant agenda [*Housing Market Renewal*]. The FOR mode is 'benevolent' imposed change to serve a perceived genuine need [*Sea Space*]. The WITH mode is 'participative', making change collaboratively to serve a widely-recognised genuine need [*Heart of Hastings CLT*]. The BY mode is an 'empowered' form of change "done by those who do the work, without requiring permission, and serving a genuine need" (Russell 2019: 8) [*Granby*]. I believe that Hastings Commons is already somewhere between WITH and BY and I hope that over time it will become more and more BY.

Figure 7.2: To, For, With, By (Russell 2019: 8)



> "When change is done to people they experience it as violence. When change is done by people they experience it as liberation: (Rosebeth Moss-Kanter,

quoted by Russell 2019: 10).

The existence of this traditional violence within 'regeneration' is epitomised by the praxis of 'slum clearance' (McAdam 2019; Lees and Hubbard 2021; although see Tunstall and Lowe 2012 for a rosier conclusion from an admittedly weak evidence base). The solution – 'Communities in Control' (Secretary of State 2008) – has been a mantra of funders and parts of government for two decades.[35] Known variously as consultation, engagement, participation, this is a spectrum from the most cynical and incompetent to the most generative and inspiring.

Both Granby and White Rock have shown that in SRN the currency of power is the effective and sustained engagement and participation of local people. While the people involved in self-renovating neighbourhoods can be numerous and diverse, they will always be a subset of the population because SRN requires 'joiners' and 'doers' – a coalescence of those willing to be active and constructive [EMP: OB manifesto 2018; FoHP 2018]. While the neighbourhood itself does and must also include people who are not (yet) participating, there is an optimism and ambition that it is possible to reach everybody. "Their 'apathy' is the failure of our outreach" was the motto of the 'Get Set for Citizenship' programme (Deptford 2000-03), while the national Community Organisers (CO) programme (Locality 2011-15) focused on 'igniting the impulse to act'. Learning from these approaches, and then from Granby in real time, the work in White Rock has always prioritised sustained and creative engagement [EMP: WR 2006-21]. This will be explored in more depth in the next chapter as part of the 'doing' of SRN.

[35] Organisations and policies that have committed to and argued for 'communities in control' include the London Regeneration Network, National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal, Policy Action Team reports, New Deal for Communities programme, Big Lottery Fund's 'Local People Leading' slogan, Big Society, Localism Act, national Community Organisers programme, Big Local, Power to Change, and many more

7.2 'Self' as Place

Can a place be a 'self'? The *Handbook of Self and Identity* (Leary and Tangney 2012: 3) describes the emergence of 'self' as an organising construct since the 1950s and the "conceptual quagmire" that psychologists and sociologists have faced in defining and conceptualising the construct.

Figure 7.3: Uses of the term 'self'

Leary and Tangney (2012) outline how the term 'self' is used in at least five different ways

1. Self as the total person – synonymous with 'person'
2. Self as personality – "a collection of abilities, temperament, goals, values and preferences that distinguish one individual from another" (Tesser 2002: 185)
3. Self as experiencing subject – the self as knower' (I) distinguished from 'the self as known' (me) – ie the inner psychological entity that is the subject of a person's experience. "While there is no specific neurophysiological structure underlying this experience of self… this does not undermine the subjective sense that there is a conscious entity – a self – 'in there' somewhere" (Leary and Tangney 2012: 5)
4. Self as beliefs about oneself – the various answers that a person might give to questions such as 'Who am I?' and 'What am I like?'. Suggest using more specific terms like 'self-beliefs' to refer to this conceptualisation of self
5. Self as executive agent – a decision-maker and doer, the agent 'ghost in the machine' that regulates behaviour.

Leary and Tangney offer some advice – don't use self as a synonym for person or personality. It is the other three uses that have some merit: 1. people's experience of themselves, 2. their perceptions, thoughts and feelings about themselves and 3. their deliberate efforts to regulate their own behaviour. But none of these uses captures the nature of the self in a way that encompasses all the others. So either the term has three very different meanings or a definition is required that encompasses all three uses. Leary and Tangney offer an underlying feature: "the human capacity for *reflexive thinking* – the ability to take oneself as the object of one's attention and thought" (2012: 6, their emphasis). Therefore, "[t]he self is a mental capacity that allows an animal to take itself as the object of its own attention and to think consciously about itself." In this definition the neighbourhood could only be said to be a 'self' if it was an animal with mental capacity, which it is clearly not. Nonetheless, the three interlinked

processes that Leary and Tangney (2012) associate with self – attention, cognition and regulation/executive action – can be seen to have neighbourhood-level variants (people in neighbourhoods paying attention to, thinking about, and regulating/shaping those neighbourhoods, for the perceived benefit of the neighbourhood itself). DeFilippis says "Since localities are not agents… they cannot *own* anything" (2004: 33), but perhaps we may choose to work nonetheless with a generative fiction of the neighbourhood-self.

> "By speaking in anthropomorphisms about actants we gradually develop a form of vision that helps to break the habit of seeing humans as the only actants" (larvalsubjects 2011).

How might it help to envision neighbourhoods as selves? This generative fiction can help us to focus on the *agency* of places, especially topical as another round of competitive bidding plays out through the so-called Levelling Up agenda (UK Gov 2021). In practice, places are already treated as if they were agents. For many years there has been a lazy, almost unnoticed discursive collapse between cities and towns and their local governments. In public sector and funder discourse 'Manchester' or 'Liverpool' can mean the city council rather than, or additionally to, the city. "Is Hastings coming to the event?" might mean is an HBC council officer on the list.

The explicitly located nature of SRN and its continuous, self-conscious, spatialised storytelling create similar elisions between place and organisation. 'Granby' has come to mean not just a neighbourhood in Toxteth, Liverpool 8, but the CLT as an organisation, the Turner Prize-winning partnership between the women of Granby and Assemble, and indeed a specific approach to grassroots neighbourhood development. In Hastings this has been taken further, both with the invention of Hastings Commons as a self-labelling tactic to capture and communicate the approach and with the organisational innovation of the ecosystem as the self-renovating infrastructure of a nested series of place-frames (Hastings Commons, the Trinity Triangle, the America Ground, White Rock, town centre, Hastings and St Leonards).

Ideally, the notion of the neighbourhood-self could help to generate identity, empathy and loyalty among and beyond its immediate population, a practice of considering the

best interests of the neighbourhood, while opening up the question of who will take specific actions. Emily Berwyn from Meanwhile Space sees this neighbourhood-self as: "A living breathing entity that grows and contracts, encounters difficulties and joyous moments, and changes daily. Is cared for by those who inhabit it. A respectful relationship with the neighbourhood, as you would a person" [210713 Emily].

Possession of a self allows the possibility for motivated actions including, for example, self-esteem maintenance and self-actualisation, as well as for place-based idiosyncrasy. If a neighbourhood can be territorially stigmatised (Wacquant, Slater and Pereira 2014) then surely we can speak of a neighbourhood's 'self-esteem'? Having a 'self' offers additional ways of dealing with threats, negative feeling and uncertainty – "cognitively manipulating information in ways that achieve certain psychological outcomes" (Leary and Tangney 2012: 9). This potential component of future-oriented neighbourhood resilience is demonstrated by several of the SRN case study actors.

The neighbourhood self is more than an entity; it's an enterprise, a venture, a thing we are trying to do/make. The French reflexive verb *se faire* (making oneself) is useful here, as is *agir* (acting) which speaks to the anglophone of 'agitate' as well as take action. What actions are required for the neighbourhood to 'make itself'? Two examples illustrate this: the way the assemblage of Granby market occupies, embeds itself into and remakes the street landscape and the Trinity Triangle Spring Clean project which involved hiring a cherrypicker to "inspect the neighbourhood as a single structure" [210401 Chris Dodwell].

7.3 'Self' as People

While the self- prefix refers to the broadest question of who has the right to shape place, my other conception of SELF requires more specific answers to the question: 'who' – individuals, collectives, organisations and ecosystems – is making SRN happen? The people identified in this thesis were by no means the sole authors of, or role-players within, the self renovating neighbourhoods. Other choices could have been made about who to focus on but I wanted to 'get in deep' with a small number of

people rather than superficially with a much broader 'everyone' (which of course would still leave many out). I chose to use my own deep embeddedness and specific perspective in White Rock and to balance that with a strong focus on Hazel Tilley in Granby. I have constructed my picture of the 'Granby self' by spending time there, primarily with Hazel (25 interviews), over and over again from 2014 to 2019. These iterative interviews built a strong relationship and helped me see Granby from inside Hazel's head and heart in a kind of ethnographic biography (Lees and Robinson 2021; Tabib-Calif and Lomsky-Feder 2021).

Additionally, I spent time with Eleanor Lee (8 interviews), including direct support for fundraising, and I balanced these with a focus on the two 'outsiders': Erika Rushton and Ronnie Hughes. In White Rock the positionality is even stronger so the viewpoint is all mine, but it has been formed over many years of listening in Hastings and moulded during the PhD period by my praxis as a reflective practitioner directly experiencing, and trying to shape, the 'thing' I was also trying to describe.

With this focus on the actors I could be said to be buying the consumption side of the gentrification debate (ie focusing on individual behaviours rather than structural causation) but there are three rebuttals to this. Firstly, my research was mainly with prior and existing residents, both Hastings B&B (born & bred) and DFL (down from London) and in Granby both long-term and new arrivals who were generally not gentrifiers. Rather than the old dichotomy of the doers (gentrifiers, regenerators, 'investors') and the done-tos (displaced, marginalised, 'beneficiaries'), I focus on those local people who are taking action to do it themselves. Secondly, focusing on SRN rather than gentrification offers a different perspective on the role of developers, landowners, and investors who have the potential to be social preservationist contributors rather than simply pantomime villains. Thirdly, the 'production' side in terms of the rent gap, the flow of capital rather than people, has been explored in Chapter 3. It is macro-economics and uneven development that triggers and feeds gentrification, but cultural analysis can describe how it happens and why it is quite like that. Fisher reminds us "*both* that capitalism is a hyper-abstract impersonal structure *and* that it would be nothing without our cooperation" (2009: 15).

Figure 7.4: Hazel and Jess

Hazel Tilley

Born: 02/08/1955 in Wellingborough; moved to Liverpool aged 1 but in care from age 6 to 12; mum did 'all sorts from dinner lady to day care'; dad was a charge hand at Metal Box in Speke; adopted sister died of Covid-19 in May 20

Lives: Cairns Street, Granby since 1989

Relationship: married to Ron, a music promoter 20 years older than her, who lives in London; Hazel spends weekends there working in the hospital, weekdays in Liverpool attending to the CLT

Career: social worker responsible for discharging patients from hospital, long-term member of Granby Residents Association, and one of the founders of Granby 4 Streets CLT

Roles: 'sales', energy and integrity, neighbouring, picking up the pieces, telling the story over and over again

Core values: taking care of people and place, calling out bullshit, and using dry humour as a survival tool

Typical phrase: "seek forgiveness not permission"

Pet: Hobbes the Jack Russell

Jess Steele

Born: 04/04/1969 in London; father a lobby correspondent, mother awarded OBE for services to homeless people, sister a GP in Devon, another sister found in 1997 with brother-in-law and niece. Brother died in a motorbike accident 1975. Brought up in Eltham, South East London, went to school in New Cross; lived and worked in Deptford 1991-2002

Lives: Hastings since 2004

Relationship: cohabiting since 2001 with partner Ronan

Career: serial community entrepreneur alongside work for national membership organisations; awarded OBE for services to community assets in the UK; director of Jericho Road Solutions; founder of Heart of Hastings CLT

Roles: 'sales', thought leadership, talking it up, putting the money together to enable spaces, connecting outwards

Core values: belief in people, social justice, communitarian, entrepreneurial

Typical phrase: "it's not enough to be right, you have to be powerful"

Pet: Scuffle the Patterdale terrier

The achievement of self-renovating neighbourhoods requires a deep perspectival understanding taking account of the person-centred questions of core values, self-efficacy, collective self-interest, co-operation and sociability. The following sections explore five aspects of the individual and collective selves relevant to SRN. First, I consider the bundle of motivations that drive us to do it, the 'civic imagination' that pictures and attempts to enact alternative futures. Second, I explore agency, self-efficacy and outcome expectancies among highly differentiated people in a collectivity. What is it that gives us the sense that we can make change together? Third, I dig into how it feels, including the emotional realms of conflict, fragility, pride and joy, stresses and strains and the sensory experience of SRN. Fourth, I analyse the 'attitudes for SRN', including the original three hypothesised 'grassroots virtues' of thrift, impatience and sociability, now tested empirically and more nuanced. Lastly, I look briefly at the skills, capacitation and organisation required in the work of SRN (explored further in Chapter 8) and wonder whether and when it might be made easier.

7.4 Self-interest and the Civic Imagination

Community organising (CO) seeks to get to know people. It is not market research but rather helping a person to identify what matters to them, and take action on that basis (Trapp [1986] 2003). The CO training session I attended in Chicago in 2011 urged us to 'get the whole person at once', understand what makes them tick, what would cause them to take action, the driving force that CO calls their 'self-interest'. An example that stays with me from the national CO programme is a young Black woman organiser taking seriously the need to talk to people across the community, braces herself to go into the bookies. She gets talking to a guy who turns out to be a single dad. He tells her that his mum wasn't able to provide for him and his siblings and they never went anywhere. As he speaks he takes a big breath in – "I want to make sure my son gets to go to the zoo" – and then out – "but it's so expensive". The emotion and the frustration are gold-dust for CO. Within weeks he had set up Single Dads Club organising shared-cost trips for local kids and dads.[36]

[36] Alinsky would have sought to "rub the resentment raw" to build a head of steam for action against the zoo. I think collective DIY solutions are more winnable and generate other benefits.

As shown in this example, such driving motivations are emotional, often embodied – 'makes you feel sick, 'breaks your heart', 'gets under your skin' (Simonsen 2007; Vishmidt 2020). For me the driving forces are: an affinity for places, love of old buildings, hatred of waste and destruction, pride in Hastings, fear of the loss of diversity/quirkiness, contempt for extractors and colonisers, belief (until proven wrong) in people's capacity for creative cooperation. For Hazel they would include: a visceral sense of injustice as ever-present, personal experience of the care system, and direct experience of neighbourlessness (cold, quiet, sad):

> "It was freezing. It was really cold because every wall is external. We were getting damp coming through. There was one horrendous year where I really thought, that's it, I have to go, I can't do this for another year because I could not warm the house. You know when it's so cold that you just want to go to bed and stay warm and not have to get up to go for a pee because it's too fucking freezing. As soon as I came in, I couldn't take my coat off, I'd have the fire and the door shut and I just wasn't warming anything because the place was getting damp as well, so you just couldn't get shut of it" [151201 Hazel].

For others among my informants these driving forces have included, as examples:

- personal lived experience, past or ongoing, of a particular issue, difficulty or challenge
- a previous background or activity, maybe long left behind but an abiding influence
- a family connection to a building or site
- anger about one's own housing or employment situation
- a particular life-phase experience such as having young children or teenagers
- frustration with 'the cost of doing nothing' [Emily 210713].

A different kind of motivation – more directional than driving – could be described as 'learned motivation'. This is the 'shoulda' motivation – we should have done it differently (Flicker et al 2008). For example, the lessons from the Get Set programme – we didn't buy an asset and we didn't leverage the network – led to the combination of property purchase and community organising that I have promoted ever since. The experience of 'doing meanwhile' and seeing all your work add value to someone else's portfolio led Meanwhile Space to consider 'permanent meanwhile' in the form of Rock House. There is a version of this which focuses on what *they* shoulda done but I have always been allergic to it and more interested in what *we* will do next.

A further kind of motivation, often seen as the dominant one, is in the notion of future rewards – "the projected future… brought into the present through forethought" (Bandura 1997: 122). This notion of the future can be seen from the collective and individual perspectives. Collectively, SRN leaders are creating a prefigurative environment guided by a vision of the future in which it is normal to know your neighbours, to look out for each other and look after the place, and in which it is possible for people to change their lives and their neighbourhoods according to their (commonly agreed) heart's desire [EMP: Hastings Commons vision & values 2020] – in other words a Right to the Neighbourhood (Imbroscio 2004).

If there is a civic imagination[37], or what Huron calls 'commoner consciousness' (2018: 176), it would be a 'way of seeing' that constantly seeks out the best options for a neighbourhood (or a town, or a city), not through top-down plan-making but using 'civics', that is the ongoing participation of citizens (widely defined) in the physical, social and political shaping of places. Such an imagination would surely seek to harness the "renewable energy of communities" (Ham and Murray, 2014: 9). It would need a pipeline of inspiration and space for imagination, as the Common Treasury of Adaptable Ideas and the Hastings Emerging Futures programme sought to provide.

This collective vision, and the work that goes with it, has directly changed individual lives in Hastings and Liverpool. Speaking of Heart of Hastings' project in Ore Valley, local resident Dan O'Connor told a funders meeting "two years ago I was on heroin, last week I gave up cigarettes, that's what this project has done for me" [EMP: 171101 Fieldnote]. We first met Dan in March 2016 when he came with his mum to a consultation event. She spoke for him and he did not look up for the whole meeting. In August that year when Heart of Hastings took the Ore Valley power station site on licence, Dan became volunteer site steward. At first happy to volunteer, he became frustrated when he saw other locals who were no more skilled or reliable paid for their

[37] "Like Collingwood's (1935)'historical imagination', there is a 'regeneration imagination' that is developed through practice. This helps a practitioner to see what might make sense in the complex, dynamic environment of a very particular deprived neighbourhood. The experience of groping towards solutions on the ground is scary, difficult, uncertain and rewarding all at the same time" (Steele 2009: 119).

time. We saw this as a positive progression and he was taken on for 16 hours a week. Still diffident and sometimes disengaged, Dan's confidence grew and in July 2018 he gave a perfect on-site interview to BBC South East describing the difference. "I've had severe mental health problems all my life. This is different from anything else I've ever done volunteering because it has a sense of inclusion, a sense of ownership over this land which is important. It's made me feel a part of something that I actually wanna do. It's very rare that you get a chance… for me anyway, to feel fulfilled like that… It's inspirational, it's noble. It's a chance to change people's lives" (BBC South East 2018, Power to Change 2017). Dan is now working full time in a carer support role that he enjoys.

In the same film Rock House resident Bob Williams also gave testimony: "This is a safe and secure place to live. I'm very happy here. There are people I feel I can trust and we all look after each other's welfare." This was put to the test in February 2017 when Bob's flat flooded and within 10 minutes most of the tenants in the building were on hand moving his belongings and one of them organised a crowdfunder to replace damaged furniture. When I said to a group on a learning visit that same month that doing six flats and 20 commercial spaces wouldn't save the neighbourhood, let alone change the world, another Rock House tenant, Adam Clements, told them ""but it has changed my world… not just having a place to live but a real home" [170208 Adam].

7.5 Agency and Difference

It is clear that the vast majority of people are systematically stripped of agency, both individually and collectively made to feel that There Is No Alternative (TINA) and that there is nothing they can do.

> "It becomes a spiral where people cease to be able to help themselves and so they become the stereotype that the police have wanted them to be in the first place and have put on them. I find it quite disgusting that there's no break from that. Poverty's not about a lack of money – it is about a lack of money but there's more to it than that, it's also about labelling, it's about not having, or feeling that you haven't got, any power, that you can't do anything to change these huge great juggernauts of bureaucracy and hate" [151201 Hazel].

In contrast to the performance of poverty through the repetition of statistics and bad stories, SRN seeks instead to create beacons that spatially showcase the 'cracks of hope' (Moulaert 2010: 11), offering a performance in "the creativity of everyday life" (Gregson and Rose 2014: 38) and the agentive potentiality of local people. The underlying task of SRN is to 'kill TINA' and rekindle possibility. Raymond Williams' call to action to "make hope possible rather than despair convincing" (1989: 118) is essential in confronting the false choice between gentrification and decline.

> "Emancipatory politics must always destroy the appearance of a 'natural order', must reveal what is presented as necessary and inevitable to be a mere contingency, just as it must make what was previously deemed to be impossible seem attainable" (Fisher 2009: 17).

Bandura has shown exhaustively (1986, 1997, 2000) how self-efficacy beliefs impact directly on performance and vice versa, creating vicious or virtuous spirals that become entrenched, and yet are therefore open to intervention. "People's beliefs in their efficacy affect almost everything they do: how they think, motivate themselves, feel, and behave" (1997: 19). This is particularly relevant where the self does not control the resources required to undertake the renovation. It is all too easy to fall back on proxy control, abdicating power to those perceived as more efficacious. The "price of proxy control is a vulnerable security that rests on the competence, power and favours of others" (ibid: 17), a dependence that further reduces opportunities to build skills. In contrast, achieving a 'win' will teach a group that it can take action and make change, and it will stand as a lesson to others. This was why Hastings Pier was so important locally – both in the winning and then, later, in the losing. It is why the solid reality of the Hastings Commons is like a signboard proclaiming that it is possible to break the cycle of extractive speculation. It is why the crazy hoops of funding processes are not just frustrating but fundamentally destructive of agency – people feel that "if even Jess Steele says it's too hard then it really is impossible" [190607 HBC councillor Leah Levane].

Darren French shows how SRN impacts on self-efficacy beliefs. In childhood Darren used to play on the power station site in Ore Valley and as a teenager he hung around the site when his dad worked security during the demolition in 2003. Late in 2016, he

came to see what was going on. He frequently tells the story: “I came on the site and I said to Jess ‘what should I do?’. She said ‘no-one’s in charge here, you should do what you think is needed’. That was a revelation!”. Darren began to break up the ubiquitous old pallets to make benches, including one with the team’s names carved into it as a present to the inspirational Marsh Farm Outreach in Luton. Over time he opened up about his life squashed into a 3-bed house with his parents, his wife and three daughters, how he left school with just one qualification – drama. He was offered a place at Eastbourne college but “the subsidies for transport not being enough and my parents not having the funds available to help stopped me from going”.

> “I was diagnosed with Marfan’s Syndrome around 2006 which I was told is degenerative. I suffered with depression and used to shut myself away in my room not wanting to go out. The site gave me a new freedom. The bottom up approach really appealed and it helped me become more active both mentally and physically. I still have issues with my back and hips but thankfully due to new diagnosis in detecting Marfan’s I have been told I don’t have it and whereas before not knowing what is causing my back problems I would’ve sank back into my depression but being part of something like the Heart of Hastings has kept me going” [210724 Darren French].

In 2018 Darren stood for election as a trustee of Heart of Hastings; in 2019 he participated in the Organisation Workshop; and in 2020 he began the long journey to his life’s dream – to become a paramedic. With shifts in membership of the CLT in early 2021, Darren became increasingly core to the ecosystem, taking up the Heart of Hastings representative position as a director of White Rock Neighbourhood Ventures and eventually the position of Vice Chair of the community land trust. In December 2021 he took over as Chair of Heart of Hastings and was appointed by the National CLT Network as a CLT Ambassador.

Another Darren, this time in Liverpool, also found his life changed through SRN when he and his 10-year-old daughter moved into one of the rental houses. Speaking about the CLT’s plans to create a Winter Garden from two terraced houses that were too far gone to renovate as homes, Darren said:

> “I think it’s going to be nice. A great idea, like. It’s hard to visualise because I don’t know anything like it. I haven’t seen that before, it’s completely new, so

> it's hard to know how it's going to be. It's exciting that people are prepared to go ahead and go for something like that. But obviously they've had the success in the area, haven't they? They must've believed in themselves. There must've been times when things seemed long and they thought of giving up or something, I don't know" [160610 Darren Guy].

Recognition of the level of sustained self-belief required for SRN raises the question of the origins of this sense of agency ("the power to originate actions for given purposes" (Bandura 2001: 6). People in my case study areas have been cast in subordinate roles and given stigmatising labels: "the more the efficacy beliefs are dismissed, the greater is the performance debilitation" (Bandura 1997: 18). The territorial stigmatisation (Wacquant et al 2014) has been acute, particularly in Granby and throughout Hastings, where people and place have been demonised as simultaneously incapable and dangerous. Bandura's table on outcome expectancies (figure 7.5) was employed in the research and thinking about the communities in these neighbourhoods and indeed those neighbourhoods included in earlier stages of the research (Ore Valley, Anfield, Marsh Farm, Stoke's Croft). They have all spent a lot of time in the unsatisfactory lower and left spaces of the matrix.

Figure 7.5 Outcome expectancies and efficacy beliefs

		OUTCOME EXPECTANCIES	
		-	+
EFFICACY BELIEFS	+	Protest Grievance Social activism Milieu change	Productive engagement Aspiration Personal satisfaction
	-	Resignation Apathy	Self-devaluation Despondency

from Bandura (1997) p20

Fisher argued that the lack of political action by British students was not apathy or cynicism but '*reflexive impotence*': "they know things are bad, but more than that, they know they can't do anything about it. But that 'knowledge', that reflexivity, is not a passive observation of an already existing state of affairs. It is a self-fulfilling prophecy" (2009: 21). I have seen that 'knowledge of impossibility' at work in neighbourhoods across the country, including Granby and White Rock.

Yet I chose these areas precisely because they included people who were demonstrating a break with the imposed narratives, effectively contesting the established narrative and mobilising new stories about themselves (Lowndes 2016). In doing so they drew on long and varied traditions of collective action, from ideas and experience of squatting and riot to mutual gardening and collaborative place-shaping, to make their way, tentatively, into the top right corner of Bandura's table.

How do the people of these urban neighbourhoods work together and rebuild their common resource pool of efficacy that will generate change? Collective efficacy is "not simply the sum of the efficacy beliefs of individuals. Rather it is an emergent group-level attribute" (Bandura 1997: 7). It is built through the hard slog of cooperation, which Richard Sennett describes as a craft requiring dialogic skills and "an earned experience rather than just thoughtless sharing" (Sennett 2012: 13). Following Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum (1993), my case studies show that "people's capacities for cooperation are far greater and more complex than institutions allow them to be" (Sennett 2012: 29).

Aristotle introduced the creative role of urban diversity: "a city is composed of different kinds of men; similar people cannot bring a city into existence" (Aristotle 1968: 310). The "located politics of difference" (Fincher and Jacobs 1998: 1-2) and the dilemmas of "co-existing in cities of difference" (Sandercock 2000: 13) are a sustained feature of urban spaces. Lees' (2004) *Emancipatory City* collection includes critiques that point to the domestication of difference in the city through regulation, othering and the ultimate hoarding of control by local and central government.

In the urban context as described by these scholars, the collective self-renovator will not comprise people who are all the same and these differences will not always have been 'domesticated'. In collaborating across difference, Callard and Fitzgerald (2015) make the case against easy exhortations to mutuality and reciprocity in collaborative relations (in their case within interdisciplinary research projects but the thinking can be applied to working collaboratively at neighbourhood level). Moreover, they assert it is not enough to identify and work to overcome the power relations that cloud equal exchange. They refer to Haraway's (2010) work on interspecies relatedness in which she commits to 'staying with the trouble' – that is, as Callard and Fitzgerald describe it, "continuing to work on and in a world that, in all its inter-species relatedness, is quite inseparable from complex intertwinements of killing, and breeding, and companioning, and nurturing…" (2015: 109). Neither Callard and Fitzgerald's collaborators nor the people working together to renovate their neighbourhoods are of mixed species, nor have they yet started killing each other, but the choice "not to seek mythical platforms for equal exchange, but to keep learning different ways of being unsettled together" (ibid: 109) is of great importance. We need to 'stay with the trouble' and 'make kin' (Haraway 2016). When Steve Wyler[38] visited Ore Valley, we spoke of the central role of relationships in this work: "it's everything, but it's also very hard on everyone" [170225 Steve]. Drawing on international experience, White (1996: 155) comments that: "the absence of conflict in many supposedly 'participatory' programmes is something that should raise our suspicion. Change hurts".

Indeed it does! In the face of all kinds of conflicts and failings, only some of which can be admitted here, we keep learning different ways of being unsettled together, staying with the trouble, being patient towards all that is unsolved, loving the questions themselves, rising to the challenges.

[38] My former boss as CEO of the Development Trusts Association and later Locality, a writer and historian specialising in community assets and enterprise

7.6 Emotion – how does it feel?

With Bondi, I see emotion less as the object of study and more as a "relational, connective medium" in which all our work is "necessarily immersed" (2005: 433). The 'emotional turn' in geography mirrors wider trends which have seen emotions move towards the centre of public life, social movements, commercial activity and consumption (Goodwin Jasper and Polletta 2000; Bennett 2004, 2009). Bondi traces its connections with humanistic, feminist and non-representational geographies (2005: 434-5). Humanistic geographers prioritise how people feel and experience places and spaces, focusing on human meanings, perceptions and values – the 'lifeworld' of subjects (Fairclough 1992; Bakardjieva 2009; Conn 2011). This "offers resources for rethinking the notion of selves discretely bounded from their perceptual environments" (Bondi 2005: 435) but can be problematic if it assumes people to be self-contained agents (consumer-citizens). Feminist geography has helped to deconstruct the binaries of rational/emotional and self/other, to "undo the mapping of emotion onto and into women's bodies" and show how "emotions permeate social and physical environments, as well as the subjective experience of individuals" (ibid: 436). Refusing to locate and study emotions in 'others' detached from the researcher and resisting the objectification of emotions, Bondi pleads "for enlivened geographies capable of engaging with the myriad of transient and inarticulable practices that constitute everyday lives in ways that exceed representation" (ibid: 437). This focuses less on emotion (specific nameable states like joy, shame, fear, pride etc), and more on affect, that which is pre- or extra-discursive, "a different kind of intelligence about the world" (Thrift 2004: 60). The personal, articulated accounts of emotion within the case study areas can be understood as resources to access the emotional geography of SRN.

One of the cornerstones of 'co-active coaching', which I have used with clients since 2012, is to assume that the client is *creative, resourceful,* and *whole*. "People are capable: capable of finding answers; capable of choosing; capable of taking action; capable of recovering when things don't go as planned; and, especially, capable of learning. This…is more than a belief – it is a stand we take" (Kimsey-House et al 2011: 3). So people may be "distorted as a result of inhabiting damaging environments"

(Bondi 2005: 439) but they remain whole and (at least potentially) capable. Through Jericho Road Solutions I have offered 'neighbourhood coaching' which combines this belief in people's capability with an understanding of how their mutuality makes them both vulnerable and powerful (Velicu and Garcia-Lopez 2018) in the neighbourhood context.

How does it feel to 'do' SRN? It's exciting, fun, scary, and hard work. It is inherently emotional labour, partly because of the 'goal ambiguity' (Davis and Stazyk 2021). Comparing his experience of labour union officials focused on definite demands, with community organising, Alinsky said the latter was "a different animal, it is not housebroken. There are no fixed chronological points or definite issues. The demands are always changing; the situation is fluid and ever-shifting; and many of the goals are not in concrete terms of dollars and hours" (Alinsky 1971: 66). Community organising taps into "the desire lines" of love, fear, hope, anger, pride and joy (Steele 2012; Wyler 2018), to fuel the 'self-interested' passion which ignites the impulse to act. Each of us involved in SRN has different motivations – the common denominator is how visceral they are. This work/this life gets under your skin, into your veins, rewires your brain, and keeps your heart beating. It easily becomes all-encompassing, and that is both a strength and a weakness as I will explore below.

At the same time, this is a collective endeavour; it cannot possibly be done alone so the levels of co-dependency are very high – within the SRN teams themselves, with the wider (engaged and disengaged) place-based communities of interest ,and with the ever-shifting fog of resource-controllers (funders etc). This intense relationality heightens the emotional impact of the work on those involved, as we will see below. "Who we are is in the 'doing' but any doing usually implies some forms of relation and a vulnerability we can never fully avoid" (Velicu and Garcia-Lopez 2018: 3).

And, I want to stress above all, this is a risky business and that living with uncertainty is an affective experience. In my experience, it is a characteristic of area regeneration and development, conventional or otherwise, that no-one really knows what is going to happen until it does. It will take forever, we will stumble, we will make mistakes, we

will learn. Indeed, through the focus on 'phased organic development', we make a virtue of incompleteness (Durose and Lowndes 2021). In this context, all we can do is proceed in good faith, which is why underpinning values are so important, as I have been arguing for more than 20 years! (Steele 2000, 2009, 2012, 2015, 2018, 2020).

My chapter in *Remoralizing Britain* (Steele 2009) explored the mixed and contesting goals and values of the regeneration industry ("social justice, social control or the pursuit of happiness"), arguing that given the unnerving unpredictability of interventions, regeneration rests heavily on two pillars – good faith (integrity) and vigilant learning (open-mindedness). The frustration for regeneration is that "only some of the players have a strong focus on the benefits for the neighbourhood. People want to 'make a difference' but that phrase can hide a multitude of vague and mutually exclusive intentions" (Steele 2009: 107).

To fulfil the potential of our long engagement in White Rock and make a start on "bringing properties into community ownership and capping the rents forever" [EMP: HoH PPT 2015], we needed to take significant risks and make decisions quickly, working out how to do things we had never done before (Jeffrey and Dyson 2021). Both in the purchase of a run-down office block in 2014 and then in the mortgaging of its successful transformation to fund the purchase of a derelict print factory in 2019, we took bold action (Blake, Robinson and Smerdon 2006). In between we bought some caves and a tumble-down stable!

While there have been some clear moments of decisive risk-taking (2014 Rock House, 2018 Observer Building), it should also be remembered that, once taken, these risks are sustained until they either happen and turn into issues, or become obsolete. "Because everything depends on everything else it's easy to wobble" [140509 Eleanor]. This conjures Laloux's (2014) metaphor of riding a bicycle – you don't write a business plan before you ride; you get on the bike and set off, continually adjusting your stance and behaviour in the light of new information but always with the goal of staying upright. This could be extended to imagine the labour of self-renovation as pushing the bike uphill, "especially hard work if you don't even know whether or not

you're going to be able to buy the building at the end of it" [200827 Reflection; see also Durose and Richardson 2009: 1774].

In 2008 I sat in a room with powerful people from Hastings Borough Council and the Heritage Lottery Fund. They talked about risk; neither wanted to commit until the other did. I saw that by abdicating their responsibility they were loading the risk onto local people who couldn't ignore the dead pier [EMP: Pier Campaign PPT 2006-14]. All the funding agreements we are asked to sign 'send the risk down', using a variety of mechanisms and it grows increasingly onerous on the way down [EMP: CHART 2020].

These inherited risks are tiresome burdens from the (inefficient, clogged up, power-saturated) filtration system that brings money to the ground. Rather it's the entrepreneurial risk that inspires me. My favourite definition of an entrepreneur is *someone who sets out to do something without controlling the necessary resources*. I have spent 30 years living that dream, and the last decade helping other people to find their way through the maze. Although my experience of risk has grown and my appetite stabilised, this statement from 2009 still summarises my position.

> Regeneration requires risk, and has become obsessed by managing it out, yet most regenerators are still unclear on how to assess risk, or even how to feel about it. I believe we have to treat change as a development opportunity and failure as a development cost – if you learn from it then it is the price of the next success. (Steele 2009: 119)

My favourite moments are when something has been challenging, especially if it felt frustratingly unnecessary, but out of it comes a different solution that turns out to be for the best. As an example, struggling to get certainty on whether to progress with a large new loan at 7% interest to purchase Eagle House, we came up with another option – a two-year development lease with an option to purchase. At a time of major uncertainty (Covid, Brexit and our byzantine funding structures), this postponed the risk and burden of purchase while giving us freedom to occupy and develop the space. This kind of 'innovation' (my shorthand for flexibility in the face of risk, uncertainty and challenge) often emerges because the apparent way forward is blocked.

7.6.1 Hard Labour, Stress & Fragility

> "There is a politics to exhaustion. Feeling depleted can be a measure of just what we are up against" (Ahmed 2013)

Emotionally, I am interested in how much of yourself you have to 'put out' in order to harness those necessary resources: the emotional labour, the gruelling hours, the spreadsheets, the pointless reporting, the data-mugging and the intensively-mediated (commodified) 'sharing' of best practice. The relentless years and years. Eventually they count for something, but by then you're tired and wanting to step back and let younger people take over. A reminder that emotions do not flit about in the ether but reside in relations between temporo-spatially-situated individuals acting within and against the constraints inherent in their time-space moment.

> "I'm too tired to be doing all of this. I need 12 months out. I'll go back to it and I'll keep my finger in with the Winter Garden but I can't be running this anymore" [171127 Hazel].

> "How emotionally hard this is, just relentless, stress and pressures, relentlessly emotional as well, and risky. In WR, I put my own money in but also reputation. My reputation is my livelihood, so it's quite a big deal. And it is really scary, a lot of the time" [210514 Fieldnote].

While Hazel and Eleanor both had their lives "turned upside down… absolutely shaped by being active here", and both recognise the 'delight' of their achievements, and especially the Winter Garden, they also identified a litany of perceived negative impacts on them personally, especially about how the work 'steals time' away from relationships.

> "Just feels like very hard choices. Friends have always been my mainstay, now I invest less in them. That feels the pits… I'm a spent force – it's boring. I don't like fundraising, going over budgets, it's just that if you get that work done then it [the SRN] becomes possible. To be making choices between grant applications and family who are not in a good state… My mum's friend is 92. I haven't been able to visit her or look after her, because I want to finish a grant application. I thought I was going to have a heart attack. I had this elderly woman and a grant application. This could mean the difference of x thousand pounds. Very odd to be in it at this time of life. Working against the grain of what I would naturally want to do. Tedious, but necessary" [181212 Eleanor].

There have always been very high levels of stress in the work of SRN, arising from its characteristic combination of ambition, scale, speed and endemic uncertainty. Each of the different aspects that SRN brings together (property development, community organising, harnessing resources, future-thinking) has its own kind of stress-load.

In summer 2018 this came to crisis for me personally with the hard work and ultimate failure of the campaign to save the pier in community ownership. Around the same time, at a community business gathering in Liverpool a post-it note about 'looking after the people better' had attracted a lot of votes. We began to talk much more about fragility. In my usual fashion I moved almost immediately into solution-mode: my way of telling the story was in the form of a proposal for a Solidarity Fund that could help to build up 'anti-fragility' and support "all the other fragile heroes, now and in the future" [EMP: 180824 PTC proposal].

Figure 7.6: Text from proposal to Power to Change for a Solidarity Fund, 24/8/18

> The people who lead and run community businesses are heroes. They are also fragile. They suffer all the worries of new and marginal businesses, plus the huge and increasing stress of rising social welfare demands, fractured communities, service cuts, and a punitive social security system. On top of that they are very often engaged in various degrees of local political conflict, bureaucratic and decision-making processes that they cannot control. They do all this out in the open, transparent, visible, engaging, accountable. And, as leaders, they must try always to be optimistic, ambitious for change and ready to take opportunities to make a difference. That sounds like a lot of pressure – it is.
>
> I've kept on carrying on for a quarter of a century (first community business: Deptford Forum Publishing 1992). But this year I nearly broke. The only thing that kept me going was a decision I made some time in May that when it was over I would take a 3-month 'sabbatical'. Do something different, look after myself, clean the house, read for my PhD. It didn't work out because I couldn't fund it. For it to work I needed to make my heaven-sent Executive Assistant full time but I couldn't pay for that if I wasn't earning. So I chose her and shrank my expectations just to August. Once it started I began talking about myself as 'in recovery'. People have been lovely about it and tried to help but it's like we're pretending. I've been fitting in 'protected' days wherever I can and relying more on my EA. Nothing really stops though – the Observer Building goes on the market and I go back on full steam.
>
> This squeezed-in sabbatical will probably be enough to stop me having to pull over because I'm sobbing too much to drive, which was how July ended. Maybe I have built up a little store of anti-fragility and reduced the clutter on my desk if not in my head.

Reading through the transcripts of my interviews with Hazel across the years, over and over there is the sense of the suffering that 'goes with the territory'. She expressed it outright in almost every interview, from November 2015 when she half-joked about

suicide in response to the frustrations of her social work in London[39], via January 2017:

> "I'm taking more and more on. And I can't, you know, I don't want to do it, it's too much for me, because I've got a stressful life anyway and I do a hell of a lot without the chairperson's responsibilities. And you know me, I would take it seriously and end up having a nervous breakdown because I've got enough in my life" [170126].

And later that year: "I'm really at breaking point. I really am. It's the second time in my life I've felt this straightened" [170915].

Our call in January 2021, mid-Covid and following her sister's death, began "Life's shit. A total mess. Ron's good, as healthy as a dying man is going to be…" [210114]. Hazel had been locked down in London but still trying to manage getting the Winter Garden ready for renting.

> "I'm so pissed off with everyone. They knew I wanted to leave. When they ask why, I say "I'm older, my husband is dying, I've done 30 years. I'll continue to love you and support you, but I don't want to be an active member of the board. I want to be an active member of the community. I want to enjoy what I've done, living in the street I helped to save and visiting the Winter Garden that I helped to build. I'm really tired and really homesick" [210114].

When we spoke in July 2021 she had had shingles three times in 12 months.

> "I'm still on the board. I don't want to be. I'm still doing talks and podcasts and things but would prefer someone else took it on. I saw it all the way through. It's been a long time. But I'm tired of it. I'm tired because life's tiring. We've had a massive impact. I don't think there's a CLT in the country that hasn't heard of us. But I don't have the energy… it's ebbing away" [Hazel 210706].

There is no doubt that a lot of the work of the Granby CLT fell as a significant extra burden on a woman who already had her hands full, someone who had already spent a life looking after others and was continuing to collect 'three-legged dogs' at an

[39] "But sometimes it's just pretty miserable and I think, I want an exit strategy when I get to a certain age. *And what is that, what is your strategy?* Well, it would have to be an overdose. I mean I used to think I'd just sit out in the snow, but here, I'm overlooked now 'cause these houses were empty for ages and now I'm overlooked by those out there. *So you can't sit out in the snow?* These walls are crying out for a huge mural. They really are" [151126].

alarming rate.[40] That it also bore down on Eleanor and Theresa reinforces the point that SRN is (perhaps impossibly) hard labour. Yet all of those interviews with Hazel contained at least as much positive, forward-thinking excitement as they did complaining. As she approached retirement day she was still thinking big in her usual focused way, planning to future proof her house, start growing food in the street and see the market take over Granby Street several times a week. But she also said "If it stops where it has done I'm not that arsed. I just can't drive forward any more building renovations. It's too hard, too time-consuming, too frightening" [Hazel 210706].

One of the resilience features of the White Rock ecosystem is that we are able to step in for each other – not just with emotional support but 'stepping in behind' when someone needs a break, taking over some of their workload when they're having a tough time, or indeed picking up the pieces if they leave. It's possible to do this within the ecosystem because we know each other's work, more than you usually would with separate organisations. But this has its own problems as work 'bleeds' across boundaries, overloading some people, causing uncertainty for most, and sometimes falling between the cracks and leading to 'failure demand' in future.

The mental health of the SRN selves in White Rock – the staff, trustees and associates who are responsible for 'delivering' the Commons – has come to the fore over the past few years, first slowly and then, since Covid, in a wave of negative experiences that threatened to overwhelm.

It would not be right to go into detail here but my conclusions would be:

- Each person is a unique combination of stories, circumstances and resilience
- In a team with high internal reliance, mental health issues are 'infectious'
- The work we do is inherently: stressful, uncertain, fast-paced, urgent, important… and rewarding

[40] "See Ron occasionally gets fed up because he just says to me, 'Every three legged fucking dog you'll pick up'. And I just think every three legged dog is probably going to do as well as anyone else. Given half a chance." [170806 Hazel]

- Every member of the team is under pressure; they show it differently.
- The impacts of the pandemic and in/out lockdowns are immense, immanent and not-yet-known
- This is not just happening to us. There are widespread capacity failures, skills shortages and high levels of sickness
- We can (always) improve how we work, how we look after each other, and how we respond when things go wrong.

It is difficult to find the right language. I keep trying different versions: *not well, melt down, wobbles, not right, suffering, overloaded, stressed, falling to bits, sobbing, withdrawing, broken, un-able right now*. In summer 2021, trustees across the ecosystem commissioned an independent anonymous survey of staff, including those who had recently left.

> "The survey tells us that the staff teams believe in the values of the organisation and that they understand how their work supports the mission and strategy of the Commons. They feel valued by the organisation and supported by their colleagues." This was felt to demonstrate successful *plant* and *nurture*. "However, they often feel overwhelmed by the volume of work and a feeling that there are too few staff to achieve the objectives. They do not feel there is enough HR support available and they would like more training and clearer guidance around workload management, performance management and how the risk register is used." This was seen as indicating "need for a greater focus on *grow* (through performance management/training etc), *reap* (greater celebration of organisation and staff achievements) and more opportunities for *rest* to prevent staff feeling overwhelmed or burnt out" [EMP: 210831 HVA presentation].

There has been significant change since the survey, including improved terms and conditions, increased awareness of wellbeing, a team trip to Plymouth, the creation of a Team Base to bring everyone together, and the introduction of additional capacity at all levels (see figure 7.11 below). These improvements should help but also "there is work to be done to loosen the structure of feeling that cannot live with uncertainty" (Gibson-Graham 2006: 4). SRN leaders need to be clear in our recruitment that coping with uncertainty and enjoying challenge is an 'essential' personal characteristic.

> "It's an attitude to taking risks, making mistakes and acceptance of not knowing how to do it best. It's a support structure, combined energy, skills and vision. If the key ingredients exist (motivation, property, money) the rest can be learnt in a two steps forward one step back method. We need people who are willing to do things differently, to not understand everything but know how to ask the right questions, to not get overwhelmed or intimidated, to fire off uncertainty and unknowns but diligently respond to difficulties with their unique skills. This doesn't suit everyone, and those that require more traditional working practice tend to struggle" [Emily 210713].

While welcoming the recognition of fragility, and without abjuring the employer's responsibilities in this, I promote an 'ethic of self- and mutual-care' (Dufty-Jones and Gibson 2021 passim). Such an ethics of care can provide a foundation built on "social relationships of mutuality and trust (rather than dependence)" (Lawson 2007:3) and this focus "brings to light not only the resilience of care but also the transformative potential of care ethics in contexts undergoing reform" (Power and Bergan 2019: 433).

Not all of the stress of SRN relates to workload. The emotion attached to the neighbourhood itself – my fierce will to protect it, my fear of it slipping away – is a kind of displacement pressure (Marcuse 1985; Slater 2009). There could be lots of reasons for these emotions: some personal to me; some relating to my ever-shifting position, status and popularity locally; some to do with the stage we're at and the resources we have/don't have available. But this emotion is also a direct response to the pressures of gentrification. I am privileged to be securely housed and not to be excluded by the price of a coffee or a pint, but I cannot protect myself from the change that it symbolises. When the tide turns there are different winners. I have a strong foreboding sense of dispossession from the neighbourhood – even as we 'take possession' of more and more buildings.

7.6.2 Conflicts and failures

The relationality of SRN means that there will inevitably be conflict, and its ambition means sometimes there will be failures. These load additional stress onto people already working at or beyond capacity.

The conflict with White Rock Trust (2015-17) is described in Appendix C2. Here I want to capture something of how it felt. The sense of distrust in the air began as something surprising and hurtful but over time congealed into a resigned hostility. There was an underlying fear of ending up in court when we needed to focus on the development of Rock House. It was an existential conflict – everything we had done or might do in the future was at risk. And it felt like both a personal attack and a personal failure.

The nastiness that can become a feature of such conflicts arose again after the 2018 pier experience when a local businessman started trolling me on facebook, by email and in person because he felt I should make a 'statement' about the polarisation of the town in the wake of the pier's transfer of ownership. He (and unnamed others) wrote the suggested 5-page statement in my name (spelt wrong) and included the line "pressure groups like Friends of Hastings Pier… are now effectively hate organisations, and represent unwarranted harassment and bullying of the legitimate owner" [EMP: OS emails 2019]. He gave me until 6pm to sign this statement and deliver it to the Two Bulls Steakhouse! This harassment went on Jan/Feb 2019 and then reappeared some months later with a threat to publish an 'alternative story', before abruptly stopping.

Other conflicts are more internal. During the research period a breakdown of relations over a period of time between the chair and the executive director and ultimately the wider team, was overlaid on a separate fault-line between the chair and myself over our perspectives on the Commons, the ecosystem and the best response to managing multiple interests. It is worth recognising the diverse potential for derailing conflict that threatens SRN. In sucking up energy, conflict both obscures what else might need tackling and causes delays that can have long-term impacts.

While all these conflicts revolve around personalities there are sometimes deeper identity/values-based causes or at least readings based on class, gender and/or race. That I was able to see these in Granby, but far less in White Rock, no doubt reflects both their differences and my positionality. There was a tension between 'the women of Granby' and those 'professionals' who "come in when they're at a low ebb career-wise… they've contributed a lot. But then there's a point at which the politics of it

fades into the background and the professionalism of their newly-revitalised career comes to the fore. The nature of their involvement changes. I think it's about the difference between politics and money" [181212 Eleanor]. This overlapped with Eleanor and Hazel's awareness of gender: "Women overwhelmingly have been responsible for it. Some men have contributed [she lists five]. The only point at which guys will come into it is when they want to be the mouth of the organisation or they want big jobs in it, and then they'll appear" [ibid]. This 'mouth of the organisation' metaphor attests to the importance of control of the story. While Hazel raised concerns about the 'all-white' photos of Granby market, Eleanor described: "Tours, presentations, comfy-fying of history, in a way that was definitely not good. Subtle double whammy. He did help an awful lot, that's definite. Never said a thing negative ever. But he also framed everything in a particular way and then felt free to be the spokesperson for the CLT and these four streets in a way that was just ridiculous, that he should be speaking like that" [ibid].

Sometimes there are dead ends. In Hastings, objectively we wasted three years and lots of 'blood, sweat and tears' in Ore Valley, which could have been focused in White Rock. If the beautiful, ambitious vision for the former power station site had been allowed to progress it would have been well worth every ounce of energy. I always say that 'failure is the development cost of your next success' but sustaining that belief is a hard emotional challenge. Due to disagreements about the approach to take, we never properly, collectively grieved the loss of the site and of the dream. While to me community organising has a welcome focus on winning, nevertheless the facing of challenges and the losing of battles also play important roles in the forging of community strength. Stories of battles lost in the past (the America Ground, the Granby clearances) can harness and strengthen the contemporary will to succeed. When we lose our own battles (Ore Valley, Ducie Street) it has a direct, often embodied impact on the SRN selves, leading to brittleness, disillusion, anger, ill health. The question in the wake of each loss is how to get over it and how to systematise and integrate the learning.

While risky projects are inevitably vulnerable to failure, the #fail that bothers me most is poor communication. We are proud of the 15 years of sustained engagement in White Rock (Hastings Commons 2021) but working this fast, at this level of ambition, and with such scrabbled resources, some things will slide. In our case it is usually communications – both external and internal.

Our relationships with neighbours are multiple and mostly positive but there are also unresolved tensions which sometimes spill out into vexed exchanges. It is sad but interesting to see how new alliances of some local businesses position us as powerful developers in contrast to their 'community' [EMP 210609 MC email]. This is a challenge I was alerted to years ago by the chief executive of the Hastings Pier Charity who said "they all love you now but wait till you have the money and the pier and you're starting to get on with it…" Sometimes these complaints feel like they are fishing for compensation, or being vindictive (phoning the contractor in the middle of the night to say that the scaffolding has come loose when it hasn't). Mostly though I think we should take responsibility for how our communications land and welcome the challenges even if they come from misunderstandings. Since the main focus of our work is the rescue of difficult buildings we will inevitably cause disruption to our neighbours but this 'trade' of ours gets mixed up with the broader equation of property-owning with power. I will return to this in Chapter 9 where I consider the dangers and dilemmas of SRN.

Internally, our communications are both excellent and inadequate! On one hand, despite many changes of personnel there is strong internal bonding and lots of opportunities for collaborative working. On the other, the complexity, breadth and speed of change in our work makes it practically impossible for the whole team to be up to date at any given moment.

Another frequent cause of failure, or at least of 'failure demand' (Vanguard 2021), is the loss of attention to detail in the overloaded work environment. For example, despite a great deal of liaison with the local college to develop a set of detailed training requirements, these were not included by the QS in the tender pack for the

Observer Building and this error was not revealed until much later. The chosen contractor was unable to fulfil these requirements so the benefits would be lost to local people, it could impact on future funding, and a key team member had to have an 'excruciating' conversation with the college.

Emotional responses to these pressures are socially constructed, that is they are "experienced, understood and named via social and cultural processes" (Lupton 1998: 15). Yet they are felt in the body – even more so in the midst of pandemics not only of coronavirus but of wider mental and physical ill-health. Two members of the White Rock team have suffered with Long Covid, while several others have left for health reasons. As Lupton argued, the body itself is not a 'natural' product (ibid: 32), experiences of embodiment are always constructed through and mediated by sociocultural processes and, citing Freund (1990: 458), emotion is a 'mode of being' or a relationship between embodied selfhood, thought and existence. This social constructionist approach appeals – in the same way Bandura's (1997) view of the links between self-efficacy and performance appeals – not because it somehow lets individuals off the hook but precisely because it allows for both multiplicity and change. If the ways we describe how we feel has real impact on how we feel, if our efficacy beliefs at least partly determine the effectiveness of our performance, then we can (choose to) do this differently and better.

> "Human beings do not perceive things whole; we are not gods but wounded creatures, cracked lenses, capable only of fractured perceptions. Partial beings, in all the senses of the phrase. Meaning is a shaky edifice we build out of scraps, dogmas, childhood injuries, newspaper articles, chance remarks, old films, small victories, people hated, people loved; perhaps it is because our sense of what is the case is constructed from such inadequate materials that we defend it so fiercely, even to the death" (Salman Rushdie 1982).

As 'wounded creatures', sharing ideas that bind us together is vital, finding solidarity in fragility. Urban life and what we make of it is both exciting and precarious. I like Merrifield's question: "how can we celebrate fission in our cities while becoming solid citizens?" (1996: 219). I would re-pose it: "how can we darn the fabric together and laugh?" Take care, take joy, take action.

7.6.3 Pride, joy, love, survival

The inspirational story of Marinaleda in southern Spain is epitomised in the commitment of its long-time mayor Sanchez Gordillo to 'the human right to joy' (Hancox 2014: 154) and, as Alinsky said, "if your people are not having a ball there's something wrong with the tactic" (1989: 128).

The day-to-day life of the Hastings Commons features both a shifting web of ongoing conflicts and a stubborn will to tackle, live through and get over them. Looking back across the eight years since the purchase of Rock House, these troubles loom large and several and appeared to have the potential to derail the core idea – that local people can choose to collectively renovate their neighbourhoods. Yet they are a small proportion of the moments. They are the storms, sharks and pirates we encountered on the journey. We need to remember the joy of the process and be proud of our contribution.

> "It's a long way between getting in the pool and completing the gala: so you need an ice cream at the end of the first width" (Jim Field, veteran community oraniser, personal conversation Chicago Nov 2011)

Sometimes the love we feel is for a specific place. In February 2017 I published a blog on Spinning Plates called "I am losing my heart to Ore Valley":

> "The land seduces people – everyone who comes falls for it, at least until they get really cold! There is an open feeling about the site that quietly welcomes and absorbs newcomers on the same level as anyone else. There's enough room, it seems to be saying… Of course we fight – there are stand-offs and smears and squabbles. This is the stuff of relationships and it's usually due to a strong sense of ownership. If someone new tries to take over it's not long before they are told straight that this is a collective effort. Everyone's welcome and not everyone is the same. But for now, and by rights forever, the land is ours… and I'm lovin' it!" (Steele 2017).

I have a phrase I use – 'the love of place is the glue that binds strangers'. If I think of it and close my eyes, I am in the sunshine at the Power Station in Ore Valley with other people – there's Darren and Dan and Sam and Arran and Tania and Rosanna and Anton and Ronan and more, and here are the kids including the teenage girl working the saw

who comes up on my screensaver sometimes, and here are the dogs growling and playing, and everyone brings their demons but we all love the place…

Figure 7.7: Ore Valley power station site 2016-2019

One of the critical features of SRN is that it's so real. A trip to the Granby market or a tour round the Hastings Commons are both multi-sensory experiences – visual, aural, olfactory and tangible. They leave a taste in the mouth that I cannot recreate here. Interestingly, as Gregson found with her car boot sales research, that taste is different when you are 'participating in its production' (Gregson and Rose 2014: 435) rather than watching from the sidelines. A recipe will always taste different for the chef.

Both Hazel and I generally enjoy being 'leaders in the field of neighbourhood development' – we get to listen, talk and (sometimes) be heard about the things we care about, both locally and within the wider sector. Personally, I love being proactive in actually fixing dereliction, institutionalising affordability, growing the common-ground resources and encouraging commoning behaviours. But it's a vulnerable position. Some of the antagonisms I have faced are surely rooted in negative responses to my personality, character and approach. Friends and colleagues over the years have suggested that the sometimes hostile or difficult responses of people in power come from jealousy, paranoia, sexism. There is often an implied or overt accusation of being 'in it for the money', which makes me laugh but raises important questions. People find it hard to imagine that someone would invest as much as I do and not be 'on the make'. Indeed, I try to demonstrate that you don't have to be a saint to make choices that help the world, that the millions of us who have had the fortune of unearned equity could put some of it back into society. I see it *both* as an exemplary repayment of the social increment *and* as a fun, risky but potentially profitable way of investing 'surplus' profit and time.

Collectively we survive the hardships of this work through love, supporting each other both locally and everywhere that people are trying to make positive neighbourhood change. My resilience is rooted in support from my partner, friends, colleagues and the many local people who take the trouble to tell me I'm doing something worthwhile. When John Brunton posted on the Rock House loomio platform [EMP: 210615] explaining our severe staff shortages and workload, he arrived at his desk next day to a cake, a big Thank You card and 24 texts from tenants offering to help, reminding me of their positive responses to previous challenges from conflict to floods.

During the WRT conflict, both we collectively and I personally received astonishing support from Bob Thust, including preparing a huge file of all the evidence we would need if it did go to court. We didn't know each other well then but when he told me "I'm going to help you with this. It's going to be all right" [161111 WRT emails] I felt cocooned and my fear abated. Years later when the troll was sending 'statements' for me to sign, I was at a conference in Birmingham and able to draw on enormous support and even impromptu legal support from co-participants.

My wider network of grassroots community businesses across the country has provided additional support throughout this long journey. More recently, relationships have deepened among an emerging set of grassroots commons-style approaches including Nudge Community Builders in Plymouth and the Onion Collective in Watchet, North Somerset. This kind of (zoom-enabled) rhizomatic solidarity comes with a sense of the greater 'we' – here, there and everywhere, now and in the future. I was able to share empathy and some lessons from my troll experience to help others grapple with something similar [EMP 201211 Attachment Economics zoom].

Long-term funders are also key to survivability. The supportive 'more-than-a-funder' role played by Power to Change (see Appendix C2) was critical to the success and survival of Rock House and therefore of the SRN as a whole. Other funders[41] have also been stalwarts whose 'moral support' is as important as their money as we try to wormhole a way through the mud of the dominant models.

7.7 Attitudes for SRN – what does it take?

I originally (2012) hypothesised key roles for "the three grassroots virtues of thrift, impatience and sociability" that were being punished by traditional regeneration. Having put these ideas under empirical scrutiny, I have come to see each of them is a kind of attitude – to resources, to time, and to others – that underpins SRN.

[41] Particularly Big Issue Invest, Ecology Building Society and the Architectural Heritage Fund

In Granby and White Rock my informants expressed their strongly-felt need for autonomy and respect, and an itchy frustration with the forces that stand in the way. Despite their award-winning successes, they had meagre hope that the attitudes of decision-makers will change. Antagonism towards authority is integrated into their character. Their actions are statements of agency – 'we can do this'. This small phrase captures the key coordinates of SRN.

Figure 7.8: "WE CAN DO THIS!"

WE CAN	DO	THIS
Collective self	DIY renovating	Transform neighbourhoods
Sociability/agency	Impatience	Thrift-as-thriving
SUBJECT	VERB	OBJECT

7.7.1 Sociability – an attitude to others

> "We cannot 'become'… without others. And it is space that provides the necessary condition for that possibility" (Massey 2005: 56).

The SRN experiences of Granby and White Rock are deeply rooted in spatial sociability. My timesheet records a total of 25,000 hours from 17/5/13 to 17/11/21. A detailed review of this timesheet shows that such 'local sociability work' adds up to between 4,000 and 6,000 hours since 2015. And I was, by definition, not alone in any of those hours. There is, surely, something to be understood in this getting together, liming, chewing the fat, sitting on the porch, hanging out? (Thust, Potts and Steele 2019). This is the heart of the process of *being-in-common* and *becoming* (Garcia-Lopez, Lang and Singh 2021). The politics of possibility requires an "open and hospitable orientation... [drawing] on the pleasures of friendliness, trust, conviviality, and companionable connection" (Gibson-Graham 2006: 6). The literature on prefigurative politics highlights the importance of prefigurative sociality which often begins with trialling different ways of sharing around possessions, food and leisure (Jeffrey and Dyson 2021: 649).

There is a process of collectivising and political actualisation through sociability (Yates 2015: 7). The developments of the past six years in both White Rock and Granby have been punctuated with typical or important events (eg America Ground Pow Wow, Rock House parties and foyer hang-outs, Cairns St meetings in the street, Observer Building neighbours meetings, Granby market, and many, many tours of the Hastings Commons). In all these examples showcasing to others builds a strong sense of 'we' within the ecosystem.

But it's not all about the parties! The 'attitude to others' in the term 'sociability' goes beyond socialising to include collaborative behaviours, distributed leadership and an understanding of differential commoning (Noterman 2016; Bolllier and Helfrich 2019). All three are addressed by Erika talking about clearing out 48 Cairns Street.

> "It was a pigsty. And it was our first house and you kind of thought, this doesn't feel right. We're going to be doing houses, this has to feel okay… Eleanor said this to me, I was like, "I'm wasting my time on this", she said, "No I think it's really important you as a chair is doing it 'cause it's you taking action, not saying 'Oh I'm going to find somebody to take action'. I think really good leaders… often will act and are very good at the very top and very bottom of things" [151126 Erika].

In Granby, 'who does what, and why don't they do more' was a recurring theme [171024 Hazel and Eleanor]. Any criticism of each other tended to be qualified with how much work someone puts in: "She has a clipboard with who's where but she doesn't give it out to people, so that means she has to run around and instruct. She doesn't trust people to do things… They are a pain in the neck, but part of me thinks, well, they really, really slog. Month in, month out, yearly… So I think, well slog goes a long way, frankly" [171024 Eleanor]. The flip-side of this is the frustration with people who are failing to pull their weight: "The board are like a bunch of children waiting for their next mummy. They have had mummy Erika, mummy Hazel, mummy Eleanor, then mummy Hazel again" [210114 Hazel].

Ronnie's long quote in figure 7.9 beautifully captures the emotional bonds and sense of belonging (Blokland 2003) that SRN can engender, while Erika's shows how it is possible to 'create space' for collaboration even if those bonds are weak.

Figure 7.9: Two takes on bonds and belonging

❝Thrift, yeah, 'cause if you've got no money, what shall we do? You can never not find a few cheap plants or seeds or pots of paint. You've got a kitchen table, you've got those old CDs you never listen to and those books you don't want any more. So bring them out, put them on the table opposite the newly painted houses and... this nearly makes me cry... you're on your way. When I used to come and see the people do it, I just thought *[crying]* I just felt the most real love. Just... how do people put up with what they put with for that long? And respond that gently? I couldn't have done it.

"For all that I was eventually given one of these, going-around-being-nice-to-people jobs. If it had happened to me, I'd have had a list of people I wanted to slaughter. I'd have known their names, I'd have known where their offices were and if necessary I'd have known where they lived.

"What is love? Love is the trusting each other even when you don't quite know who's standing where to keep things going. Love is the noticing that the safe pair of hands isn't feeling that safe today, that the person who's usually good on detail just doesn't see this one, that the person who usually gets on with anybody has just sworn at everybody in the room, and still holding it all together.

"I think we know each other very well... it's the long, slow being together. The love, the trust, the friendship grew over the years, really from as soon as I stopped standing up at the front of rooms and started sitting round the pub tables out in Cairns Street at the end of street markets. That's when we really started to build...

"There is a love between us, we're just always glad to see each other and there's always... you don't get exasperated when it's absolutely essential to come and talk about name-your-issue on a Sunday night. 'Cause it's real, yeah. For a small number it's just become part of our lives. I never think of it as work. Which is just as well *[laughing]*.❞

[Ronnie 151126]

❝What the CLT had struggled with and what I'm quite good at is, they had a very adversarial approach, because they were a campaign group who had been anti-demolition, lovely pictures of pickets and all that.

"But to actually make something happen, it had to become a very broad umbrella in which people who initially didn't want to talk to each other, could operate under the same umbrella. Eleanor asked if I would chair it for a couple of years just to get that going, to create that 'we're all on the same page'. And I think that's happened.

"There's probably still historical resentments but early days, it was really easy for lots of community people to express their anger at the latest funder through the door, so some of it was about managing that and saying, 'That anger's legitimate, it has to be expressed, but let's create a space in which we can all celebrate together and achieve together and win together and give the credit away'. 'Cause that's how to make it happen.

"So yeah, providing an umbrella in which people can begin to be in the same space and be part of the same project. Even if actually they never are friends or have a relationship, that you can be part of something.

"People use different tricks in this, don't they? I remember the first time somebody from HLF came and said they might give us a grant. We gathered all the different partners, who had never been in the same room together at that point, and we put on a show for the woman who might give us some money. And actually, the woman who might give us some money was not important, what was important was that we all listened to each other.❞

[Erika 151126]

There are many examples of everyday mutuality and reciprocity throughout my evidence: a dozen Rock House tenants turning up within minutes for emergency assistance when one of the flats flooded; the Bottom Up Development team helping one of the team to move house; Hazel's neighbour, very new at the time, handing some delicious food over the little front fence in thanks for some advice earlier in the week. Establishing these kinds of social norms creates a fertile (re)learning ground for more instrumental collaborative behaviours (Sennett 2012: 9).

7.7.2 Impatience – an attitude to time

The value of impatience is in the imperative of momentum which gets things done in the place of intolerable waste. While a space is empty, social and economic public goods are being foregone (Jericho Road Solutions 2015). But the risk is greater than that – bad things happen to spaces that no-one looks after, and the longer they are left the more likely and more destructive those events will be. The Hastings Pier fire of October 2010 was utterly devastating because, after years of neglect, there was no guaranteed safe way onto the decaying historic structure to fight the flames. The costs of building restoration always rise exponentially once water and pigeons are allowed in. We have seen this happen over 35 years of dereliction for the Observer Building and even longer for the sad houses of Granby's fourth street (Ducie).

I indicated in Chapter 2 the value I place on 'sustained impatience' and will return to it in the next chapter as one of the important 'landscapes of time' for the 'doing' of SRN.

> "The thing about impatience is it drives people to act instead of meet or lobby. It's much better to do a small thing and demonstrate change is possible, than wait to do a big thing. The action of sweeping the street, the action of painting the houses. Even if you do nothing else, at least you've done that. So you take an action, particularly an action in a public space" [151126 Erika].

Erika's husband describes Eleanor as an 'essentialist' – "it's essential and it must happen now!" The concept also resonated for Assemble as "just getting on with it, getting in there and talking and hassling and doing things" [160628 Joe, Assemble]. For Ronnie the idea of impatience was associated with the 'rage' that kept him to involved.

> "The concept of 'meanwhile' resonates with the times. Nothing is certain, money is tight, waste is anathema. Communities can deliver change on the ground; they just need the go-ahead…" (Meanwhile Project 2010: 13).

7.2.3 Thrift – an attitude to resources

Thrift is an attitude to resources, a hatred of waste and wasteful behaviours (Hai-liang 2007). It is at the heart of the philosophy of meanwhile, which celebrates a thriftiness of time as well as space and other resources.

Hazel embodies the thrifty use of resources in her personal life, household management, and her approach to the renovation of her beloved Cairns Street. "One look around this house will tell you that I don't buy anything new. I haven't bought any new clothes for 30 years. Even my hoover is secondhand. That was given to me by somebody who has obsessive compulsive disorder. She lent it to me and she wouldn't take it back." Yet she is hostile to thrift as a concept, bound up as it is with class politics. Instead she would "call it poverty" and recognise that "if you have no resources then you use the little you have to the hugest extent" [Hazel 151201]. There is a long tradition of disdain for thrift as imposed frugality. Marx suggested it was capitalism's desire for "the acetic and productive slave" and Wilde said recommending it for the poor was "both grotesque and insulting", the thrift of the subject class always adding wealth to the master class.

Hulme has explored the difference between the early meaning of thrift as 'thriving' and its later meaning as 'frugality', tracing the latter's role as "a consistent undercurrent to capitalism [that] aided its survival" (2019: 8) but arguing that thrift-as-thriving can also be "a genuinely resistant practice… an urge as strong as capitalism" (ibd: 11-12) that "can be used to carve out future alternatives, not simply shore up existing systems" (ibid: 109).

This thrift-as-thriving requires 'collective commodities' and a commitment to keeping them collective (Hulme 2019: 111; EMP: Hastings Library of Things), changing the relationship between people and the objects around them, so that the objects

(including buildings, neighbourhoods) become ''active" (Arvatov 1997: 26) "comrades" (Rodchenko, Stepanova and Noever 1991), "co-workers" (Hulme 2019: 112-3) in the production of new kinds of subjects. These Constructivists hoped for socialist subjects. To survive the Anthropocene we have to find "a new hegemonic form of the thrift ethos" (Yates and Hunter 2011: 19) with new solidarities. Stiegler theorised that, as proletarianisation of workers was a deprivation of skills (*savoir faire*) leaving exploitable labour power, proletarianised consumers were deprived of *savoir vivre*, a knowledge to enable life, left with purchasing power to be exploited. His answer was that these producer-consumers be rethought as 'contributors' who "participate in the creation of the world in which they live" (Crogan interview with Stiegler 2010: 162). In SRN this would include a capacity for *savoir voisinagir*[42] – knowing how to neighbour.

Thrift does not always appear frugal. Erika [151126] described the cafe in Cairns Street:

> "they're weirdly thrifty in that as soon as they've sold one round of breakfast, the son is sent up the shop to get some more bread for the next round because she hasn't got enough money to buy all the bread first thing in the morning. But that means the bread's bought from the corner shop, which is really expensive. You think, well why didn't she just bulk-buy her bread and have cash for her to do it? But actually maybe it's really important the son's involved and he runs up the corner shop and the corner shop gets some money. You've got to let that be all right. So it's kind of thrifty, but it's kind of white sliced [laughing]."

Thrift is often associated with older generations in a make-do-and-mend trope, and one Granby tenant referred back "It's the old days, isn't it? The place I grew up in, it's how things worked. Someone's brother's cousin came round to do the wallpapering and whatever. This is how things worked, like. It was easy to do things rather than going through this bureaucratic process" [Darren G 160610]. Joe from Assemble agreed that "it's a generational thing" but felt "people of our generation [20-30 year-olds] think in a much more thrifty way, and more hands on. The idea of working for some company for your whole life doesn't exist anymore" [160628 Joe, Assemble].

[42] This is a neologism for which I may not be forgiven! Savoir is used with verbs. Voisin is neighbour and voisinage is neighbourhood. French does not have a verb for neighbouring ('etre bon voisin'). Agir is 'to act'.

Sometimes thrift requires spend as an investment in the future – a good winter coat or the astonishing beauty of the Winter Garden. “When there’s very little money and dignity is an issue, it’s really important to spend a lot in the least likely of places. Or at least to give people something before you ask something of them. So it’s thrift by the community itself, not as a requirement by a funder” [Erika 151126]. In White Rock, too, there is a continuous balance between the meanwhile thriftiness of ‘extreme shop-fitting’ and the desire to avoid abortive work that stack costs into the future, with decisions on these choices guided by Vitruvius’ imperatives of *firmitas, utilitas* and *venustas* (durability, utility, beauty) (Vitruvius I.3 trans. Rowland and Howe 1999: 26).

It seems then that thrift is an old idea whose time has come again, an ambivalent but important concept that defines an attitude to resources which characterises SRN. The public living room at Eagle House draws together the threads of thrift as necessity, as environmental action, as a hatred of waste, as the thrill of a bargain, even as virtue signalling. In creating neighbourhood commons SRN seeks to nurture and harness ‘good behaviour’ from a wide variety of people driven by a range of motivations – thrift-as-thriving is one of those virtues.

Figure 7.10: The Public Living Room at Eagle House (opened 10 September 2021)

As one of the grassroots virtues punished by traditional regeneration, thrift is always vulnerable.

> "There is no reward for thrift. People are thrifty. The big barrier to doing anything really positive is money. Once the money comes in, that's when the small people start falling away. Because it's more money than they have knowledge or experience of. What starts to move residents away are these big figures and the language that's used in bid-writing, the fact that you've got to start jumping through hoops, that things become bureaucratic" [Hazel 151201].

Procurement rules, regulations and expectations are a barrier that was not significantly improved by the Social Value Act 2012. There is a clear distinction between 'value for money' (vfm) and grassroots thrift. Having to prove vfm upwards to funders actually wastes time and money, and often excludes more thrifty solutions. In White Rock, one fund required spending £275k in six months on a complex, multi-faceted programme of works in a confined area of the Alley. Then we found the cliff needed stabilising! So we had three teams – geo-engineers working on the cliff and caves, roofers replacing the roof at Rose Cottage and Hastings Buildings Services undertaking all the other renovations. All in the middle of the third Covid-19 lockdown, with no real clarity about the end-users of key spaces. While I do not think this is a sensible approach, maybe SRN succeeds when and because it can jump these hoops? There has always been a focus on 31st March because of Government accounting practices, with a scurry for spend (and the availability of underspend) in the last quarter of each financial year. This short-termism in funding is becoming increasingly frenzied.

> "UK Government spews out announcements; sets unrealistic timescales; takes forever to make decisions; insists on 5-case Green Book business cases (expensive consultants); forces local government to both assess the bids and pay for private sector 'independent evaluation'; then wants to revisit it all themselves, realise they don't have the capacity, employ a load of newbies who invent the most ridiculous forms; and eventually make peremptory 'ministerial' decisions about what gets funded. They misunderstand what they have said yes to; the legal agreement takes ages, passes risk all the way down; and there's no actual money for months. The monitoring is based on the bid you submitted way back when, but any adaptation will require a Project Change Request which will take an undefinable amount of time with an uncertain outcome…" [211105 Fieldnote].

In a completely different context, Monsod (2016) provides the useful heuristic for government under-performance: “incompetence, inertia or indigestion”. In the current context, I would add hubris, mistrust, and distance from the ground. Neighbourhoods in this environment are neither frugal nor thriving. If thrift is removed from moralistic discourse, dislocated from the concept of duty, it becomes instead an ethical concept and a project to disrupt “the political tide that financialises ever greater areas of everyday life” (Hulme 2019: 116). As with the public living room and the Hastings Library of Things, a non-transactional thrift-as-thriving approach “sets up collectivity as a leveller, and as a form of societal provision” (ibid: 118).

7.8 Skills, capacitation and organisation for SRN

While I see thrift, impatience and sociability as ‘grassroots virtues’, leadership, commoning, and collaboration are skills or talents that must be learned and practised (Sennett 2012). Beyond these attitudes and skills, to be successful, the SRN self needs credibility, confidence, and the capacity to take action. This requires both the *aggregation* of our skills into collective efficacy and the ongoing *capacitation* of our selves and our organisations.

Commons are built through collective work but this is an uneven process. Both institutionalist and alterglobalizationist schools of thought see commoning as a process of ongoing learning (Huron 2018: 172). The commons rely on people learning over time through experimentation – *metis*, rather than *techne* (Scott 1998; Kumar 2021). Huron’s proposition that learning to common is learning to argue productively (2018: 173) is borne out in the relationship between Hazel and Eleanor in Granby.

In this process of “learning to common and commoning as learning” (Caldwell et al 2019; Linebaugh 2014: 14), the work “inadvertently produces ‘repertoires’ of knowledge, skills, and resources” (Tadros 2015: 1345). Confidence and sense of shared purpose are ‘transferable skills’ that can be deployed strategically. Dense social networks are “a crucial resource for long-term efforts to articulate counter-futures and challenge unjust social structures” (Jeffrey and Dyson 2021: 652).

People bring skills, as well as gaining them through the SRN process. A freelance 'creative economist', Erika has an impressive CV including chairing Baltic Creative, establishing the Beautiful Ideas Company, supporting the development of Islington Mill in Salford, running a social impact launchpad and many more achievements. I asked Erika outright how important this other experience was for her role in Granby.

> "Tons, if I'm honest… I think that ability, it's not that only I have it. Eleanor, yes, she's a community member, she's also an experienced economic regeneration professional. In her earlier life, we worked together, best fundraiser I've ever met in my life. [Laughing] So I think people get this confused thing of who's community and who isn't and try and put people in a box and we experience that all the time. Actually, communities are made up of people like you and me. We're not abnormal. And that doesn't mean there isn't really different mixes of people who have very little capacity and people who have lots, but that's often to do with the position you are in your life. I couldn't have done this ten years ago, my daughter was young. But my daughter's 21 and I have more capacity" [Erika 151126].

There is lots to unpack here: this 'confusion' over *who's community and who isn't* and the response that communities are *made up of different mixes*, that she and I, and all the leaders of self-renovating neighbourhoods, are drawn from the mix. We were neither born social entrepreneurs nor formally trained; we have acquired our expertise through dogged persistence in the making of change against the odds. At any given moment a range of skills and perspectives will be required and we must make what we can with the strengths available in that moment. One of Erika's most resonant lines was: "Somebody changes the world, why not us?".

It would be wrong to imply that the kind of work demonstrated by Granby 4 Streets and Hastings Commons is readily do-able by any collection of people. I have often been struck hard over the past six years with the miserable realisation that our achievements would be near-impossible without the particular bundle of skills and expertise we have accumulated. This depressing thought is balanced by two more positive conclusions – the knowledge that it is possible to find, build and nurture these skills and the hope that (one day) the barriers will be lowered to make it easier.

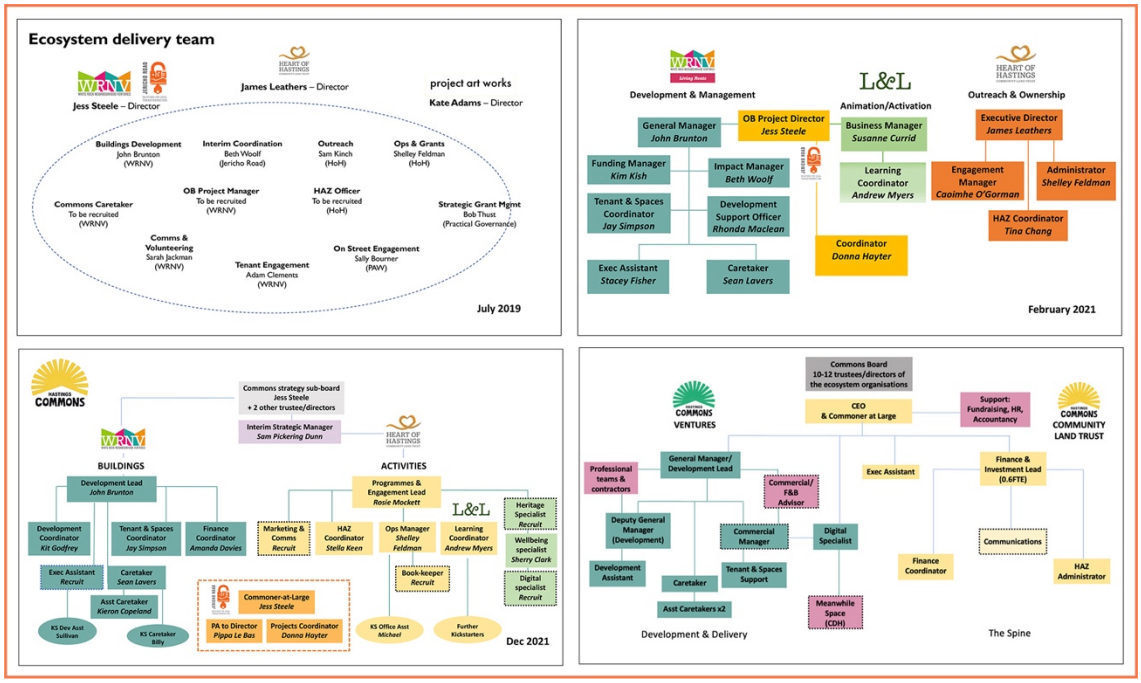
Within the White Rock team we have harnessed and nurtured a wealth of skills in finance, fundraising, property development and management, lettings and tenant care, storytelling, engagement, negotiation, and time management. As mentioned above, our most important aptitude is the ability to live with uncertainty and to face obstacles and challenges as part of the normal course of the work. Overall the team requires very broad competencies, but also dynamism, flexibility, responsiveness, and passionate commitment.

Since 2014, we have created and sustained a shared corporate memory, particularly through the continuities of Jess, Eddie, Emily, John, and Bob. While those continuities are important, any community organisation should be like the caretaker's broom: it has a new handle, and then a new brush, but it's still the caretaker's broom. The many people who have directly contributed to the work are woven into that memory. It has been, and continues to be co-produced. Within the wider community we have encouraged curiosity, contribution, commoning and the valorising of local knowledge. We have built relationships of trust, loyalty and mutual respect. Those are always precarious and have to be continually prioritised.

Balancing this rosy view, the current team has been understaffed and not fit for purpose. A staffing and governance review is underway (June 2021-March 2022) in parallel with ongoing recruitment to key posts. In this phase of the pandemic's impact many organisations have been facing acute skills and capacity shortages as people make all kinds of life-changing decisions – a phenomenon dubbed by Anthony Klotz 'the Great Resignation' (Hempel 2021, Christian 2021). It has always been challenging to get the teams and roles right and I sense that this is endemic to the work. For the sake of maximum flexibility, my tendency is towards a state of continual revision but I understand this is difficult for staff. In fact this (spring 2022) is only our second major restructure and it comes in response to the staff survey and the need for greater coherence across the Hastings Commons. In February 2022 we agreed to rename Heart of Hastings and WRNV as Hastings Commons Community Land Trust and Hastings Commons Ventures. My role is changing from the free-range 'commoner at large' gap-filler and initiator to a formal chief executive position to build the capacity

of the community land trust and prepare for a future in which Ventures, and therefore all the buildings, are wholly owned by the CLT [EMP: 220210 Ecosystem Awayday].

Figure 7.11: Ecosystem team organograms evolving over time



While intra-community relationships are strong and networks highly developed we have to deal with (more than) our fair share of difficult relationships. This has ramped up as we increasingly cross the threshold from agitator to stakeholder. It is partly inherent in the act of development – you are the change-bringer and will be held responsible for disruption. Neighbours worry about noise, dust, traffic, parking, and future uses or users who might not share their interests. Most local people support the transformation but some would prefer the space to remain derelict, others are keeping a cynical eye out for unearned uplift and a few are sunk so far in the dominant model they negotiate a lease for a slab of concrete [EMP: 210520 11C lease]. If someone contacts us and does not get the answer they want it can spread quickly. Coping with this multiplicity of contacts, encounters, and incoming emotional flak is hard enough; 'managing' it in the sense of efficiently responding, recording and trust-building is a great challenge. Burnout[43] (Maslach, Jackson and Leiter 1997; Maslach

[43] In Maslach and Jackson's definition: "burnout is a syndrome of emotional exhaustion and cynicism that occurs frequently among individuals who do 'people work' of some kind" (1981:

2011) is a spectre that haunts us all. We aim to develop a wellbeing policy including an ethic of self-care within Maslach's six key domains of worklife – workload, control, rewards, community, fairness and values (Maslach 2011).

The other organisational challenge is just how busy the work is. Back in 2019 one highly-efficient member of the team captured the problem: "We need more time to think about what's worth doing, rather than doing-doing-doing all the time" [190314 Fieldnote]. There is a strong sense of the system coming together 'as one'. As we navigate what that means while simultaneously adapting to the tasks ahead, the organisational infrastructure will shift and change. Continuous innovation in staffing and governance is part of our DNA. I hope that it always retains the organic essence of the ecosystem, the agility to push forward alternatives and the dogged determination to make things happen.

> "It strikes me that the Hastings Commons has reached a threshold in terms of institutionalisation. Over the past few years we have moved from being a group of outsiders pulling together to make stuff happen, to a set of organisations with policies, payrolls and responsibility to staff. Somehow we need to make this transition without losing everything that made us agile, dynamic and rooted. Can we learn from recent experience so our team feels better supported and, along with building confidence and wellbeing, they can survive the vicissitudes of the work? And can we find a way for the Commons not to feel like an addition to the work but the core of it?" [210630 Fieldnote]

This chapter explored the Selves of self-**r**enovating neighbourhoods from a variety of angles. Of all of these for further work I would prioritise the critical importance of agency and the need to develop a popular language that can politicise it. The individuals shape what happens but that doesn't mean that only those individuals or those kinds of individuals could shape it [210622 Reflection]. It means that whoever is involved there will be questions of self and identity – class, gender and race bound or influenced, but also 'personality' in the sense of constructed rather than destroyed agency. Mine is a constructed agency – as a child and over the years I prove Bandura

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1). They argue that "strong emotional feelings are likely to be present in the work setting: it is this sort of chronic emotional stress that is believed to induce burnout" (Maslach and Jackson, 1986: 6). In their model, the burnout syndrome has three components: emotional exhaustion, de-personalisation, and lack of personal accomplishment.

(1997) right. My self-efficacy beliefs have been strong and strengthened by performance which arises partly from those beliefs. As they are strengthened and the performance generally improves or at least is sustained, that creates a constituted, embedded agency which is *both* resilient, rolling with the punches that keep on coming, *and* fragile, precious and not endlessly renewable [211115 Bob Thust].

We know from Vanguard (2014), Cottam (2018) and others that agency is systematically destroyed through many processes that poorer people are subject to and more affluent people are able in the main to avoid. We should recognise the fragility of agency in any case, and the need to "plant-nurture-grow-reap-rest" [EMP: 210831 HVA], but also take action against its uneven distribution as a result of dis-agencing systems and practices. The beauty of Bandura's work is that it underscores the connection between self-efficacy beliefs and performance: so often a vicious circle, but potentially a virtuous spiral. This is why it is so valuable to celebrate along the way!

Figure 7.12: Rock House 'Into the Black' party, March 2018

7.9 A Crazy Kind of Hope

Like Gibson-Graham in their challenge of a postcapitalist politics, SRN leaders have to "chart a politics of possibility in the face of incredulity and sometimes disdain" (2006: xiv) from all quarters including estate agents and neighbours, and from critical, radical left-oriented thinkers as much as from the right. I experienced this at national level during the Community Organisers programme, with hostility from the leaders of Citizens UK towards community organising rooted in development trusts and settlements (Steele 2011: How Dare the Lord?!; Fisher and Dimberg 2016). In parallel, over the long campaign to save Hastings Pier, many people were (understandably but unhelpfully) sceptical that it could be done; others felt threatened that we were highlighting the inadequacies of private and public ownership of Britain's piers.

I ask, with Ernst Bloch, why is it that possibility has had such a bad press (Bloch 1989: 7) and answer, with Harvey that there is "a very clear interest that has prevented the world from being changed into the possible" (Harvey 2000: 258). The question is: what is our response in the face of that vested interest: melancholia, nostalgia, cynical distance, or some crazy kind of hope?

The worst enemy of SRN is the particular combination of paranoia, melancholia and moralism that Gibson-Graham capture so well. Paranoia "'wants to know everything in advance to protect itself against surprises, marshalling every site and event into the same fearful order" (2006: 4). Melancholic nostalgia retains an ironic distance; "a detached spectatorialism replaces engagement and involvement" (ibid: 6). Place-based activism is seen as accommodationist and divisive, suspect, likely to be already incorporated, naturally or inevitably, into the capitalist world order. There is a moralism here that is "excluded from power yet fixated on the powerful" (ibid: 5), while dog-whistling the moral superiority of the lowly. Long after Gibson-Graham identified this denigration of the local, this 'discomfort with the telling of small stories', as "something visceral… [that] seems to emanate from a bodily state not simply a reasoned intellectual position" (2002: 26-27), it continues apace (Srnicek and Williams 2015). The equation of power and efficacy with size and scale is deeply embedded.

> "The challenge going forward will be to try to make sense of an urbanising world undergoing permanent, multiple crises, to track both the overdeveloped new capacities for harm as well as the unpredictable but irrepressible new sources of hope" (Madden 2020: 679)

I agree with Zizek that "cynical distance is just one way… to blind ourselves to the structuring power of ideological fantasy: even if we do not take things seriously, even if we keep an ironical distance, *we are still doing them*" (2008: 30). As Lacan said so complexly 'les non-dupes errent': those who decide not to be duped are mistaken after all. A cynic who 'believes only his eyes' misses the efficiency of the symbolic fiction that surrounds us, and how it structures our experience of reality (Zizek quoted in Fisher 2009: 48). Fleming and Spicer show how employees may "dis-identify with cultural prescriptions, yet often still perform them" (2003: 157), reproducing the power relations they seek to escape. These closing-down traits "render the world effectively uncontestable" (Gibson-Graham 2006: 6), whereas SRN requires instead "a process that makes room for a host of alternative scriptings… a proliferation of economic differences" (Gibson-Graham 1996: 147). In the face of melancholic cynicism, my personal commitment is to 'some crazy kind of hope' that gets things done, the subject of the next chapter.

Figure 7.13: Selves

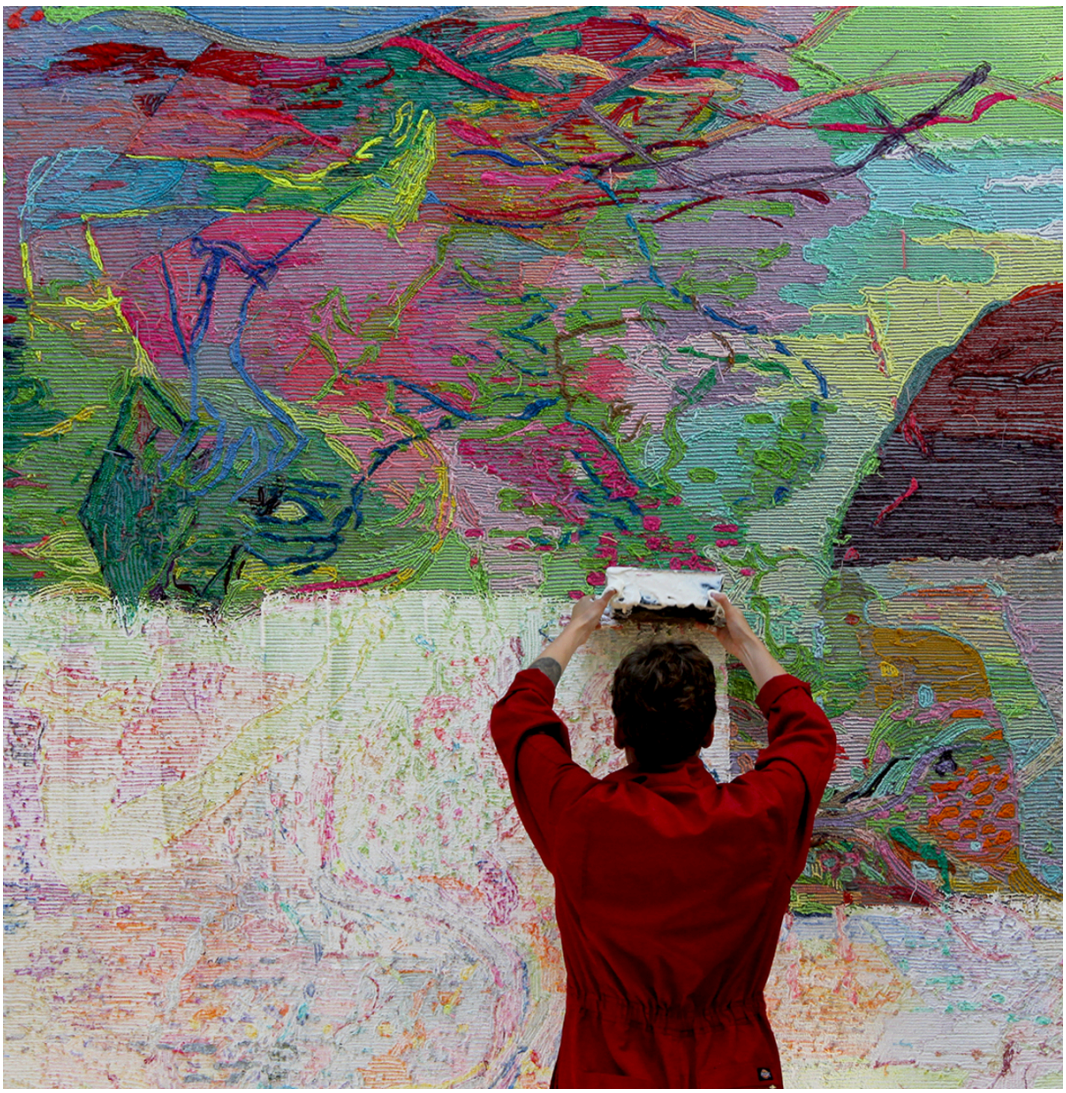
Selves are hopeful, fearful, fragile and emotional. Sometimes irrational, often distracted. They are embodied, which could mean muscular, visceral, sexy or painful, slothful, addicted to harm. It always means ageing and time-limited. They are minded, and their minds are sharp, sparky, soulful, sad, and unpredictable. They have histories, personal and political, that flow in their blood and influence their every move. They are emplaced and we are concerned with those in this place but they are mobile, emigrating or displaced from our neighbourhoods just when we need them most.

FRAGMENT, WRITING RETREAT, NORTHALLERTON, APRIL 2019

CHAPTER 8: RENOVATING – the verb

Renovating is the verb in the clause – the doing word that makes the difference. Linebaugh (2008) stressed the concept of commoning as a verb and Holloway (2002, 2010, 2016) sees 'doing' as one of the main pillars of interstitial revolution and as "inherently plural, collective, choral, communal" (2002: 26). I deliberately choose the word 'renovating', not in the sense of refurbishing individual old properties (although that is certainly part of the task) but to conjure up the idea of mending, weaving together, darning the threadbare patches of the physical, social, cultural and economic fabric.

Figure 8.1: Darning the Fabric[44]



[44] The artist is Victoria Morton, the image is from the Dovecot Studios website: https://dovecotstudios.com/tapestry-studio/tapestries-rugs/you-can-radiate-over-here

The ‘verb’ must capture everything that needs doing to make and maintain a self-renovating neighbourhood, from achieving control over land to planning and funding, from design and building to ongoing decision-making and the production and protection of communal wealth. This ‘renovating’ is a form of ‘place-shaping’ because the core aim of SRN is to enable the producers-consumers of neighbourhoods to shape them “more after their own heart’s desire” (Harvey 2013: xvi). In this chapter I explore the broad and diverse spectrum of activities involved in making and sustaining a self-renovating neighbourhood. Then how, through the multiple acts of ‘renovating’, people and resources are enrolled and en-roled as place-shaping becomes embodied and material, a process in which the ‘neighbourhood self’ is renewed.

‘Renovation’ could include new-build on brownfield sites where that process is initiated and driven by local people in order to renovate the neighbourhood, as was due to be the case with the Hastings Ore Valley project. This is not to ignore the contrast between traditional gentrification in which the sweat equity of individuals upgrades specific properties and large scale brownfield new-build coordinated by corporate developers and governments. That difference is important, not least because the gentrification aesthetic becomes a commodity produced by the developer and purchased by the resident who buys or rents a lifestyle (Hackworth and Smith 2001, Davidson and Lees 2005). However, my focus is on collective DIY regen as a potential alternative to both individualist gentrification and the dominant paradigm of corporate/state ‘renewal’.

The distinction between self-renovating neighbourhoods and the classic ‘pioneer gentrifiers’ is one of *collectivity*. Blasius, Friedrichs and Ruhl (2016) explored three approaches to defining the various ‘demand side actors’ in gentrification – by occupation (artists, students etc), socio-demographic characteristics (age, number of children, educational level etc), and attitudes (primarily considering attitudes to risk, to ‘old-timers’ and to the aesthetics of authenticity). Keen to classify groups by statistical data that can be tracked over time, they conclude “we have to renounce attitudinal data” (2016: 53). Instead, they choose age, years of schooling, household size, children and income, resulting in a typology in which all gentrifiers are under 45 years old and

with a maximum of one child (everyone else is either 'others' or 'elderly') (ibid: 57). Theirs is a valiant effort to enable cumulative micro-data about *who these people are* but, while identifying numerous problems with their own typology, they do not consider *what these people actually do* which is strange since they end with a policy suggestion based on the 'Milieu Conservation Regulation' which allows local authority intervention in the specifics of what is done in neighbourhoods. I would put forward instead a comparison between approaches to neighbourhood change in terms of how and what is done. To what extent is our approach comparable to the 'sweat equity' of traditional gentrification by individuals and families or of accidental transformations by bonded collectivities like the 'single young professionals' of Crossfield estate or the West Indian families of 1960s Brockley? Figure 8.2 focuses on the distinctions between those groups and processes that have more in common. A column for corporate/state renewal would read 'rarely' on every line.

Figure 8.2: Distinguishing SRN from comparator approaches

	'Pioneer gentrifiers'	**'Social preservationists'**	**'Accidental transformations'** (Crossfield & Upper Brockley)	**'Self renovating neighbourhoods'**
Take risks	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Darn the fabric	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Use DIY approach	Often	Sometimes	Yes	Mostly
Work collectively for common good	Not usually	Sometimes	Yes	Yes
Build stronger community	Not usually	Sometimes	Yes	Yes
Decommodify	No	No	No	Yes

The most obvious difference is what happens to the ownership in the long term, that is the action of decommodifying to create and protect communal wealth. Crossfield estate remains in control of LB Lewisham in terms of management, with many of the flats experiencing right-to-buy tenure change and enormous price rises (the worst of both worlds). In Upper Brockley most of those families long ago sold out. In their time, these approaches made a transformative difference, rescuing built fabric from

dereliction or demolition, building strong (temporally-limited) communities, and creating significant financial value (see Appendix D). However, with no move towards community ownership, they did not build or protect the long term commons. DeFilippis' critique of Putnam's interpretation of social capital rams home the message that poor areas do not lack networks and relationships: "What they lack is power and the capital that partially constitutes that power" (2001: 801). The assembling of the Hastings Commons is a mustering and intertwining of capital assets – both economic (fixed) and social (intangible).

Before we explore the SRN activities we need to understand a cross-cutting aspect of the renovating verb: TIME. Any 'verb' must imply temporality as well as spatial location: the 'doing' is steeped in spatio-temporal specificity. As Massey (2013: video) memorably described it, space is "like a pincushion of a million stories". For the practice of SRN I focus on three 'landscapes of time' (immediacy, the human and the humane), and two types of 'moments in space' (spending time together, the chance encounter). I conclude with the most obvious temporality of all – 'it takes ages!'.

8.1 Landscapes of Time

Bastian's (2014) scoping study of 'time and community' showed that "time plays a complicated and wide-ranging role in social processes of belonging and interconnection" (ibid: 137). Her resulting bibliography identified 300 themes, focused into 11 core themes, along with three central issues: past-present-future; continuity and discontinuity; and the multiple rhythms of time-use (ibid: 142). Her research workshop in 2012, which I attended, emphasised "the experiential features of time, particularly the aesthetic and affective aspects of shared time" (ibid: 155; see also Thust, Potts and Steele 2019). Bastian concludes that shared representations of the past and/or future shape how a community is imagined and legitimised: both a 'community of hope' (future) and a 'community of memory' (past) are required. Contrasting with gated communities involving the segregation of residents' time-paths from undesirable social interactions (Atkinson and Flint 2004: 875), the work of SRN is an effort to schedule time (as well as space) to promote encounters.

The temporal landscape that drives SRN is *immediacy*, which comes in two forms – self-driven and other-driven. I have long been convinced of 'the virtue of impatience'[45] in regeneration and this was one of the hypothesised characteristics of SRN at the start of the research. Interviews, experience and more detailed analysis has nuanced this slogan into three aspects that could be summarised as:

- Work with what you've got, rather than wasting it
- Achieve positive change now rather than waiting for a masterplan to be delivered
- Waiting is risky – it gets worse if you leave it.

These conclusions, clearly visible in the stories of emergent commons within both White Rock and Granby, demand a particular combination of punk-squatter-DIY-conservationism, grassroots community organising, and creative 'meanwhile' activity given the space to grow and the freedom to fail.

In tension with this virtue of impatience (temporal pressure applied for the common good) is the artificial shortening of time for the benefit of power (estate agents, auctions, fast development, funding timescales, spending deadlines). It is characteristic of bureaucracy that the timeframes will work better for the bureaucrat than for the citizen-participant-applicant (Hoag 2014; Mountz 2011; Sellerberg 2008). This manipulation of time by decision-makers and funders adds risk to already challenging projects but is deeply embedded and almost impossible to challenge. Instead, SRN leaders develop opportunistic 'sense and seize' antennae that can tune into even the most absurd of time-rules (Ince and Hahn 2020).

The second landscape is the imperative of the *human lifespan* and its transitions. Everything about community time reflects the transitions of life – nursery, primary, secondary school; leaving home, building a career, a household, a family and a community; getting older, eventually growing frail, exiting. All human life is 'meanwhile' and we need to design services that make the absolute best of it (Steele

[45] Author's speech to DTA Conference plenary 7/11/2012, and presentation in Hastings on 'The challenges and opportunities of community led regeneration' (Steele 2015: s14)

forthcoming). Thinking this way, what would we make of health and wellbeing, of education, of life chances? Human lifespan is temporary but long so we need to both seize the day and plan for 70+ years. The concept of 'cradle to grave' feels somehow old-fashioned, and yet these start and end points have not and will not change.

Alongside impatience and the human timeframe, sits *the discipline of the 100-year horizon*. It is imperative to plan for beyond our time, for the future that we will not see. Along with now and a lifetime, this long term future is a type of time that matters to people, to a healthy planet and strong community and economy. I think of it as a 'humane timeframe', one that considers our children's children. Half of UK children born in 2007 will live to be 103 years old (World Economic Forum 2017: 4). We need to think about these children and their changing needs across a lifetime. This was the driver behind the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 (Jones, Goodwin-Hawkins and Woods 2020). This long term thinking was pioneered in the Milton Keynes 40-year tree planting cycle funded from industrial rents[46], Squash's[47] 100-year vision for their piece of Liverpool, and the Hastings Pier "long, long horizon when all of us are dead"[48].

Both human and humane time-frames fit within a framework of futures thinking (International Futures Forum 2021) that has inspired intense activity in the Hastings Commons since 2019, first with the grassroots knowledge transfer project known as the Common Treasury of Adaptable Ideas,[49] then through the 'Emerging Futures' programme (June-Dec 2020)[50] which included a strong focus on Bill Sharpe's Three Horizons[51].

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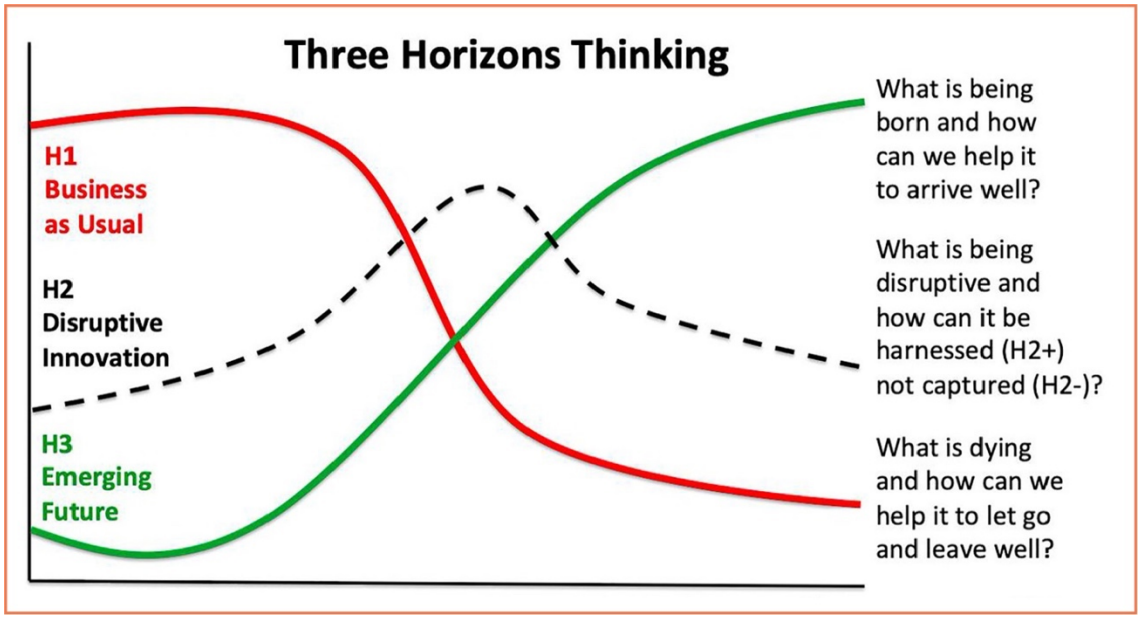
[46] The Parks Trust took a 999 year lease of 4,500 acres along with an endowment of £20m mainly in commercial property so that rental income would fund the green estate in perpetuity (Parks Trust 2022).
[47] https://squashliverpool.co.uk/about
[48] As I said to Mr Gulzar on his first night of ownership of Hastings Pier 15/6/18
[49] https://www.commontreasury.org.uk/
[50] https://www.emergingfuturesfund.com/blogs/hastings-emerging-futures
[51] https://www.h3uni.org/practices/foresight-three-horizons/

Figure 8.3: Three Horizons thinking (Sharpe 2020)



In line with the 'rolling conversation' (Peck 2011) in the policy mobilities literature (McCann 2011; McCann and Ward 2013; Baker and Tenemos 2015), the adoption and spread of these thinking frameworks within communities is complex. Rarely a clean landing, this has proved in White Rock and Granby rather an iterative process in which thinking minds open to synaptic connections progressively appropriate, adapt and re-disseminate modes of thinking and praxis, finding new ways in which our ideas and skills can be embodied, enacted, realised and made durable. Jeffrey and Dyson's (2021) myth-busting around prefigurative politics captures how this proceeds by 'productive improvisation' in the short-term and the institutionalising over time of 'spaces of relative protection'. In Granby the table sale became the market; planters on the street led to the Winter Garden; the piecemeal approach literally saved the neighbourhood. In White Rock our many improvisations have led to 8,000 square metres of space-in-custody and the ability to create not just affordable homes and workspaces but wholly decommodified spaces like the pocket park and the public living room.

8.2 Moments in Space

The most important spatio-temporal practices for SRN are those 'moments in space' that build familiarity, solidarity and sustenance.

The first and most obvious, yet drastically undervalued, is *spending time together*, also known as 'hanging out on the porch'[52]. On and on, over and over, building familiarity, working the participation muscles, developing trust through the repeated interactions of association. This happens in particular but varied spaces, at particular but varied times, and with particular but varied individuals. The Heart of Hastings community land trust project at Ore Valley involved local people occupying a 4 acre former power station site. Members of the core team of around 20 people were on site every single Saturday for 2 ½ years, as well as many other days for specific events, visits and activities. This created strong bonds between people and a deep affinity with the land itself. In Liverpool, the Granby Four Streets community land trust took over the space of the street – cleaning, gardening, painting the boarded-up houses, installing big picnic tables, holding a monthly market. These activities both created and demonstrated a high level of *neighbouring* which Walter, Hankins and Nowak (2017: 113) call: "sustained contact and place-making in the space of the neighbourhood" and which Oosterlynck, Schuermans and Loopmans (2017) framed as "solidarity through encounter with diversity" (*passim*). Even in the digital world, time spent together builds trust: the local ecosystem of interconnected organisations making the Hastings Commons doubled in staff during the Covid lockdowns but sustained its dense web of collaborative activity through informal whole-team weekly zoom calls.

This kind of sustained and repetitive time together is vital for building bonds, sparking ideas, sharing values and strengthening place-based attachment. But there is also much value in the *chance encounter* enabled by propinquity and serendipitous design. Within and between the various buildings in the Hastings Commons, we prioritise opportunities for encounter – "the moments in the everyday spaces" (Walter, Hankins and Nowak 2017: 113) that connect people, even if only briefly, so that their differences are held in creative balance with the shared moment of time-space. The Alley in White Rock and Cairns Street in Granby are both perfect places for this. Massey would remind us that "space is open… there are always connections yet to be

[52] See: https://www.pioneerspost.com/podcasts/20190314/agenda-item-one-fish-and-chips-on-the-porch

made, juxtapositions yet to flower into interaction (or not, for not all potential connections have to be established)" (2005: 11).

The chance encounter can be designed into permanent assets, but we can also revalue what is fleeting or ephemeral (Witmore 2006). The meanwhile philosophy "recognis[es] that assets exist in time as well as space and that an empty building represents a social and economic objective unrealised. Temporary or short-term doesn't mean unimpressive or without impact – think lightning, blossom, a festival" (Meanwhile Project 2010: 2). Many scholars have commented on the interstitial nature of meanwhile and makeshift urbanism (Dinerstein 2012; Fisker et al 2019; Rock 2018). Tonkiss tackled directly this question of "how to think the category of the temporary, as well as that of development" (2013: 318), asking "why anyone should be so ready to discount the near future, given not only its immediacy but the fact that it can help set the terms for what happens later" (ibid). She also outlined a useful typology of governmental approaches that work to promote, permit or prohibit the kinds of interventions that Meanwhile Space and others have been making since 2009 (Meanwhile Space 2019). Her concern that "such urban alternatives are routinely compromised, frequently co-opted, sometimes corrupted and often doomed" (2013: 318) is an important warning that I return to in the 'risk assessment' in Appendix G. Equally, Ferreri's reflections on the concept of 'decanting' (the displacement of residents from council estates undergoing 'renewal') as a slow, violent and *collective* domicide "drawn out over time and space" (2020: 1009), remind us that the 'temporary' in neighbourhood change can be an indeterminate experience of chronic displaced horror (as for so long in Granby) as often as it may be an exciting new space that kickstarts alternative regenerative practices (as happened in White Rock).

While meanwhile uses assert the importance of now and soon, there is no doubt that community-led regeneration of buildings and neighbourhoods takes a lot of time – both in terms of hours contributed and time elapsed.

Figure 8.4: A conversation about time [210202]

Ronan: I think it takes longer than you think it takes. That's my concern, it's that thing of you've got to keep adjusting the steering. And that all takes time.

Jess: It does. Years. Well it took four years with Rock House, didn't it? Really. And it will take longer, I expect. I'm really aware of that but the funny thing is nobody ever challenges me on it [laughs]. I mean you have, and I'm really aware of it anyway, but it's one of those sort of dances you have to do. We would never have been able to buy the Observer if I'd done a spreadsheet that said we won't get any rent for two and a half years… So, there has to be a blind spot in order to make enterprise happen at all. Because if you saw everything, you probably wouldn't do it. That's the problem [laughs] with risk assessment. I know it sounds awful, but it's true. That if you saw and understood the implications of every risk, and you had the option not to take them, not to do it at all, then you wouldn't do it at all. Which is why most people don't.

My notes of my first phone call with Eleanor and my first meeting in Cairns Street in May 2014 contain everything already: the 10 houses; the Winter Garden; Steinbeck getting frustrated with delay; the blending of grant and loan; a 'community welcome place'; the shops; the market; and, interestingly, a scribble that says *Biennial - Granby 4 Streets as the 'art' -> give Lewis a brief for a MW/pop-up approach*[53]. The enormous ambition and the almost comical time-blindspot are shown in the note: *Next 6-12 months: buy 10 houses + do them well. Plus shops + market. Local people - trainees, apprentices, local contractors. 'Put local people in charge'.* In December 2015 Hazel told me "it's going to take a long time cause everything does. The Winter Garden won't be ready til May 2017" [151201]. In fact the Winter Garden was not opened until March 2019 and it remains under continuous development. Maybe this is not a blindspot after all but rather a pragmatic fantasist approach to development time that stretches and twists to allow for momentum, inertia, delays and opportunities. Recent research, however, shows that when compared like-for-like, community-led development is no slower than developer-led (CRESR 2021), just that the visible starting-points are different.

This long-time-coming nature of community asset development is why the notions of being-in-common and of becoming are so important for SRN sustenance. If all we were trying to achieve was the renovation of derelict property there are surely more efficient ways (although we are doing it in contexts where both market and state have

[53] This refers to an action for Lewis Jones from Assemble. It was a lesser point in the meeting but would have a big impact in leading to the Turner Prize.

failed). But we are doing more than physical renovation, we are *becoming-together*. So really it doesn't matter how long it takes as long as you continue to become… but that is a difficult message to get across to a lender!

Following these deliberations on how time-space frames the work of SRN, I now focus on six 'key activities' to present and analyse the elements of the SRN process as experienced in the two case study neighbourhoods.

1. Enacting property
2. Harnessing resources
3. Engaging, capacitating, organising socialising, thinking
4. Physical renovation
5. Producing and protecting communal wealth
6. Ongoing tasks and processes

Drawing from the previous chapter, we could see these activities as driven by impatience, achieved through thrift, and collectivised through sociability.

8.3 Enacting Property

While several of my interlocutors have suggested that these SRN activities should begin with setting a vision, I think 'Enacting Property' is a valid starting place for my analysis – not because it happens first but because it is critical to the distinction between SRN and other kinds of discursive neighbourhood engagement. The materiality of specific buildings and spaces, their intense locatedness and topology (by which I mean their positional relationship to each other, see Paasi 2011), and the mission of long-term proprietorial stewardship, combine to convince me that SRN rests first and foremost upon the enactment of property (Blomley 2004).

Neighbourhood-focused actors must acquire the rights to make change in the face of a hegemonic ownership model that excludes all but the proprietor from doing so. This will usually mean taking the land/buildings into collective ownership, although it could also involve shifting the relative rights of users and owners (Clark 2005) or coming to

arrangements with owners that incentivise the collective benefit [EMP: 100608 Walker]. Delinquent ownership is a major barrier and “processes at the nexus of property, morality and materiality shape how 'justice' is practised” (Brown 2007: 507).

As described in Chapter 2, the dominant ownership model (Singer 2000; Blomley 2004) – or the ‘absolute approach (Underkuffler 1990) in which property is objectively definable, set apart from social context – powerfully shapes our understandings of possibilities, ethics, and the ordering of economic life. In the case study neighbourhoods the dominant ownership model is both the problem to be tackled and the operating environment in which action must take place. Any process of decommodification will require local actors to engage with the world of private property transactions (as we will see below, acquiring public property has some differences but many of the same players and attitudes). The phrase used to describe this process in White Rock: “jump in, play the game/do the deal, climb out, wash off” captures the sense of disgust, of supping with a long spoon, and also the potential danger of co-option – what if we can’t climb out or it doesn’t wash off? The metaphor also connotes a specific ‘washing’ process – decommodification.

Thompson argues (2015: 1026) that articulating the commons as property rights is “conceptually impossible and politically self-defeating” because that enables the land to be seen “as an abstract deed of entitlement”. The customary rights of the commons are “legitimated autonomously through the very act of their mutual negotiation”. He warns that articulating them as legal rights “threatens to codify, ossify, and undermine into passive and alienated relations the highly active, iterative, and organic relations of the commons” (ibid).

While recognising the points, I disagree. After all, this process of acquisition *and then decommodification* of property rights is core to the role of CLTs and essential (but not sufficient) for self-renovating neighbourhoods. The decommodifying is not about burning the title deed; it’s about that deed registering an ownership that is a) tethered, b) open to local governance and c) mission-driven (ie focused on benefit rather than profit). It is also wrong to imagine land ownership records as ossifying –

the whole point of a title register and plan is to record changes to boundaries, rights and obligations. I would not argue for 'legalifying' the rights of the commons in terms of use and contribution, but it is necessary to establish a safe (decommodified) platform on which to undertake this "very act of their mutual negotiation" (Thompson 2015: 1026), otherwise wannabe commoners are likely to get moved on before long.

The existing hegemonic system is hostile to other forms of ownership, especially the commons (Singer 2000, Blomley 2004). It works by abstracting property from its context and ostensibly voiding it of social relations, so that it can become a number on a spreadsheet, naturalising the 'right to speculate' in order to profit from property through the extraction of socially-produced surplus value. By taking over the spreadsheet, the title register and the keys, we are able to bring back together the three kinds of power given by property. First, the 'exchange value' is converted into a balance sheet item that provides capitalisation for the wider and ongoing work of the SRN. Second, the exclusionary right given by ownership can be turned on its head and become an inclusionary principle. Third, the use value is valorised, improvised, squeezed and refined until it settles into a high-utility steady state (always open for future change but working well for the moment). Balancing these three aspects to create viable, sustainable assets tethered to and serving their neighbourhoods is the challenge of SRN. Collective ownership institutions like CLTs operate inside the capitalist political economy but transform the logic of the placeless, bodyless market. "The market is not rejected but the power relations that constitute 'the market' are restructured… Collective ownership alters the scale of ownership and renders capital place dependent when it otherwise would not be" (DeFilippis 2004: 34).

As chair of Granby 4 Streets CLT, Erika was clear that "for me ownership is key… I would like the CLT to not only own its own houses, I would like the RSLs [housing associations] to give theirs to it. I would like us to own the school, I would like us to own the neighbourhood. Early presentations about the CLT were about 'our community in a land that we trust', and particularly for migrating communities, whatever else went on in Liverpool, there was a territory here that they trusted". So this is not ownership for the sake of it, certainly not for the exchange value, but a

matter of empowerment. “I feel like there’s a process of repossession going on here but it’s kind of community repossession, not bank repossession. We are repossessing space, streetscapes, community buildings, houses” [151126 Erika].

Davina Cooper describes property as “a form of coding that locates relations to a thing within wider regulatory and epistemic structures” (2007: 630). ‘Severable’ forms of belonging will encode the thing as commodity (that is made meaningful by its market relationship). A relational form of belonging will encode the thing as an embodiment of a particular relationship. Layers of coding can overlap: Cooper points out that the Summerhill school grounds are potentially severable but also a core attribute, constitutive of the school (ibid). A similar argument could now be made of the Hastings Commons buildings within the neighbourhood.

It should be noted that Granby and White Rock shared a fundamental characteristic as starting point for the SRN – dereliction. Runfola and Hankins see dereliction having an empirical, distributive element which can be observed and evaluated and a ‘procedural dimension’ which “offers a window onto the role of residents and community organisations and their ability to effect environmental conditions” (2009: 346). On 1st October 2014 we ‘took vacant possession’ of Rock House. Those words were extremely meaningful: we repeated them to each other then and they have appeared in the story ever since. We now have a standard category of activity and budget called ‘take possession’.

* * *

Three building vignettes show “the interpenetrations between social process and spatial form that arises out of human practice” (Harvey 1973: 11):

VIGNETTE: **OBSERVER BUILDING (OB)**

I am interested in the OB as spatial form, a container for human practice and clearly shaped by those practices (Harvey 1973: 11). When it was working as a newspaper office and print factory, its form and character can be envisaged – indeed felt through all the senses – from the acutely located memories of generations of workers, from the material and textual testimony of the print newspapers themselves and, most movingly, from James Joyce's description of 'The Newspaper Office': "through a lane of clanking drums... Thumping. Machines. Smash a man to atoms if they got him caught... the obedient reels feeding in huge webs of paper. Clank it. Clank it. Miles of it unreeled... the loud throbs of cranks... the silent typesetters at their cases... Sllt. Almost human the way it sllt to call attention. Doing its level best to speak. That door too sllt creaking, asking to be shut. Everything speaks in its own way. Sllt... Heavy greasy smell there always is in those works... A sudden screech of laughter" (Joyce [1922] 2010: 106-110).

Since the OB closed nearly 40 years ago and all the people left the building it became by no means empty of human practice, but that practice became extrinsic – the passive-aggressive behaviours of neglect (forgetting, giving up on, failing to care for) and money-making from a distance with "balance sheet numbers buyable from the town hall" [EMP 171214 OB speech notes]. Despite their differences in terms of wealth, power, attitude and prevailing economic environment, the series of OB owners blur into a single escalating financialising process that is both utterly bizarre and absolutely normalised. Through their serial planning applications, this hypothetical Owner made ongoing calls on the state to legitimise the realisation of profit from dereliction. Indeed as the latter took greater hold, it became progressively easier to achieve planning consent. Cllr Godfrey Daniel, long-time chair of the Hastings Planning Committee told me in 2013 "I've tried harder than anyone to solve this problem, I've given so many permissions to that building...". These permissions were almost all completely un-buildable. Strangely, this is not 'a material' matter for planning decisions since buildability is seen as an issue for the applicant.

The OB is a classic example of the injustice and anti-productivity of speculative property investment over the past 40 years in a process that I term the 'farming of dereliction'. This is not a building where lots of people have tried and failed; rather it is an exemplar of a market and state system that allowed speculators to profit over more than three decades while the building and the neighbourhood continued to suffer from "the reduction of the urban landscape to a set of financial criteria" (Fields 2017: 3). In this process of 'real-world financialization' (Aalbers 2015), dereliction is an under-examined but surprisingly key part of what David Harvey called the spatial fix for capitalism's tendency to accumulate capital beyond what can be profitably invested thereby putting itself always in crisis (Harvey 1981, 1985; Schoenberger 2004; Smith 2008). Unlike investment in infrastructure, transport and communication networks, investment in dereliction parks the capital but does not result in "an expanded and improved built environment" (Schoenberger 2004: 429). Instead, like so much of casino capitalism, it trades on a fantasy future commodity. It is illuminating how much money this 13-headed Owner spent on planning permissions and how little on repairs – the commodity was never the building itself.

The long and stressful process by which the dominant ownership cycle was broken has been described in Chapter 5. Suffice to say that at our 'Show the Love' event with tenants, neighbours and friends in the building on Valentine's Day 2019, property had been enacted and the freehold was now held 'in custody' by White Rock Neighbourhood Ventures. The next steps of pre-development, planning permission, tendering, and value engineering are described below under Physical Renovation. As I write this (December 2021) we are half-way through a £5M contract to renovate the lower four floors. The scaffolding is up; the failed roof has been removed; and the building is being re-created in front of our eyes.

I have focused on the OB story as a unit of analysis in the enacting of property because of its depth, scale and impact. It is worth exploring, more briefly, a contrasting story of a different building just a few yards away.

VIGNETTE: **Community asset transfer of 12 Claremont**

12 Claremont (12C) is another special building and one White Rock Trust had its eyes on since 2013. It helped to generate an alliance between Heart of Hastings and Project Art Works (PAW). In August 2016 Suzy and I (CLT trustees) and Kate (PAW chief executive) viewed the property together. It had been purchased by East Sussex County Council (ESCC) at an above-market price from the previous owner, a dynamic local social entrepreneur who had been successfully letting it out as arts studios and a cafe. Kate herself had previously had a studio in the building and "it was where PAW was born as an idea" [160810 Kate]. The council thought they wanted it as part of their £6M library refurbishment next door. They gutted it – stripped the electrics, removed the ceilings, took out the working lift. But then something was wrong about the floor levels between the two buildings and they decided they didn't want it after all.

Within a month we submitted a proposal to ESCC suggesting a community asset transfer of the building to Heart of Hastings CLT in partnership with PAW "to create a hub of community value, including creative arts and enterprise space alongside affordable housing or live-work" [EMP: 160919 12C proposal]. An alternative proposal for use as 'easy-in, easy-out' workspace was also put forward and all bidders were invited to a workshop in early 2017. It took a further year for the council to decide in favour of community asset transfer and we were asked to provide a full business case. This time we were in competition with a local church. We received confirmation in July 2018 that we had scored 70% and been selected as the 'preferred bidder'. Although the political process was concluded, the lease negotiations dragged on for years. While the politicians and regeneration officers had shown willing to partner, the lawyers remained entrenched in adversarial processes of 'documentary legal fetishism' (Wilson and Mitchell 2003:10). They made it impossible for us to include residential; they pushed for a full list of Phase 2 works which cannot be determined until architects have been appointed (which couldn't happen until the lease is signed); the Schedule of Condition will be set after Phase 2 works and the landlord can serve a dilapidations notice at any time thereafter; and if all the tenant works are not complete any attempt to exercise the break clause would be invalid. The long wait, the work at risk and the imperative to retain secured funding for the project, meant these matters had to be conceded, posing unnecessary risks to the success of the project itself. The lease was finally signed in January 2022.

VIGNETTE: **Our commons, the Alley**

In Hastings, the Alley itself is probably the most interesting space in the enactment of property, for exactly the same reason that the story of the America Ground resonates. Its lack of proprietorial ownership or responsibility tempts those who would be commoners (as well as would-be flytippers etc). The behaviour of adjacent freeholders, whose rights and responsibilities over the Alley are inscribed in their property deeds, speaks directly to Hardin's Tragedy of the Commons (1968), when people use their rights to dump rubbish or park vehicles. It also shows how entrenched the rentier approach has become when owners charge others an annual fee just to move bins across a tiny piece of anomalous freehold.

Property is not only enacted techno-legally but also through occupation and use. The Alley has seen all types of occupation and behaviour including markets and community engagement, events like the Heart of Hastings 'village fete', French and Dawson's wood recycling cave, the artists' studios of Rose Cottage, exhibitions in the Observer Building vaults, sandwiches in the Pocket Park. The process of renovation is itself an enactment of property, especially in the context of unowned land like the Alley in White Rock or Cairns Street in Granby. Tidying up is a radical act that broadens the answers to questions put by Blomley (2004: 15) "what is to count as property?" and by Roy (2017: A3) "who can count as the subject who can claim home and land?".

The Alley in White Rock can be compared and contrasted with Cairns Street in Granby as common public space. Both formerly neglected, both transformed through 'creative caretaking'. This raises the question of what it means to 'adopt' a roadway. On one hand it has a formal meaning that the highways authority takes responsibility. Informally it means that someone shows care. "The benches, tables, planting. Being in the street. Questions about parking, rubbish, who maintains. All of these are about commoning" [191211 Reflection].

Standing in the Alley at various times over the past seven years it was always clear that we needed to innovate a new balance between equity (creating financial value) and equity (sticking to our values of fairness) (DeFilippis 2002; Parvin 2020). The question of how to progress was challenging because we are not following the gentrification approach that would be a typical reaction to this unique space. We faced (and continue to face) dilemmas here more than in any other part of the portfolio. This is fundamentally due to the Alley's historic and actually-existing nature as a commons and our commitment to sustain and develop that common nature rather than, as most developers would, attempt to enclose it. Paradoxically, we (the social enterprise developer and ultimately the community land trust) are 'taking ownership' in order to protect common ownership. The Alley was extremely dilapidated, dirty, and 'antisocial'. Yet it was quiet. Any and all improvement for the common good results in people making use of the space which leads to noise and disturbance for the few long-term residents. Our version – building a Pocket Park that welcomes teenagers, stabilising and planting up the cliff-face, creating interlinked 'patio gardens' for all to use – seemed to make at least one resident want to leave. Additionally, the spaces clustered around the Alley are for 'leisure' – that is, public-facing uses that are neither homes nor office space. Such uses are heavily 'coded' by class and subculture: people look at a cafe or a bar and can tell whether it's 'for them' before they ever see the prices. Our challenge will be to create spaces coded for inclusion.

In these three vignettes I have sought to use individual property stories to draw out aspects of the enactment of property that remain hidden in the more usual narrative which encompasses the whole experience and achievements to date, glossing over the ruptures and wasted periods, the fits and starts of property processes (see Meanwhile

Space 2019 for further honesty about the challenges). I have argued, with Harvey (1973: 13-14), that the conceptualisation of the spaces in question is resolved through human practice with respect to those spaces. How much more so, then, can that be applied heterotopologically to a *portfolio* of spatio-temporal-social (Borch interview with Soja 2002) spaces, practices and values, and perhaps to the wider *neighbourhood* itself?

8.4 Harnessing Resources

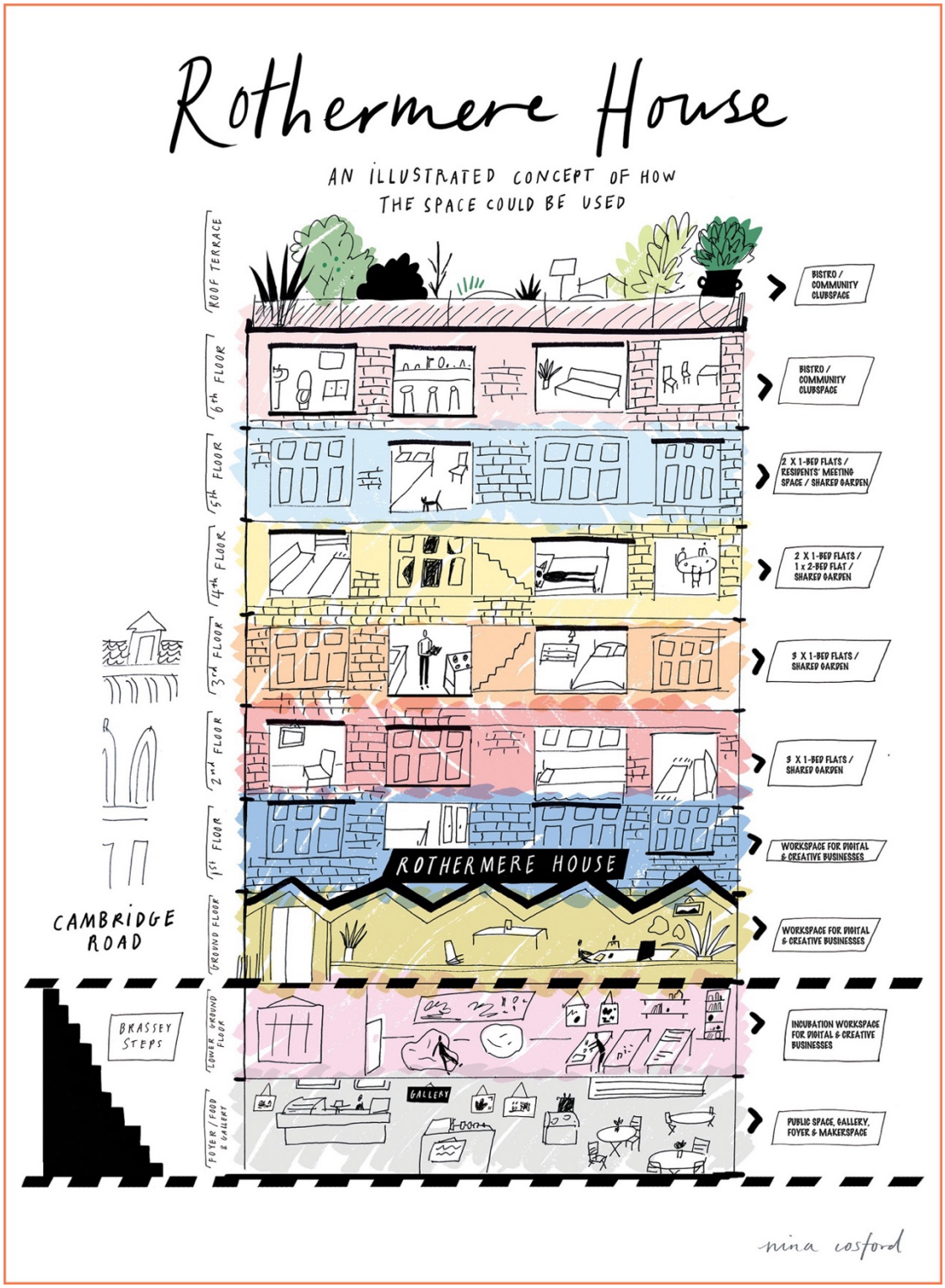
It is not only in the property deal itself that community agents must engage with dominant commodified property models. The enactment, development and management of property requires significant resources, both financial and human. Harnessing these, especially in the form of loans, requires a clear understanding of the creation, maintenance and perpetual growth of property value, even while seeking to de-prioritise exchange value for the sake of long-term use value. Seeking to extend communal wealth, we must increase the book-values of our property in order to borrow more for new acquisitions. Value is judged partly on the strength of the tenant covenant, pushing SRN decision-makers towards choosing more stable and profitable tenants against our desire to support more risky and marginal uses that benefit local communities.

The foundational resource is not money but vision. One of the distinctive features of SRN is that this is less of a 'visioning exercise' and more a long process of absorption. Hannah Sloggett, of Nudge Community Builders in Plymouth captures it:

> "One of the things we learned was to listen all the time. It might be one thing that someone says that you can convert into something you can make happen. We don't do a lot of formal consultation but we're all the time soaking up what the issues are, what people are talking about, what they'd like to see. And seeing how that can play out in what we do" (Sloggett 2021).

In my view, you need 'vision' (ideas + enthusiasm) to get people excited and you need 'sight' (familiarity + reflection) to develop the best uses.

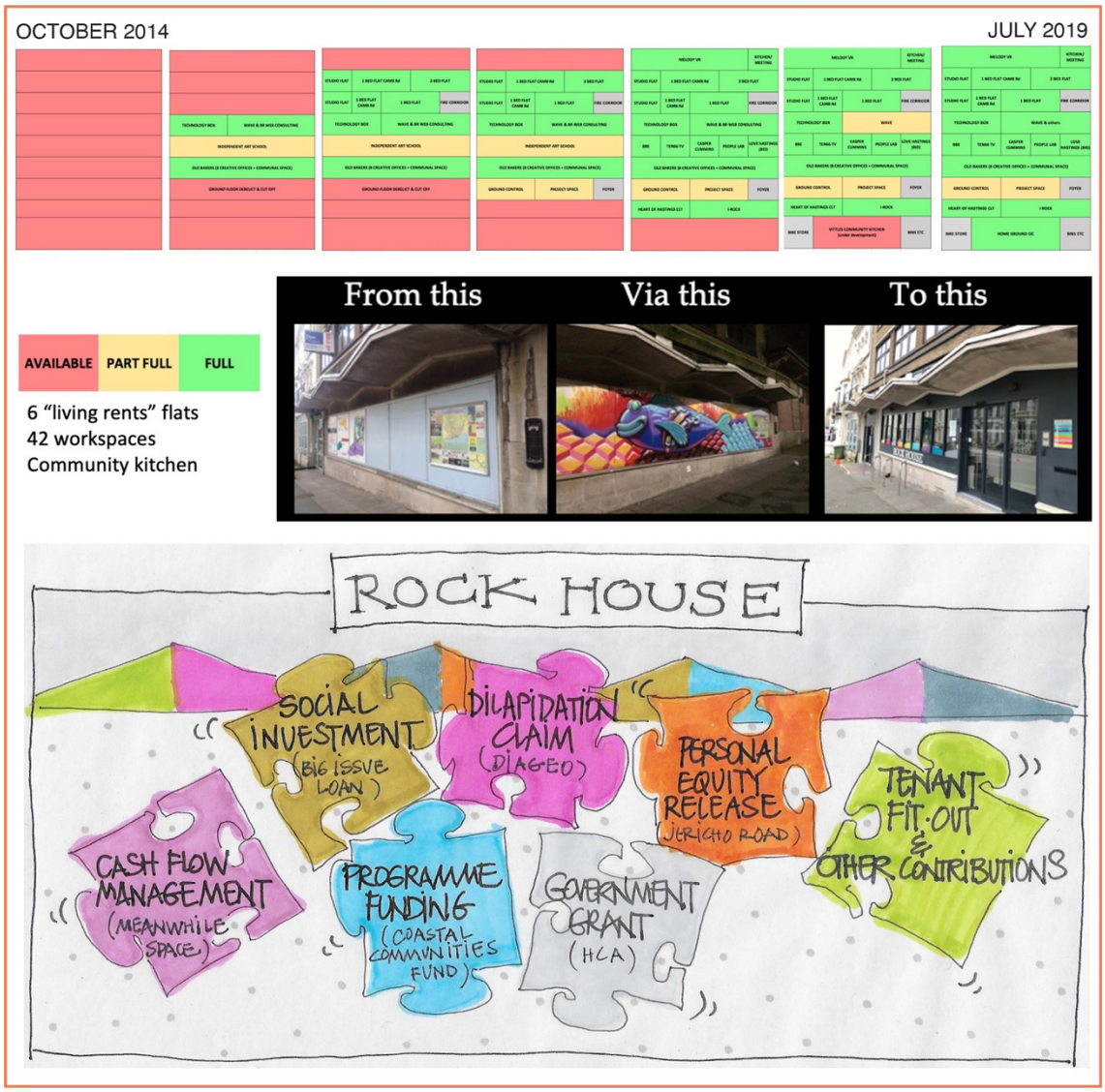
Figure 8.5: Nina Cosford's 2014 illustration of Rock House. "I think one of the most effective bit of comms was the cartoon sketch of the concept. It made the plans clear but accessible, it wasn't a glossy vision of the future" [210715 Eddie]



As described in Chapter 5, Jericho Road and Meanwhile Space collectively financed the purchase of Rock House, using personal equity release and an Empty Homes grant. The approach we took, which is described in Physical Renovation below, later came to

be known as ‘phased organic development’. At the time we saw it as moving forward a little at a time bolstered and protected by the security of freehold ownership. Building on my experience of Hastings Pier where we ran a twin-track approach balancing ownership and funding, here it was a triple-track of development, financing and use.

Figure 8.6: Rock House – organic phased development



Two early financial rewards came directly from that ownership. We completed the purchase in late June 2014 so became the recipients of the rent from the last quarter of Diageo’s 25-year lease. On 1st October we took vacant possession and began a Dilapidations claim, despite being told Diageo’s lawyers would never accept it. Though none of us had any experience we were supported by Third Sector Alliance who managed to achieve an award of over £130,000 of which we kept £115,000.

While the 80+ grants and loans harnessed in White Rock since 2014 is extreme, the context of multiple funding streams (and therefore multiple funder relationships) is inevitable in SRN. Granby got started with the Steinbeck loan and a Nationwide Foundation grant, then were supported by Power to Change and Architectural Heritage Fund, alongside a large Arts Council award for the Winter Garden.

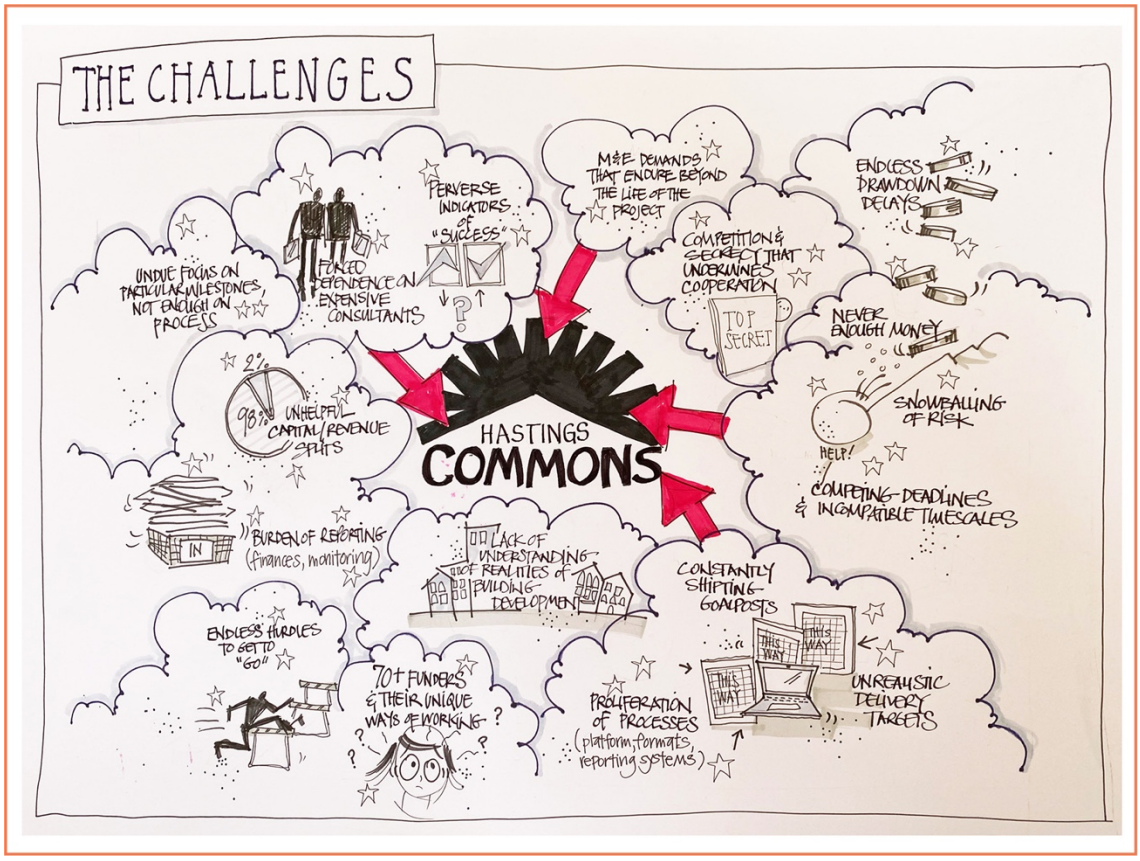
The securing and managing of these grants and loans is a major and ongoing task for the self-renovating neighbourhood. There are two positive points to make. First, bid-writing in the SRN context is itself a creative and decision-making process. The process of explaining who you are, what you want to do, and why – however regimented, deadlined, word-counted – actively shapes what will happen next. It is also intensely relational and discursive. In every bid process you are making decisions about how to pitch and whether to use 'their language' – as with Assemble "poaching the language of 'homesteading' to push buttons" or the radical Mutual Home Ownership Scheme sounding respectable because it includes the words 'home ownership' [160628 Assemble]. Often we are forced to use the language of Land Value Uplift, outputs and 'beneficiaries' to unlock funding, but in the other direction bidding offers a chance to shift the dominant language by introducing alternative concepts. Once submitted the bid becomes part of the papers for various assessors and decision-making boards; if successful the summary will be published next to powerful logos; once they invest they usually want to visit, providing the opportunity for further influencing. The Hastings Commons has partly been brought into being through giving its name to the title of funding bids[54]. Second, the disciplines of funding – the need to continually report, explain, plan and predict – do have their benefits in terms of reflection, planning and improvement. There are few jobs with as much emphasis on this continuous explanation and justification. Pollyanna-like, I try to find some comfort in that.

There is no doubt, however, that fundraising and funding management is extremely hard work, and supremely frustrating. The deadlines always rain downwards. Up the

[54] However, beware, 'they' are also trying to steal 'our' language. Hastings Borough Council described as 'bottom up' a process in which 150+ people individually 'submitted' their ideas for the Town Deal.

chain, rules and timeframes are fixed until they choose to break them. At the bottom, where the justification for the funding lies, we have to jump (or wait). The processes are bespoke to each funder; each more or less clunky, together a cacophony of platforms, spreadsheets, forms, surveys, rules of evidence, and other practices worthy of deep anthropological study. The 'distracted patience' of urban governments mentioned in Chapter 2 has been manifest in how long they will abide the unbearable dereliction, how capable they are at moving astonishingly slowly, the lack of agency implicit in how they 'wait for the guidance', and the scared-cat jump that they do when it finally arrives.

Figure 8.7: Funding challenges for the Hastings Commons (Sherry Clark, Feb 2022)



It has now become *de rigeur* for central government to announce a funding programme to be run from one or other tier of local government, insist on 'independent' (ie private sector) Technical Evaluators and then require Section 151 officer sign-off to shift all the risk. It is no surprise that the legal agreement that comes eventually to the 'delivery partner' passes that risk straight over. In the recent case of

the Community Renewal Fund, UK Government ignored the prioritised lists resulting from all this assessment activity, delayed announcement and added another layer of assessment process which proved itself confused by the realities of actual projects on the ground, resulting in the sudden loss of nearly £1M of anticipated funding for the Hastings Commons.

It may be changes in the balance of our funding, or a sign of wider changes, that our funding is increasingly intermediated. The CHART programme is managed by Hastings Borough Council on behalf of a rather shadowy Managing Authority which is assumed to include representatives of UK central government and of the European Regional Development Fund. The Getting Building Fund came out of Boris Johnson's "build build build" messaging and reached the ground via the Local Enterprise Partnership > Essex Council (the SELEP accountable body) > East Sussex County Council > White Rock Neighbourhood Ventures. Every grant, loan and change request has to go through this process with legal agreements and sign-off at each finance threshold. This can mean long and uncertain gaps between approval and the ability to claim any funds. What is noticeable is how little understanding or alignment these funding processes have to the way building projects actually happen. The lack of practical development experience or knowledge inside the funder/council/civil service leads to arbitrary rules, unrealistic timeframes, a simplistic split between 'capital' and 'revenue', and undue focus on specific milestones (such as planning permission) that miss the point of development as a process.

Chiappini and Tornberg describe the 'grant machine' in which we compete "to mobilise discursive resources and form convincing coalitions" (2019: 88) – a good definition of my role in the Hastings Commons (alongside coming up with plausible numbers). They probe the idea that the very features that might be seen to prove that this work is more than just empty rhetoric, "for example, collaboration, openness in urban governance, civic engagement and grassroots entrepreneurship – in fact may be precisely part of a strategy in a new competitive realm of empty rhetoric" (ibid: 88). While recognising that such language is routinely manipulated, I think people are sensitive to the (in)authenticity of their use in context.

After 30 years of experience in the regeneration field I know that there is no straight-line progress. Indeed I have seen repeating waves of non-sense coming from governments of all levels and political colours; spirals of interesting-sounding fashions take root among funders then die out to be reborn in another decade; and the zombie-like return of indicators, outputs, outcomes and deliverables that are not regenerative and should never have been valorised (such as local authority dwellings demolished, land value uplift, kilometres of road built). We will probably always have to 'mix the funding cocktail' at local level, but I live in hope that the funders will become better mixers [EMP: 211122 Vidhya Alakeson, CEO of Power to Change]. For SRN to be feasible more widely, funder mindsets and approaches need to transform, beyond what the National Lottery Community Fund call 'conversational funding' to achieve participative funding (Paterson 2020) in which the focus shifts from the one-to-many relationship between funders and their supplicants to a humbler understanding of the one-to-many relationship between neighbourhoods and their funders.

The type and sources of funds need to expand to enable new investment in which money flows round within the place and between neighbourhoods through solidarity mechanisms invented and managed by active leaders at local level. Heart of Hastings has been innovative here. Frustrated by the speed at which properties were sold when they became available, it seemed we needed a benevolent millionaire to provide a 'war chest'. Not having access to any such benefactor, we set out to 'make our own' by establishing an Investors Collective (IC). Individuals invested between £5,000 and £50,000 with 90% of it as a 3-year loan paying interest of 3% pa and 10% held as long-term equity in community shares. Following a series of 'pizza evenings', HoH raised £150,000 which secured the purchase of a 4-storey building at 39 Cambridge Road.

When the renovation costs turned out to be twice as high as predicted we planned to open out the pilot IC to a wider audience through the online investment platform Ethex. A full prospectus was written but by the time it was complete, we had secured other finance to fill the immediate gap so decided the prospectus should be for a wider portfolio including 12 Claremont. Delays in enacting property, and pressure to focus on other resources – in this case an ultimately unsuccessful bid to Heritage Lottery Fund –

meant the broader prospectus was not completed. As the ecosystem became more intertwined and our ambition grew, we began investigating a 'neighbourhood investment mechanism' for wider use within and to expand the Hastings Commons, with a potential 'umbrella nim' that would connect 'commons-style' activity in neighbourhoods around the country [EMP: 201130 nim discussion document; 210624 nim position paper]. This kind of 'scale jumping' (Smith 1992), proceeding through horizontal solidarity, can help escape the traps of local particularism through an expansion of geographic and political reach (Jones et al 2017: 143).

The resources required are by no means all financial. I have touched above on the hard work and expertise needed just to secure and manage the various financial elements. Further need for skills, brains, brawn and determination will be evident in the sections below.

Stephen Pritchard has suggested that Granby is not an example of 'community-led regeneration' because it involved money and support from outside the neighbourhood (Pritchard 2016; Mann 2019). Yet Ronnie Hughes' film made for Granby in May 2011 explicitly states: "We'll widen our contacts, broaden who we speak to, look to others for help and inspiration – other trusts, other places." This entrepreneurial harnessing of help wherever it can be found is certainly evident in both case studies and should be included in the SRN characteristic *initiated and led by local people and businesses* (see figure 10.1).

8.5 Engaging, organising, capacitating

The previous chapter outlined sustained engagement as the currency of power for SRN, the need to harness and build capacity, confidence and credibility, and the importance of sociability, impatience, thrift and innovation as *attitudes* within SRN. Here I look at these elements again but this time seeing them as *processes* of SRN. These processes are not only instrumental in the darning of the fabric and the achievement of portfolios; they are also fundamental to shaping and reproducing the *culture* of neighbourhood commoning that lies at the heart of SRN.

Culture is formed from repeated actions that become normalised, not some separate or 'higher' thing. Community is conversations that happen over and over, embedding particular stories and values over time (Blokland 2017: 29; Neal et al 2019). If we work for our conversations to be about generosity, gifts and hope, these repetitions build up trust and care, not just among the participants but extending to fill the spatial container (our neighbourhood, our town, our city) and reaching into our shared future. The evil twin of these repetitions is the discipline of the market in which the repeated interaction is transaction based on exchange value. Over time that negative feedback loop teaches that exchange value becomes the only thing that matters[55], with dramatic consequences for spatial futures.

Alongside academic (Head 2007; Johnston and Lane 2019) and practitioner (Kearney and Olsen 2009; Locality 2010; Citizens UK 2021) literatures, here I draw on my own prior experience from the early 1990s to date (including but not limited to the research in Granby and White Rock) to summarise my understanding of community engagement and organising. If c*onsultation* is two smooth discs passing within an inch of each other, then *engagement* is two cogs interlocking to make something happen, through the direct involvement of people who have reason to care in a wide range of agentive rather than passive roles. The engagement process involves reaching out, connecting people, places, organisations, issues and ideas in a two-way dialogue that creates lasting social bonds that are tethered to the place. Engagement should be ongoing, creative, accessible, responsive, and ambitious. It should focus primarily on questions not answers, replace advice with curiosity.

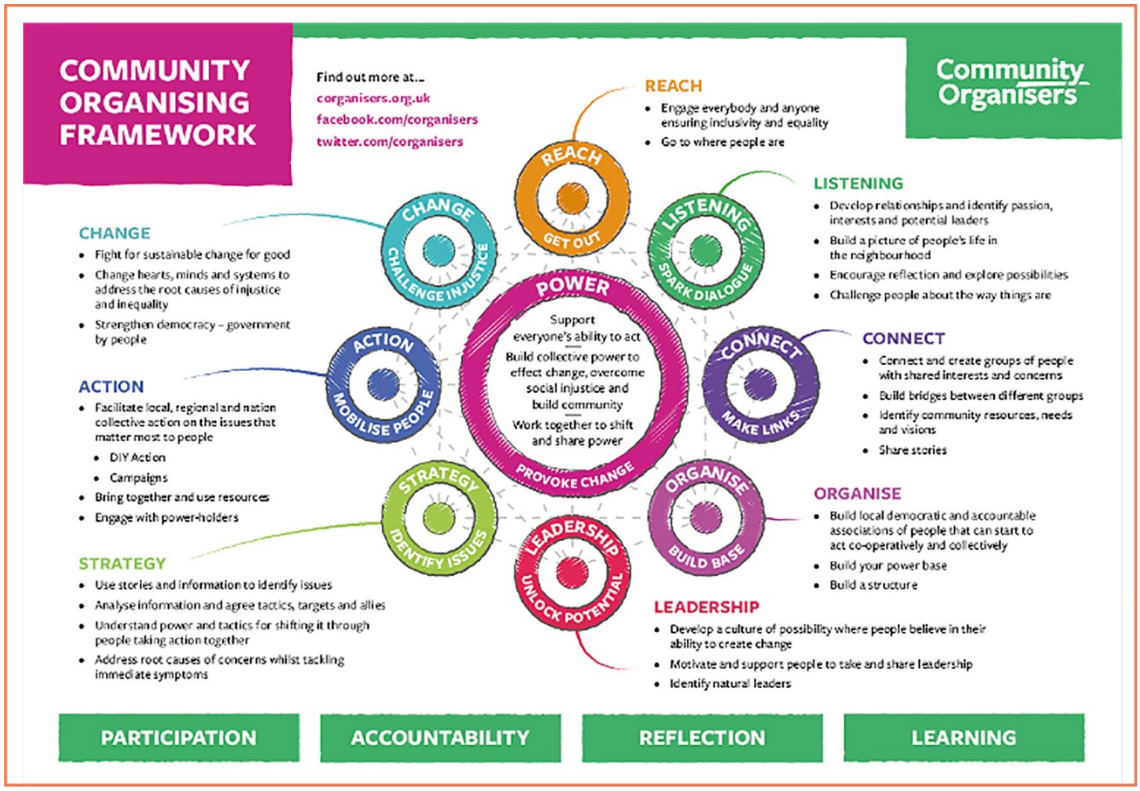
> "Questions are more transformative than answers – they are the essential tools of engagement. A great question is ambiguous – requiring each person to bring their own personal meaning into the room. It is personal, it evokes anxiety/has edge" (Block 2018: 110).

A community organising (CO) approach to engagement involves 'reach' – going out not staying in, using door-knocking and a range of creative outreach techniques (Trapp [1986] 2003; Steele 2000; Magpie 2001). It focuses on one-to-one dialogue. This is not

[55] Attachment Economics discussions Jan-Mar 2021

research but rather about building trust, helping an individual to clarify what matters to them, to identify their passions and potential. It means making connections between people and between ideas, knitting these into networks that build community power, sharing leadership roles, identifying issues and, above all, taking action to achieve change – whether to make demands of the powerful or to establish collective DIY responses, or both (Shragge 2013). These elements are captured in the CO framework shown in figure 8.8, itself based on an earlier 'scaffolding' of community organising, co-created with community organisers across the national CO programme which I developed and led for Locality 2011-15 (see Chapter 4).

Figure 8.8: The 'scaffolding' of Community Organising (Community Organisers a)



The national CO programme was criticised due to its connection to the Big Society rhetoric of David Cameron's Coalition Government, which positioned it as a fig-leaf or sticking-patch over the brutal austerity cuts that came alongside from 2011. However, when the Big Society faltered in 2012 the CO programme continued. Fisher and Dimberg criticise "the paradoxical goals and nature of the program" (2016: 98) while acknowledging the ambition of a national government supporting such grassroots

participation as unprecedented since the US Great Society programs of the early 1960s. They note that, while building on the rhetoric of 'communities in control', this was different: "it actually hired and trained people to be community organisers" (ibid: 97) and that "any mass hiring and training of community organisers has the potential to unleash grassroots democratic fervor" (ibid: 96). They situate Locality's approach "in the moderate middle" because it emphasised community building and asset-based approaches (ibid: 100). I would argue that we emphasise these things because we want communities to have power long term – not just to win one (political) fight after another but to begin to skip some fights as no longer necessary because some 'needs' have been met through harnessing our own resources. I disagree that the promotion of long-term community autonomy and sustainability, freedom and survivability is a 'moderate' goal. Fisher and Dimberg do accept that the programme's 'modest goals' (we fought tooth and nail against imposition of any prior agenda or predicted outputs beyond the numbers of trained and volunteer organisers) and 'limited supervision' (in fact there was significant and carefully-balanced support from trainers, host and peers but also openness to a range of models and approaches), led to a dynamic, interactive process that enabled a wide range of social action projects including some antagonistic to the Cameron administration, austerity and neoliberalism (ibid: 103). My research conclusion is that the Hastings Commons has emerged in White Rock precisely and only because of the 15 years of creative, adaptable neighbourhood-based community organising along these lines.[56]

Locating participation[57] within 'diverse economies', Udall and Holder differentiate between communicative, organisational and productive participatory practices (2013: 70-71). In the remainder of this section I explore how these issues of power, action and engagement have played out on the ground, first drawing on the Granby story and then diving more deeply into questions of power and participation in Hastings.

[56] There has been at least one full-time community organiser or engagement worker hosted in White Rock since 2013.

[57] "A set of practices that seeks to develop and explore the desires of communities as well as address diverse needs, and through this process to contribute to the productive and reproductive work of spatial justice" (Udall & Holder 2013: 63)

Figure 8.9: Lessons in community engagement

After 30 years in the field of community engagement I continue to be surprised, make mistakes, reflect and learn. However, that experience led me to some core conclusions which I bring to the work in Hastings and to advising community groups everywhere.

First lesson of engagement practice: "*It doesn't just happen on its own, it requires invitation, connecting and building*" (Fell 2021).

- **Start sooner rather than later, and don't stop**

  Community groups often tell me 'we're not ready yet to go out and talk to people, we need to write the plan'. This is both ethically and tactically wrong. Experience has shown that the kinds of 'plan' required are endlessly evolving. SRN takes years, decades, and involves many different people. The praxis of action and reflection must be collective, open and ongoing in order to improve the 'product' and renew the base. As the years build up behind, both Granby and White Rock take pride in a heritage of sustained community engagement. In White Rock, where there is a clearer focus on temporality through phased organic development, this has been explicit and carefully catalogued (see Appendix C1).

- **Spend more time on the porch**

  Sociability is a key coordinate of SRN. Spending time together, hanging out, 'chewing the fat', talking stuff through – this is where the innovations come from. Such activities sit on a spectrum of (in)formality from chance chats and completely free-flowing environments (which still take focused energy to enable and sustain), through a variety of models of learning through dialogue (from Mondragon's study circles to Freirean and feminist consciousness raising[1]), to more planned opportunities such as the Common Treasury events held in Hastings 2019-20 where over 100 local participants had a morning of inspiration from grassroots people from elsewhere and an afternoon for the hard work of adaptation. In Granby 'the porch' is the street, especially Cairns Street with its benches and planters, its intense 'neighbourality'. In White Rock, the interstitial spaces (lobbies, corridors, stairwells, the Alley) have always been locations for diverse encounters. As the portfolio grows these interstices are expanding and we are also designing in more deliberate shared spaces, such as the public living room at Eagle House.

- **Look for strengths and gifts to address needs and gaps**

  My work has always been 'asset-based' in three ways – firstly through a focus on the genius loci, the unique inheritance, what is *already in place*; secondly through a belief in people as capable creative agents and collective action as more than the sum of the parts; and thirdly through a mission to rescue and revivify the most fundamental and lasting neighbourhood asset – space – and, where possible, redirect both its use-value and exchange-value into perpetual common good. The community organising focus on self-interest/passion is identified and harnessed through *listening* which builds trust, respect and relationships, finds and supports leaders, gathers issues and inspires solutions (Kearney and Olsen 2009).

[1] Freire 1972; Butterwick 1987; Cain, Kushner and Thomas 2021. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to explore in depth the pedagogy within SRN and the commons but this would be a worthwhile further research project.

In Granby, as outlined in Chapter 5, the backdrop was the long years of punishment and resistance. SRN began with the pivot to DIY: sweeping, planting, painting, table sales. These actions in themselves provided an almost palpable injection of agency, and as Cairns Street became greener the results strengthened the self-efficacy beliefs of those involved [160609 Hazel]. Thompson (2015, 2020) has traced how the concept of a community land trust became adopted in Liverpool, and particularly in Granby. It could be seen as a legitimised vehicle to enable the shift from the defensive actions of Granby Residents to the proactive DIY approach that aimed to rescue 10 houses. The CLT was a flexible enough format to be able to consider the neighbourhood holistically, not just the four streets of terraced housing but also the four corners of degraded commercial premises at the junction of Cairns and Granby streets. Assemble's development of the Granby workshop – recycling the demolition rubble into beautiful artefacts that would enhance the refurbished houses – could be seen as the epitome of positive DIY. "We even make our own light-pulls!" [181213 Hazel].

Engagement in Granby was primarily through everyday neighbouring and joint participation in DIY urbanism actions including street-gardening and the market. Through these actions and the reflexive discourse they enabled, Cairns Street in particular was reconstituted as a commons, a space reclaimed in all functional senses as belonging to, and the responsibility of, its community. For Hazel this was a return to the true nature of terraced streets: "The whole street is open to a great extent and you see your neighbours, you come and go on a common platform" [151201 Hazel]. However, this 'ownership' can never be complete or uncontested. The housing associations and the city council retain their property ownership and urban management powers and are able to flex or relax those muscles at their own choosing. But the power dynamic certainly shifted with the DIY reconstitution of place through the active engagement of residents. New neighbours coming to Granby in the past five years have entered an entirely different atmosphere to those prevailing over the previous half-century, an atmosphere which exudes hope and care rather than despair or anger.

In Hastings, the backdrop was the spectacular story of the pier rescue. Seeing the pier as embedded in and emblematic of both White Rock and Hastings as nested places, this success with a single, 'totemic' asset was deliberately and consciously widened to neighbourhood DIY through two primary routes – neighbourhood planning and property development, punctuated throughout with sustained, sociable engagement.

The White Rock experience of neighbourhood planning, described in Chapter 6, both gave and took away 'voice' from local people. Regardless of its efficacy, the work certainly sustained the ongoing task of 'getting to know people and place' which is finally (2022) due to be codified in the form of a shared Commons database. It also might be seen to have engendered the strategic neighbourhood regeneration approach that eventually resulted in the submission of the Heritage Action Zone bid. This was a long process of building power through connecting people one at a time to the idea that they might have a role in shaping the future of the place. This power building is topological rather than topographical (Allen 2016), based not on fixed distances of spatial scale but on how connections and relations "come together and play out in the same place" (Brownill 2017: 147).[58]

Intervening in local property in White Rock began with the meanwhile leases at 5 Trinity and the Rock House basement. However, these early 'acquisitions' were described as 'premises' and performed as instruments and spaces of engagement, drop-in spaces for community action, rather than a challenge to the power dimensions of property ownership [EMP: 140407 WRT minutes]. Even the attempt to purchase the Observer Building was, at that time (2013-14), focused on rescuing a much-loved landmark and ridding the area of its pigeon menace rather than driven by a desire for decommodification. Nevertheless, by 2015 the 'gentrification conversation' was in full swing, concluding with the formation of the Heart of Hastings community land trust to bring more property into community ownership and cap the rents forever. Six years later we were in possession of nearly 8,000 square metres of space, comprising a significant stake in the neighbourhood.

[58] See Figure 7.1 – a gaming approach to mapping community connections.

In both neighbourhood planning and property development activities, there has been an explicit commitment to extensive, intensive and sustained community engagement over a period of more than 15 years, and to the deliberate inclusion in place-making of those who usually miss out. Engagement methods have included door-knocking, walking tours, and events of all kinds (see App C: Community Engagement in White Rock 2006-2021). Learning from community organising, we have sought to *provide space for conversations*, for the "complex and often contradictory process of activist-becoming-activist" (Chatterton and Pickerill 2010: 479), for "being-in-common as part of a 'community economy'" (Gibson-Graham 2006: 97). Over many years, the cumulative effect (Williams 2018) of all of these horizontal engagement actions strengthens the synaptic web of the local crowd and authenticates the collective voice.

From 2016 the engagement approach in Hastings was informed and nuanced by the experience of trying to create an Organisation Workshop (OW). The OW idea came to Hastings from Marsh Farm Outreach (MFO) who completed the first UK OW in Luton in July 2015. The OW is an approach to large-scale capacitation that began in Brazil in the 1960s under the leadership of Clodomir Santos de Morais (Carmen and Sobrado 2000). It immerses a large (40+) group of people excluded from the labour market in an intensive experience of 4-12 weeks in which they are provided with space, materials, equipment, and access to mentors *but must organise themselves* to gain access to the common resources and take on contracts to achieve agreed improvements to a space or building. In Gibson-Graham's typology (2014: S150) the OW would be seen as an *alternative market* approach, since participants are able to earn collectively through fulfilling contracts. In the UK regulatory framework it is *non-market* because it is so difficult to pay people who are receiving social security benefits. That means it becomes more focused on collective volunteering, working together to make something.

> "The theory is simple – a large group of 'excluded' people are given the land and the 'means of production' (equipment, materials, access to expertise). The only thing missing is organisation which they must create themselves. As they do so, they not only transform the land, creating assets for their own community, but the individuals themselves are positively changed as they grow friendships, networks and enterprises" [EMP: 190301 OW flier].

I had been a keen supporter of MFO's work and their efforts to bring the OW to the UK since the early 2000s. In 2015 I invited them and seasoned OW Director Ivan Labra, to Hastings to explore the opportunities here. There was a lot of interest and we were encouraged by the leader of Hastings Borough Council to focus on the Ore Valley power station site. We began to recruit the 'Bottom Up Development' (BUD) team, initially to start with a door-to-door survey. A big discussion in Sept 2016 when our new full-time community organiser had just come on board and we had the keys to the site, led us to drop the survey and focus on the site. The aim was to build up the BUD both on-site as stewards and volunteers and off-site as outreach workers reaching more people through door-knocking, stalls and going to meetings. We would occupy the land, developing facilities and resources while we undertook a deeply-engaged planning process with the aim to use an OW approach to build a first house and then follow through with 75 eco-homes plus workspace and community facilities, all built by an enterprise that would emerge from the OW.

The reality as it developed on the ground at the Ore Valley site was both more than and less than expectations. The positive impact on individuals was visible and significant, and the bonding capital built within the BUD strong and inspiring, yet it did not expand to reach the numbers of people nor focus skills and effort to achieve the physical changes that had been anticipated. Week after week of occupation led to a series of material changes as described in Bec Lester's (2019) dissertation, but not to the 'homestead' originally envisaged. This could always be explained by the dampening effect of ongoing uncertainty about the land, but it was disappointing nonetheless. More than 1,000 people came to the site, lots of them many times, and there were some great community events but in the end we were unable to leverage this power-base effectively.

The decision by the regeneration agency Sea Space in December 2018 to 'market-test' the Ore Valley site and their insistence that this required the eviction of Heart of Hastings and the BUD Team from the land, led directly to the Organisation Workshop happening instead in the Observer Building in April-May 2019. Indeed this was often framed unhelpfully in negative terms as "because we can't do the big OW at Ore Valley

we will do a little one in the Observer Building", downgrading expectations and, to an extent, preparations for the OW. Additionally, delays to the purchase of the building meant acute uncertainty for the OW. In the end completion of the sale took place just 9 weeks before 60 people turned up for a month-long intensive experience within the huge, empty, cold and part-derelict building! A full report of the OW process and lessons learned was completed but remains as yet unpublished. Key themes are summarised in figure 8.10.

Figure 8.10: Lessons from the Organisation Workshop, held at the Observer Building April/May 2019

Key Themes from the Hastings OW:
• The evolution of leadership, organisation and solidarity
• Transforming one-off actions into process
• Mutual support and bonding
• Forms of learning
• Modeling behaviour
• Reflective dialogue
• Trial and error
• Sharing existing strengths and skills
• Seeing is believing
• Mental health and wellbeing – anticipating confusion, stress and intensity
• Understanding individual needs
• Dealing with drop-off
• Balancing learning with intervention
Key lessons for future OWs included:
• Separate OW design from preparation
• If objects teach, choose them wisely
• Open the process with thought and care
• Put mental wellbeing on par with health & safety
• Reflect on the diversity of your cohort before, during and after
• Help participants set a framework for acceptable behaviour
• Focus on the O in OW, challenge the first emergent 'organisation'
• Make formal learning two-way and both large- and small-group
• Be clear about what happens next, plan for follow-through
• Unlearn some of the OW dogma to allow for innovation

From the Hastings Commons perspective, the Observer OW did not lead to the dream of White Rock Renovators as a social enterprise building firm. It did, however, continue the tradition of productive improvisation in engagement and capacitation. Since our

social impact focus is on 'life-changing opportunities' and 'place-shaping opportunities', the OW was an intelligent and ambitious place to start the building's new, decommodified life.

8.6 Physical renovation

8.6.1 The choices we make

While organic phased development is shaped in part by those who come forwards during the process, this is itself guided by initial choices about vision, ethos, uses, rents and tenant selection. As Hazel [210706] put it about Granby: "We started with a load of empty houses and no people, so what we did then was right". In White Rock the Observer Building "was the rotting heart of the neighbourhood for 35 years. It very obviously needed solving. We went the long way round to achieve that and ended up with the Hastings Commons. The question is: can future communities in Hastings protect and expand that commons for the benefit of the town?" [201010 Fieldnote]. In both these quotes what is hidden is as interesting as what is said. Both begin with a problem that needed solving; each explains that they just got on with it, and that there is more to be done. What they don't describe, because the assumption is hard-wired, is the foundational ethic that guided their actions – the vision to make things positively different; not just to solve dereliction and 'return' to some previous better moment but to 'bounce forwards' (Steele 2020). These places were 'building back better' long before it became a UK Gov slogan (Johnson and Sunak 2021).

In both Granby and White Rock, the work to renovate and develop the buildings was significant in scale and challenge but its meaning lay in the potential to create alternative spaces of dwelling, of work, exchange and consumption, and of public/communal life (Fisker et al 2019: 10-14). The commitment to affordability in perpetuity and to tenant selection criteria that prioritise need, local connection and community building is present in both. In White Rock we are more explicit about using this to embed new social norms in which it is normal "to look out for each other and look after the place" [EMP: HC postcard, Sep 21].

Both case studies have intervened in and created mixed use environments, which is part of what takes them beyond community-led housing and into SRN. Granby CLT has protected, renovated and provided homes out of what would otherwise be rubble, but the vision was always broader than housing. The neighbourhood housework that had preceded the CLT formation meant it would always be about the four streets as a place not just a collection of terraced houses facing each other. The physical inheritance included the 'public realm' of the roadway, the Four Corners and two houses too dilapidated to be restored economically as homes. Assemble's involvement led to short-term 'leisure' uses of 48 Cairns Street including as a mini-cinema and the establishing of Granby Workshop, which began to meet the long-held desire to generate work and training for local people, especially young people [EMP: 140525 Tracey Gore, Granby].

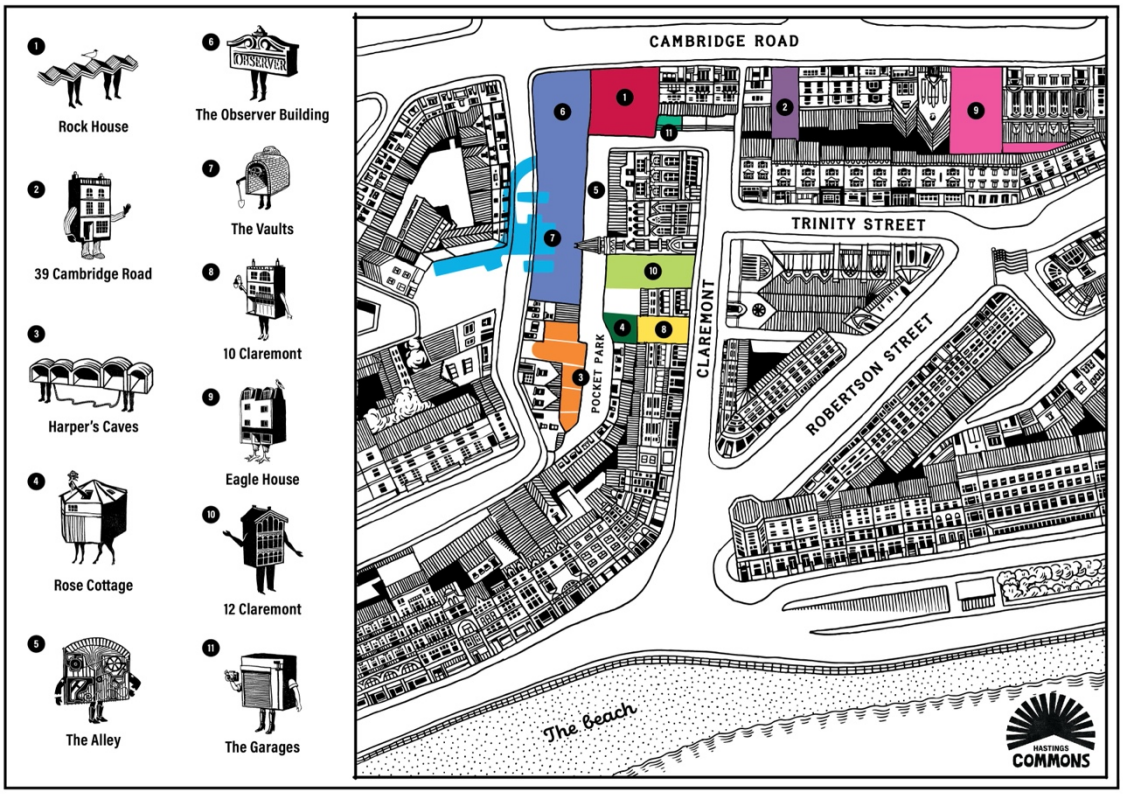
In White Rock we always planned mixed use for Rock House: because it allows a range of funding options, because none of us came from a housing background (so our homes are embedded in the wider use rather than dominating it), and because we wanted to make a busy, creative space of encounter and collaboration. The Observer Building was considered an extension of this 'beds-and-desks' approach, but one of its many unique challenges is the quantum of space that cannot be either homes or workspace. Along with the acquisition of other unusual spaces, this forced us to confront more complex questions about 'leisure' uses as described above in the vignette about the Alley. The pressures of spending deadlines and the constraints of a global pandemic have made it particularly difficult to undertake our version of parallel development, where uses and renovation emerge organically in a symbiotic relationship. Too often we are being forced to describe in advance and in detail, with related projected outputs and outcomes, something that should be allowed to be emergent.

> "Say that old council yard, it's been a fireplace shop, then someone turns it into a music studio, then someone opens a cafe because there's enough business. And it grows organically and becomes cool. But we're trying to do transformational change with difficult buildings and difficult money" [210315 Ronan]

Nevertheless, making and re-making the spaces ourselves disrupts the 'sharp in / sharp out' model which "assumes a division between the makers and the users of space" (Tonkiss 2013: 320). Despite the challenges, choices about the redevelopment of the Observer Building, the Lower Alley and Eagle House – as with Rock House before them – have been completely entwined with the needs and interests of existing and prospective tenants.

As client we are able to set core standards around heritage conservation, environmental sustainability, maximising use and building in opportunities for encounter and collaboration. More detailed design considerations are beyond the scope of this thesis but would be worthy of specialist research and analysis. While each individual building is a character (see fig 8.10) with its own focus and issues, it would also be an interesting next step to explore in depth the 'space syntax' (Hillier and Hanson 1984) of the Hastings Commons as a whole, exploring 'internal' community and 'external' detachment, connections between the social and spatial logics, the detailed structures and interconnectivity of the component spaces and their distributed ("ringy") or non-distributed ("tree-like") forms (Caldenby, Hagbert and Wasshede 2019: 164).

Figure 8.11: The Commons in the immediate neighbourhood (Rachel Bright, Feb 2022)



8.6.2 The realities of renovation

Thick description "spreads everything out to the limits of our tolerance for dimensionality and detail" (Gibson-Graham 2006: xxxi). To describe and analyse the full scope of the processes that make physical change across the Hastings Commons would break those limits. Instead I focus here primarily on Rock House and the Observer Building as examples of our development process.

When we bought Rock House in 2014 we had a quantity surveyor's (QS) report saying it would cost £1.89M to convert and we had £80k in the bank. We disposed of the report and used the £80k to bring two floors into use for identified tenants. We had no experience and no project architect, just an engineer and a 'floors diagram' in Excel. Within four years we had completed 8 of the 9 floors and we celebrated sustainability with an 'Into the Black' party (see figure 7.12).

Having watched the process with somewhat bated breath, our mentor Chris Brown [210823] believes this could never have operated inside the dominant 'whole-system' of property development as described in Chapter 2. Instead, through a process which we came to call 'phased organic development'[59], we achieved a transformation – from dereliction to dense productive use with jobs and homes and shared space, financially successful and an asset now worth six times what we paid for it – with minimal participation in that dominant dynamic. Project-managed and cash-flowed by Meanwhile Space (MWS), fundraised by Jericho Road (JRS), built by Hastings Building Services (HBS), it was collectively 'delivered' (in the midwife sense) by an ever-growing team of tenants and associates, with a small but inclusive entrepreneurial board at its heart. Later in the process Casper Cummins came on board as architect, having been a tenant of Rock House for some time already. We began to pay a local QS to work alongside Chris Dodwell of HBS.

[59] Years later one member of the team captured the essence of phased organic development in the phrase "we know what we're doing even though we don't know what we're going to do!" [190207 Fieldnote].

The experience of developing the Observer Building could hardly be more different, despite our principled commitment to phased organic development. The building is so much bigger, more derelict, more expensive, the logistics so complex, the expectations so high, and the funding so ringed with burdens, rules and tripwires.

> "The OB is an unusually difficult building – a cave in the bottom, concrete in the middle, historic faience at the front, lean-tos at the back and side. With complicated funding, phased and with every single use class somewhere in there" – Sarah Castle, Observer Building architect [EMP: 210813 OB WP2 mtg].

Figure 8.12 Serious dereliction – the east elevation of the Observer Building (Aerial Surveys & Inspections Ltd, July 2020)

Given the importance of the building, and hemmed about by people calling TINA, we bowed to the RIBA stage framework, the need for a full professional team (including

the cost consultant) paid on percentage of total project costs,[60] reliance on the performance of planners, paying the builder to cover the 'value engineering' process, and other egregious consequences of playing from a weak position within the dominant system. Penalties for change (in budget, scope and timing) are anathema to SRN yet completely standard in the industry. Despite excellent skills and relationships at the core of the project, we have often found ourselves frustrated, compromising and/or paying way over the odds – each time looking back fondly to those first four years at Rock House (despite the conflicts described elsewhere in this thesis) and wondering how we might combine these approaches to best effect in undertaking future building renovations. Phased organic development can be seen as a triple-track, symbiotic relationship between uses, renovation and funding.

All development ventures have a classic 'horror story'. In Granby's case that was the contract for the first five houses (see Appendix B); in White Rock it was a building developed directly by Heart of Hastings with a combination of poor relationship management, a difficult contractor, and inadequate prior knowledge of works and costs. The project was eventually completed and rented as four flats (3 at Living Rents and 1 at LHA rate). However, the shoddy building work causes seemingly endless issues, including serious flooding from wrongly-fitted pipes, and the original overspend makes it is hard to see how the building will ever become an asset.

8.6.3 Costs and value(s)

Phased organic development inevitably increases some costs if compared against a standardised production of units of value. Instead of economies of scale, we rely on economies of trust and proximity (Vanguard 2014). Instead of standardised processes we deploy trial-and-error as 'productive improvisation' (Kumar 2021; Jeffrey and Dyson 2021; Massey 2005). We reconfigured the Second Floor of Rock House three times before finding a lettable approach: it now has five offices that have been

[60] The 'professional team' for building projects are paid on the basis of a percentage of the construction budget. It seems to me there is no clearer way to misalign interests. When the tender prices came in higher than expected, all the fees went up including the cost consultant who had misjudged the total.

continually let ever since. Often cost increases are directly related to funding regimes. Fundraising for the Observer Building (2018-date) has required the invention of many projects-within-the-project at different scales to be ready for different funding outcomes. Not only is it costly to undertake this complexity of multi-scenario planning, but these snapshot scenarios often become fixed, appended to grant and loan funding agreements. In August 2018 as we began negotiations to purchase, we submitted an application to the South East Local Enterprise Partnership (SELEP) for £5M from the Local Growth Fund. Too early, too risky, this was not successful. Since then the grants and loans awarded by SELEP for the Observer Building total £5.1M but they came in three different chunks each requiring its own business case, assessment process, rules and reporting.

Lack of access to adequate funds made fixing the Observer Building roof a headache – "it can't be done without scaffolding but if we spend the money on scaffolding we won't have enough to fix the roof, and if we put up scaffolding we ought to do other external works but we don't have the money for them. If we leave it up awaiting funds, potentially for 2-3 years, it will cost over £200k" [191202 Fieldnote]. These daunting problems are par for the course. As an example of our approach, we explored setting up a Scaffolding Training Enterprise in partnership with East Sussex College (Hastings). The expensive bit of the scaffolding business is the putting up and taking down, but that is also the element with training potential. If we could purchase scaffolding to be owned by the College, they could establish a new scaffolding and access training course, and provide labour at cost to the Hastings Commons. We just needed to find £100k to buy a load of scaffolding! This shows how, as Client, we are always looking not just for thrift but for value, and especially for social value. We want to 'squeeze the building' for life-changing opportunities.

In Robert Tressell's (1914) thick description of the early 20th century house-painting trade[61] the clients were seeking the cheapest possible outcome, the bosses were cutting corners and doing deals with the council, the workers were 'ragged trouser'd

[61] Written and set in Hastings, which Tressell calls Mugsborough.

philanthropists' providing their labour for poverty-wages and enduring chronic insecurity in the form of 'the Slaughter'. A century later we responded to this Hastings heritage by seeking to construct non-exploitative, mutually obligated mechanisms to manage construction. As WRNV General Manager John Brunton says of Hastings Building Services: "I don't think of them as contractors. They're colleagues, they're our friends. They built where we are" [210505 John]. Project managers who 'come at it with a clipboard' commit a cardinal sin in the informal, mutually respectful relations that keep this kind of work moving forward. We treat the builders with respect and admiration, and plan to permanently recognise their work with a Builders' Wall. Alongside HBS, examples of other near-DIY approaches included my partner Ronan renovating Rose Cottage, OW participants Darren and Colleen building the Pocket Park, and our tenants Cheese-on-Sea completing the renovation of 10 Claremont. Such DIY action is based on "a politics of self activity" (McNally 2002: 243) that seeks forgiveness not permission (Klein 2000: 317; [190425 Hazel]).

HBS are committed, flexible and employ all local people, but also chronically under-resourced and over-worked. It was clear they could not take on the massive Observer Building. Having appointed IF_DO architects in August 2019, we had made great progress by the time Covid hit and were able to complete and submit the planning application by May 2020, receiving permission in September. During lockdown we were awarded a total of £4,275,000 from four funding sources. With part allocated to refinancing early loans, £3.5M was available for the Phase 1 works and fees. This was in line with the Cost Plan which estimated the works at £3.2M. We went to tender in November 2020. The looming final Brexit date and the impacts of Covid on building supplies and labour made it hard for contractors and suppliers to quote reliably. We had to give extensions and when the tenders were returned the prices were around £1.3M more than the cost plan. Parallel tracks opened up, with me forced straight back into fundraising, progressing a range of grant and loan requests, while John took forward the "soul-destroying experience" [210505 John] of so-called value engineering (VE) to drive down the overall cost. The practice of this VE – the long zoom meetings working through inadequate spreadsheets full of provisional sums, fractious under the emotional weight of compromise and disappointment and made urgent by a Pre

Contract Services Agreement (PCSA) costing £8k a week – seemed designed to frustrate its purpose of making savings. Once the changes were agreed IF_DO had to redraw over 100 plans and issue 58 Architects Instructions, which delayed the contract signing until November 2021 (though we progressed the works under the PCSA).

Meanwhile, alongside the already-known challenges, more 'abnormals' were discovered – from the asbestos graveyard[62] to the damaged lift shaft, from the ongoing leaky roof in some of the worst rain-storms for decades to the need to store 54,000 litres of water *inside the building* to feed the sprinkler system and 'attenuate' rain-water before it hits the drains. It is hard to convey the relentlessness of the day-to-day responsive decision-making involved and hard to conceive that the main client rep is also overseeing several other development projects, managing the steady-state buildings and still providing 'pastoral care' to any tenants who get into difficulties. Staff capacity is a constant issue but this holistic combination of property development, building management and tenant support at the core of WRNV's work could be a template for community-based property development elsewhere.

I have focused here on two of our buildings to capture some of the key elements of the physical renovation but this should be located in the context of the full Hastings Commons portfolio and within the wider notion of considering the neighbourhood as a single physical structure. In Chapter 7 I spoke of the neighbourhood 'making itself' through the Trinity Triangle Spring Clean. This approach faces conceptual and practical challenges as it tries to find a new equilibrium between the entitlements/obligations/ interests of site-specific owners and the long-term wellbeing of the neighbourhood.

8.7 Producing and protecting communal wealth

8.7.1 Defining communal wealth

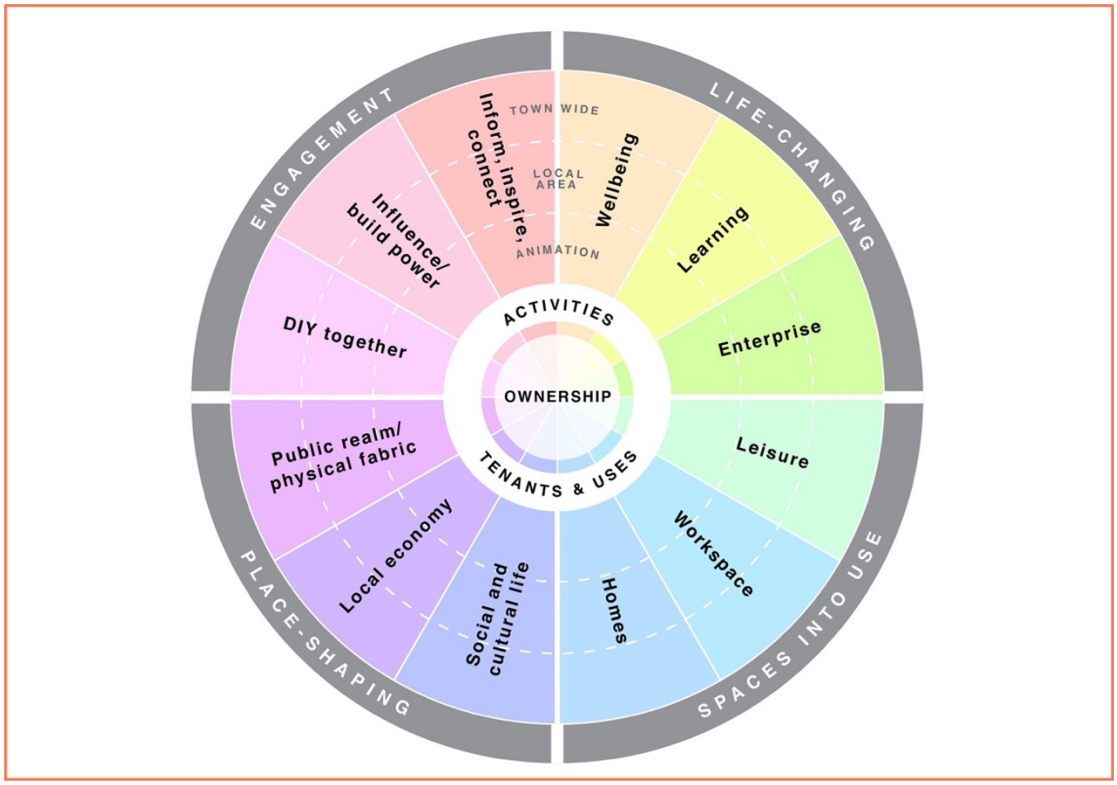
A definition of communal wealth could legitimately be very broad indeed, way beyond the real estate owned by community organisations. More broadly still, 'community

[62] We discovered pits in the Alley Hall floor filled with crushed asbestos from elsewhere in the building with a thin layer of screed on top. [EMP 210712 photos]

wealth' might also consider the whole swathe of local assets, income, and wider wellbeing. For a more focused and useable definition I choose to consider communal wealth as *assets in custody for community benefit*.

Assets can be a very broad category. An obvious example would be CLT-held buildings. Less obvious would be skills. There are many skills in the community but most of those are not 'in custody', they are not enrolled. Once they become enrolled those skills become part of the common treasury, the communal wealth. I would argue that social capital is part of communal wealth. I agree with DeFilippis (1999, 2001, 2004) that neither individuals nor communities can 'possess' social capital and that communities are outcomes of relationships that are imbued with unequal power. Yet it is *the doing of* trust, relationships, and reciprocity (that is, the diverse economy working hard) that can turn some of those relationships into social capital. To an extent social capital is a 'future commodity': the expectation that those things will continue to happen creates a greater sense of safety and security, less loneliness, more joy and a greater range of solutions potentially available (whether you need a job, a babysitter, an ally in adversity or a shelf putting up).

Figure 8.13: Hastings Commons impact themes, 2020



Given the well-evidenced range and impact of community business activity (Power to Change 2021), 'community benefits' should also be defined broadly. Figure 8.12 shows the breadth of impacts that the Hastings Commons aims to support. However, narrow monetised definitions of 'benefits' focused on Land Value Uplift, Gross Value Added and Labour Supply Impacts are currently being imposed on an ever-increasing number and type of projects and organisations through the rapid spread of the HM Treasury Green Book business case methodology across Government funding programmes such as Future High Streets, the Levelling Up Fund and the Town Deals. Now if communities wish to participate in local regeneration they must not only learn Treasury-speak but swallow the key terms of the Benefit-Cost Ratio calculation.[63]

'Custody', I would define as held by or within a mission-driven organisation with a long-term plan for sustained community ownership and benefit. While recognising the challenge and impact of any community asset project (Hart 2005), I am particularly interested in those that create commons within, and thereby help to transform, urban neighbourhoods. Bezdek (2021) explores the extent to which some CLTs function as commons institutions (rather than only as housing providers). She shows how these require the construction of "the cultural commons — that essential CLT knowledge, its re-production and distribution, and the commons members' capacity for efficacious self-management – necessary to steward the land as the community of members determines for generations" (ibid: npn)

> "CLTs hold land and buildings in trust. The commons holds more – land, buildings *and commoners*. The commons is this web of people that is open and continually evolving, changing, growing. But it's not universal, not the public, not everybody. It's the active and the engaged. Some would say make it as widespread as possible – everyone is a commoner if they just turn up and say they'll come again. But that's not true, because commoning is a verb. So communal wealth is the wealth that is created by and held within the commons, for now and the future" [211216 Reflection].

[63] Personal experience of the Hastings Town Deal (2019-date) including current work to prepare the Hastings Commons 5-case business case.

The recursive production and consumption of neighbourhoods *in situ* (Pratt 2009: 1056) is work undertaken by all neighbours 'going about their usual business' in time-space. In contrast, the positive, interventionist *shaping* of neighbourhoods is a more deliberate and focused task that transcends and connects many, usually separate, fields of expertise.

> "The urban commons governance principle is not self-government, nor decentralization. It is rather distribution of powers among public, social, economic, knowledge and civic actors and therefore it implies a significant investment in the design of new forms of collaboration and partnerships among these actors" (Ramos 2016: 9)

8.7.2 Affordability and Accessibility

One of the hypothesised characteristics of SRN is "explicit action to prevent displacement" and a key part of this is the affordability and accessibility of space for living. While affordable workspace and inclusive leisure are necessary, housing is a special kind of asset (Madden and Marcuse 2016: 12). The mix of housing types and tenures also plays a critical role in the shaping of neighbourhoods. Community land trusts take a range of approaches to setting and sustaining housing affordability, and this can vary over time or between different categories of asset (Lawson 2017).

Granby CLT developed an even split of rental and sale homes. In setting the prices for the five houses for sale, an initial shared-ownership approach was abandoned due to concerns that UK law on 'staircasing' could allow the resident to achieve 100% ownership, thereby losing the long-term affordability (Harrington and Seagrief 2012: 6.1). Granby moved instead to the deed covenant model (Abramowitz and White 2006: 8) with resale prices determined by multiplying the original sale price by the uplift factor (current median income divided by 2015 median income) with a minimum uplift value of one to prevent decreases (Lawson 2017: 9). Questions remain around the long-term legal enforceability of the deed covenant model, unless there is specific legal provision put in place (Davis 2006: 45). Any resale restrictions implemented under the deed covenant model may not have the same permanence as under the US ground lease model, potentially undermining long-term community control of assets.

In the UK the model is relatively new and it is not yet known whether these fears surrounding legal enforceability will be borne out in practice as the model is tested.

For the other Granby CLT homes rents were set at 80% of market rates by Steve Biko HA as the managing association. This model of 'affordability' is increasingly embedded in regulation and funding regimes (Wilson and Barton 2021) but it does not necessarily mean that homes will be affordable because prices have no relationship with local income but are instead dictated by distorted market prices (Wiles 2014). The other options are to set rents in line with local median incomes or housing benefit levels.
In Hastings we were always committed to offering rentals and the aim was to preserve 2015-equivalent rents for both homes and workspaces, which were widely viewed as exceptionally affordable, certainly within the South East. Influenced by Joseph Rowntree Foundation's work on 'Living Rents' which makes the case that 'affordability' should be related not to market rates or to government subsidies but to local incomes, we adapted the term for local use by committing to rents at no more than 1/3 of local median wage. First checking that our 2015 rates were within that constraint we pledged never to raise them except by the rate of inflation. We considered indexing the rents directly to local wage-rates but were concerned this might link our future rents to the results of gentrification (higher average incomes) rather than provide an oasis of stability within an almost-inevitably rising market. We have used Living Rents[64] throughout the portfolio, adding one Local Housing Allowance-rate flat at 39 Cambridge in exchange for a £50k capital grant through Hastings Borough Council. More recently, through partnerships with local organisations working with neurodivergent artists and people recovering from mental ill-health, we have been exploring 'exempt accommodation' where the rent can be set at cost and covered in full by the state through housing benefit.

The issue of affordability raises the inevitable question 'who is it for?'. Early writings about Rock House emphasised the danger that faced local creatives and project workers in the form of rising market rents for both homes and workspace. Responding

[64] And our housing management subsidiary is called Living Rents (Hastings) Ltd.

directly to the fear of gentrification – "it's too late for Hackney, not too late for Hastings" – we imagined Rock House as a mixed-use hive of creativity and collaboration. Our tenant selection criteria were set early and repeated often – NEED, LOCAL CONNECTION, ENTHUSIASM FOR THE ETHOS, and CONTRIBUTION. Over time we realised we wanted to "create spaces where people know their neighbours and where they expect to play a role in the social and physical upkeep of the common space and the neighbourhood" (Steele 2020: 123). We saw this as establishing new social norms. By choosing people who would be keen to engage in this way, we could use the quality of the space and the sense of belonging to tempt others to do so.

It did not work out entirely like that! In a parallel with the issues that faced the Organisation Workshop, the problem with this approach in Hastings is the widespread and acute housing need. With NEED as a key selection criteria, and faced with heart-breaking personal stories, we tend to prioritise prospective tenants in a terrible situation rather than those whose exclusion from the housing market was less dramatic. One impact of this is that the backgrounds and attitudes of the residential tenants are generally quite different from those of the workspace tenants. This was not what we had expected back in 2014 when we pictured the homes going to local creatives and project workers. This is likely to have impacted on the development of 'community self-management'. While we have found that people who want to be part of the Commons come from all kinds of backgrounds, those with more acute issues or chaotic lives may find it harder to contribute. This is where Noterman's concept of 'differential commoning' described in Chapter 2 is helpful.

White Rock and Granby are not case studies in this thesis because they have created affordable housing, but because they are (aiming to be) self-renovating neighbourhoods. One question I am often asked is 'what quantum or proportion of local property must you own to have a positive impact on the local housing/workspace market?'. Back in 2015-16, during the emergence of Heart of Hastings I thought, arbitrarily, it might be 20%. Now I understand it differently. By taking custodian freeholds of the assets clustered around the Alley, we have created the Hastings Commons which is of a concentrated scale and ambition that can have significant

impact not just on the immediate area and not just in Hastings. In Liverpool, Granby CLT took ownership of just 11 houses out of around 200 in the Four Streets, yet it has had and retains a major place-shaping role that has transformed the area, changed how Liverpool City Council and Liverpool people view the city's terraced housing, won prestigious national prizes and is seen across the country as a beacon of grassroots good sense.

Now I would answer not in quantum or proportion but in a profusion of names, images and stories that inspire because they embattle the old enemy, TINA. These intangibles are not just sign-boards after the fact but drivers of the projects themselves. They intertwine with the buildings to form an alternative kind of immersive environment in which commoning can happen, now and in the long term. Together the stories, buildings and relationships – all of them always 'under development' – constitute this actually-existing commons, spatially and phenomenologically specific yet capable of broadening our knowledge and understanding across all neighbourhoods.

8.7.3 Protection

The purpose of all this work in Hastings and Liverpool, as with all community land trusts, is to create *and sustain* decommodified land and buildings for the common good. While organisational structures like CLTs have governing documents and procedures (such as the charitable 'asset lock') that seek to protect the long term community benefit through community ownership, these have proven to be fallible (Thust 2019). In any case such ownership structures are not the only and sometimes not the best delivery vehicle for the development stage. In Hastings, the process of community asset accumulation began with Meanwhile Space (MWS) and Jericho Road Solutions (JRS) forming WRNV to purchase Rock House, as described in chapter 6. The Shareholders Agreement (SA) has been used to enshrine critical benefits like capped rents and to commit to a development plan approach that reflects the charitable aims of the community partner (see Appendix C2). In 2019-20, the SA went through its third major rewrite during my research period and another is planned for 2022.

In its initial form, with WRT in the 'community partner' role, the Shareholders

Agreement was ineffective in dealing with the erupting conflict of values relating to communal wealth. Whereas MWS and JRS felt that Rock House was itself the communal asset that should be directly creating common good (through capped rents and tenant contributions), the remaining directors of WRT saw the building as an investment that should be making maximum surplus to allow them to grant-fund community activity. That conflict ended because Power to Change, clear that they had funded the former approach not the latter and frustrated by WRT's failure to abide by the terms of the grant, chose to act as 'more than a funder', taking the shares back from WRT, funding the legal work, playing a full directorship role for over a year, and ultimately transferring the shares to Heart of Hastings CLT.

Granby also provides an example of different perspectives on communal wealth. When one CLT tenant was unable to pay their rent, Steve Biko HA took them to court. Hazel didn't find out until the tenant asked for some help with the court forms and "I went berserk. They got a £385 fine plus the arrears to pay… I just said 'They're not paying it, we're paying that. You don't give indebted people more debts. I've never heard of anything so stupid in my life'. And I said 'if you don't do it, I'll resign'. That's how strongly I felt about it, because you can't treat people like that'" [170125 Hazel]. The outraged response from Steve Biko's chief executive was that this went against their policies and could set a precedent but Hazel had found some power: "We paid the court costs. It's not for us to pay the arrears, but it's not for us to take our tenants to court until we've given them [time]". I asked Hazel what would happen in future if tenants were in arrears. "We have to look at each case separately. But you don't take them to court as a first resort". The tenants were four months in arrears and were taken to court just when their benefits had been sorted out. Hazel's suggested approach is more or less exactly what happens with Living Rents tenants in the Hastings Commons. There is a significant amount of 'pastoral care' and any arrears are discussed in the context of trying to help the tenant tackle whatever is going on in their lives – usually benefit failures, problem debts or mental and physical health issues – that is getting in the way of their commitment to pay the rent. In the context of communal wealth it is interesting to unpick Hazel's fury about the court incident. If it was a non-CLT tenant she wouldn't like it but she wouldn't see it as a direct attack on communal wealth and wellbeing. Her concern stems from the fact that this CLT tenant

is part of the commons, and therefore their ability to live well matters to the commons and their rent is part of the commonwealth.

The loss of Hastings Pier from community ownership in 2018, along with other high-profile cases, raised serious concerns about the long term security of assets already in community hands and led to the Protecting Community Assets Inquiry (Thust 2019). This focused on three aspects, prevention, rescue and impact limitation, generating a range of practical suggestions including: supporting better deals in the first place, a rescue fund, a protector of community assets, and improving the understanding of community assets among insolvency practitioners. The Observer Building is one of four national pilots for the Protector of Community Assets which is envisaged as a community benefit society whose members provide a form of mutual protection in the worst-case scenario where the community interest in the asset comes under threat.

8.8 Ongoing tasks and processes

SRN involves "both a set of buildings and a kind of practice" (Community Business Patchwork 2021). It requires constant, parallel and intertwined task-processes of values-defining, decision-making, story-telling, lesson-learning and future-gazing. The primary of these is to identify and understand the values and vision underpinning the work we undertake together, and to share concepts about *why, how*, and *who for*, through frequent discussions in formal and informal contexts, committing to 'the variegated social' (Cooper 2014: 158). Alongside the positive driving force of vision and values, opportunities and threats emerge that require a response. In all cases there is a need for leadership and governance, both of which demand time as well as skills, passion and integrity. In the Hastings Commons there is a drive in principle towards distributed leadership. In practice this has been assisted by the multiple organisation model with its separate managers and boards, with personnel overlaps creating the shared web of information.[65]

[65] During 2021 this model evolved further towards a 'superboard' bringing together all the trustees and directors of the ecosystem organisations for collective decision-making, and a fully integrated workforce. The organisations plan to remain legally separate and retain their complementary roles.

In order to protect the values of SRN, it is essential to sustain the encounters at the heart of visible engagement. Massey reminds us that places are not locations of coherence but "the foci of the meeting and the nonmeeting of the previously unrelated and thus integral to the generation of novelty." (2005: 71). Such 'novelty-generating' encounters range from chance conversations in alleys and stairwells to planned discussions to develop specific aspects of the SRN. These 'moments of space' are the drivers of "the constant emergence of uniqueness… the constant production of the new" (2005: 68) and their sustenance requires a disciplined commitment. As Ronnie said of the Granby market: "It's monthly in the spring and summer and then there's just the December one to finish off the year then people go and lie down for a few months to recover. It's a huge thing. But we wouldn't be on site [renovating buildings] without it, it's been the binding discipline of just doing something. Sometimes the street market's been the only thing happening. But it has happened. It has never not happened" [151126 Ronnie].

LISTENING, TALKING, THINKING and SPEAKING should also be seen as renovating actions. Gibson-Graham remind us that we are 'doing thinking' and "the spirit of our thinking is a matter for ethical decision" (2006: xxix). They argue for the importance of the 'emotional orientation' we bring to our thinking and see 'ethical self-cultivation' in terms of the taking of stances and the development of techniques to actualise those stances. My stance, with Law, is a commitment to "thinking the in-between", recognising "that realities might in some measure be made in other ways" and working to "make some realities realer, others less so" (2004: 63, 67). Huron argues that "thinking, reading, writing, and talking about the commons can be part of enacting it" (2018: 172).

An ethics of thinking creates "a ruminative space of not knowing… providing an incubating environment for half-baked ideas… working against impulses to squelch and limit" (Gibson-Graham 2006: xxviii). This sense of lingering with the as-yet-unknowns, of thinking within a politics of possibility, reminds me again of Rilke (see figure 4.7). Such politics require: "ontological reframing (to produce the ground of possibility), rereading (to uncover or excavate the possible), and creativity (to generate actual

possibilities where none formerly existed"(ibid: xxx). These three elements are all demonstrated within the unfolding of self-renovating neighbourhoods in both Granby and White Rock.

In the case study neighbourhoods, while "thinking participates in that uncertain process by which new possibilities are ushered into being" (Connolly 2002, quoted Gibson-Graham 2006: xxix), it is *listening and talking* that make the difference. Ideas come from talking to each other and can be spread by speaking to the world. One source of the 'data' for this thesis is the bank of my 130+ speeches and presentations over the period 2007-21 that show the emergence, adaptation and recomposition of ideas, phrases, visuals, and thinking frameworks that both reflect and shape the evolving work on the ground, in Hastings and in neighbourhoods across the country (see Appendix I).

The work of creating the cultural commons involves framing and reframing the story from the past right up to 'now', sharing it over and over in text, pictures, speeches, case studies, research responses, digging up stories from the past and repackaging them as inspirations for the future. If the place is a "simultaneity of stories-so-far" (Massey 2005: 9) making and telling stories is a critically important part of 'renovating' – it continually (re)constitutes the neighbourhood. Through the stories lessons are absorbed, reflected upon and tested out. Other learning comes from looking outwards, through peer networks like the Common Treasury and Locality. Undertaking the PhD alongside this practical experience has provided a specific kind of learning – connecting to the literature, forcing me to locate the White Rock experience and the Granby ethnography within multiple contexts. Part of my role within the commons is 'future-gazing' – preparing spreadsheets, gantt charts, funding applications, and theories of change using a combination of disciplined futures thinking and finger-in-the-air prophecy.

Thinking, talking and story-telling are all critical to attracting capital grants and investment, but a self-renovating neighbourhood would ideally be self-financing in the long term, so the core business models of renting and trading are of utmost

importance, but they too are surprisingly influenced by the narrative. I have always said that it was possible to make “a decent profit” from renting affordable homes and workspace, just not an “indecent one”. Rock House has proved that, even in the most difficult circumstances, tenant loyalty to an explicit set of values and a strong personal commitment to their welfare will sustain the covenant. I am less confident about the ability of ‘leisure’ space to pull its weight within the Commons but we will do our best in this new field, beyond the familiar ‘beds and desks’, and learn a lot along the way.

Through these multiple acts of ‘renovating’, people and resources are enrolled (brought into the fold, roped in, become part of a group) and en-roled (enabled to take up a specific role in search and service of a broader common good) as place-shaping becomes embodied and material, a process in which the ‘neighbourhood self’ is renewed. Beyond the day-to-day, month-by-month and years-on-end of the SRN creational process, there is the wider question of our living together which Massey calls “the central question of the political” (2005: 151).

To some extent it has been the failures of urban governance both nationally and locally that have driven local people to SRN approaches. It is an open question whether SRN will influence formal governance structures in future; there is little overt sign of it to date. Nevertheless consensus must be built, decisions made, progress reviewed, and accountability maintained both to funders and to neighbours. In White Rock we generally had the opportunity to get on and make progress by working with people and organisations who explicitly shared vision and values, although this was challenged in the Alley where adjacency rather than choice is the key common factor. In developing the Trinity Triangle Heritage Action Zone, new mechanisms of decision-making and accountability were constructed in the shape of a Partners Board. Given the need to include institutional players, it was expected to be challenging to ensure that this would continue to reflect the SRN values. In practice this has not been too difficult because the programme is strongly ‘owned’ by Heart of Hastings. In contrast, where we have had to rely on interaction with the local authorities, as with Ore Valley and 12 Claremont, progress has been far slower, less certain, and laden with risk.

In undertaking the work of SRN, community actors face a series of major hurdles which could be summarised as POWER, MONEY, CONFLICT. Decision-making processes about land and property are shaped by and in service of the dominant ownership model. Despite some early good luck stories (eg the Granby Steinbeck loan, the successful Dilapidations Claim for Rock House), and eventually impressive funding lists for both neighbourhoods, there is no doubt that the *management of financing* for SRN is a great and ongoing challenge [EMP: 160610 Winter Garden meeting]. Since SRN is a fundamentally relational activity, there will always be conflicts – of values, of personalities, of priorities. "It is to the extent that stability is not natural, essential or substantial, that politics exists and ethics is possible. *Chaos is at once a risk and a chance*, and it is here that the possible and the impossible cross each other" (Derrida 1996: 84, my emphasis).

> "[T]here is nothing more difficult to take in hand, more perilous to conduct, or more uncertain in its success, than to take the lead in the introduction of a new order of things" (Machiavelli [1532], quoted in Peck 2011: 790).

At the end of the verb chapter it should be recognised that all this 'doing' is extremely hard work. And yet, in Granby and in White Rock, people have been doing it nonetheless. The next chapter explores the object of their attention – the neighbourhood – what is a neighbourhood, how to shape it proactively, and the dangers and dilemmas faced along the way.

CHAPTER 9: NEIGHBOURHOODS – the object

This chapter focuses on the *object* of the self-renovating neighbourhood [subject-verb-object] clause. What are we working with, what are we trying to make?

9.1 "Places are Peopled and People are Placed"

9.1.1 Why neighbourhood?

Nawratek makes an argument for alternative visions for re-industrialised cities… "But so far none of them has been developed any further" (2017: 16). Of the Cleveland 'Health-Tech Corridor' he says: "This does not happen by itself, of course a political will is required to cut off (at least for a while) a fragment of the economy that supports the neoliberal logic of immediate profit at any cost" (ibid: 17). Given the extent of this challenge and in the spirit of the feminist question (can we have our revolution now, please?), maybe we should start at a level where we think we can make progress? This is a strong argument for a neighbourhood focus. Neighbourhood dynamics is a complex and contested field (Manley 2013) but that doesn't stop the neighbourhood being important as a site for social change. It is a dizzying experience, and one that would be useful for 'strategic planners', to come in close to the fine grain and realise that the buildings and spaces that make up small neighbourhoods are actually really big, difficult and impactful.

The intricacies of the 'neighbourhood effects' literature are neatly tackled by the fact that, whether we can prove or explain the impact of the neighbourhood on outcomes for individuals, there are undoubtedly "spatially ordered outcomes of local communities" (Timberlake 2013: 385). "In a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy, neighbourhoods have effects in part because people and institutions act *as if* neighbourhoods matter, further reinforcing the reproduction of inequality by place" (Sampson 2014: 1737).

Galster (2001: 2111) describes the neighbourhood as a "bundle of spatially based attributes" (see Appendix A for the Neighbourhood Attributes of Granby and White

Rock) combined into a "complex commodity" that competes with others in a marketised situation. He warns that market mechanisms do not easily cope with these highly idiosyncratic characteristics. He shows how consumers of neighbourhood (households, business people, property owners and local government) are also its producers, but within this overall multifaceted picture he gives, in my view, unwarranted primacy to "external forces reverberating through the metropolitan housing market", stating that "the prime origins of a particular neighbourhood changing are located outside that neighbourhood" (ibid: 2122). I agree that localities are produced through a complex set of actions and relationships "both by people that live in them and by those that do not" (DeFilippis 2004: 26). My thesis is based on the potential for constructive resistance to and replacements for (some of) these 'externally induced' changes.

In the policy-making and practitioner worlds, still feeding off popular/ist academics like Florida (2003, 2004) and Landry (2000), 'place-making' tends to be boosterist and uncritical of gentrification and the role of capital. It was therefore enlightening for me to explore the scholarly literature, including Harvey's (1996) concept of place-making as the relational, power-scarred carving out of 'temporary permanences' from space and Massey's (2005) constellations and trajectories. Pierce, Martin and Murphy (2011) draw on these, and on Martin's (2003) place-framing (discussed further below) to conceptualise *relational place-making* as the dynamic and flexible interplay of place, networks and politics (2011: 59). While this dynamic is multi-scalar, the stress on relationality, the lack of community power at 'strategic' (higher spatial) scales, and the materiality of place-making seem to direct our attention down 'among the weft and weave' if we want local people to participate in making change.

I argue for a process of locality construction and maintenance – physical, socio-economic, semiotic – that is actively and purposively led by local people whose power and legitimacy lies in their willingness to take on the neighbourhood housework for the common and collective good. This is a daunting challenge – it needs to find ways to change everything: from tethering capital to place, to developing a new social contract of rights and responsibilities around the 'moralities of land', from building collective

efficacy to tackling 'vagrant sovereigns'. And it needs to recognise the bewildering specificities of places everywhere, the multiplicity and openness of trajectories. Three decades' experience has led me to a deep understanding of the unpredictability of regeneration interventions and to the conclusion that all we can do is 'proceed in good faith'. Therefore, not in spite of but revelling in that unpredictability, *here we are so here we begin…*

9.1.2 What is a neighbourhood?

Seriously under-defined in the 1994 *Dictionary of Human Geography* as "a district within an urban area", later updated (2009: 494) in the light of Martin's (2003) intervention, the n-word *(neighbourhood)* is complex, multivalent, almost as rich as the c-word *(community)*. It brings to mind Heidegger's concept of 'dwelling in nearness' "the rich, intimate ongoing togetherness of beings and things which make up landscapes and places" (Cloke and Jones 2001: 651). Casey (1998) argues that such 'nearness' brings about neighbourhood rather than the other way round. I agree shared space alone is not enough. There are increasing numbers of sterilised, privatised spaces that we are allowed in only as long as we show our faces[66] and bring our wallets. They are not neighbourhoods (Minton 2012).

Starting with a definition which I will later unsettle, a neighbourhood is an area of built-upon land where many different people spend time in propinquity and encounter each other in both transactional and non-transactional relations. The land is multi-variegated in its types of spaces, and, critically for our purposes, in their ownership and uses. The ways in which people interact with the neighbourhood and with each other are equally variable – through living, working, leisure, learning, and community action. These denizens are the producers and consumers of neighbourhood. It is in the style of their supply and the manner of their consumption that they constitute the current distinctiveness of the place. In creating and consuming the temporary time-space constellations of that specific neighbourhood, they are enacting single scenes in

[66] This was written pre-Covid. The detail of the performance we must make changes but the excludability remains.

a history play – governed by what went before. They are doing so within the theatre stage-set – governed by what is around them, who owns it, who pays for it and a multitude of other constraints. Yet, as Massey argued so persistently, this is not a matter of an "essential section of a slice through time…[nor] a series of self-contained presents… The interconnectivity of the spatial [is] not between static things but between movements, between a plurality of trajectories" (2005: 76). The spatial is dynamic; space is "itself constantly becoming". Failing to understand time and space as properly interwoven – warp and weft – "leaves no opening for an active politics" (ibid: 77). As important at neighbourhood level as it is at global, and all scales between, this active spatialisation of politics relies on discursive place-framing as described in the section below.

Seeing locality as a network of shared experience and power relationships, DeFilippis (2001, 2004) thinks localities cannot 'have' anything (agency, social capital, autonomy, etc). I argue for a more material organic view of neighbourhood. Yes, neighbourhood is a web of relationships but it is *also* a fine-grain physical collection[67] of functioning spaces and buildings; beyond housing it may include the school, the pub, a set of shops, green space, play areas, roads, paths and alleyways, signs, rubbish bins, public conveniences, spaces for leisure, culture and politics, derelict buildings, abandoned spaces. It is the setting for individuals' lives (Agnew 1987); a "treasure trove of memories" (Blokland 2003: 16); a "reservoir of resources… a 'shaper' of who we are, both as defined by ourselves and by others" (Kearns and Parkinson 2001: 2109). These are not blank sheets but historically formed localities with webs of relationships, layers of historical experience and striations of different interest groups. They are far more than "neutral backdrops or uncomplicated stages for people's lives" (Pratt and Hanson 1994: 25) or "spatially fixed geographical containers for social processes" (Hannam, Sheller and Urry 2006: 5). As Neil Smith realised in his shift from glacial geomorphologist to urban geographer, "[p]olitics, class struggle and flows of capital etched their way onto buildings and streets… carving up urban landscapes with the same awesome power and precision as [glaciers]" (Slater 2016: npn).

[67] Indeed potentially a 'single structure'

> "Uneven development is social inequality blazoned into the geographical landscape, and it is simultaneously the exploitation of that geographical unevenness for certain socially determined ends" (Smith [1984] 2008: 206).

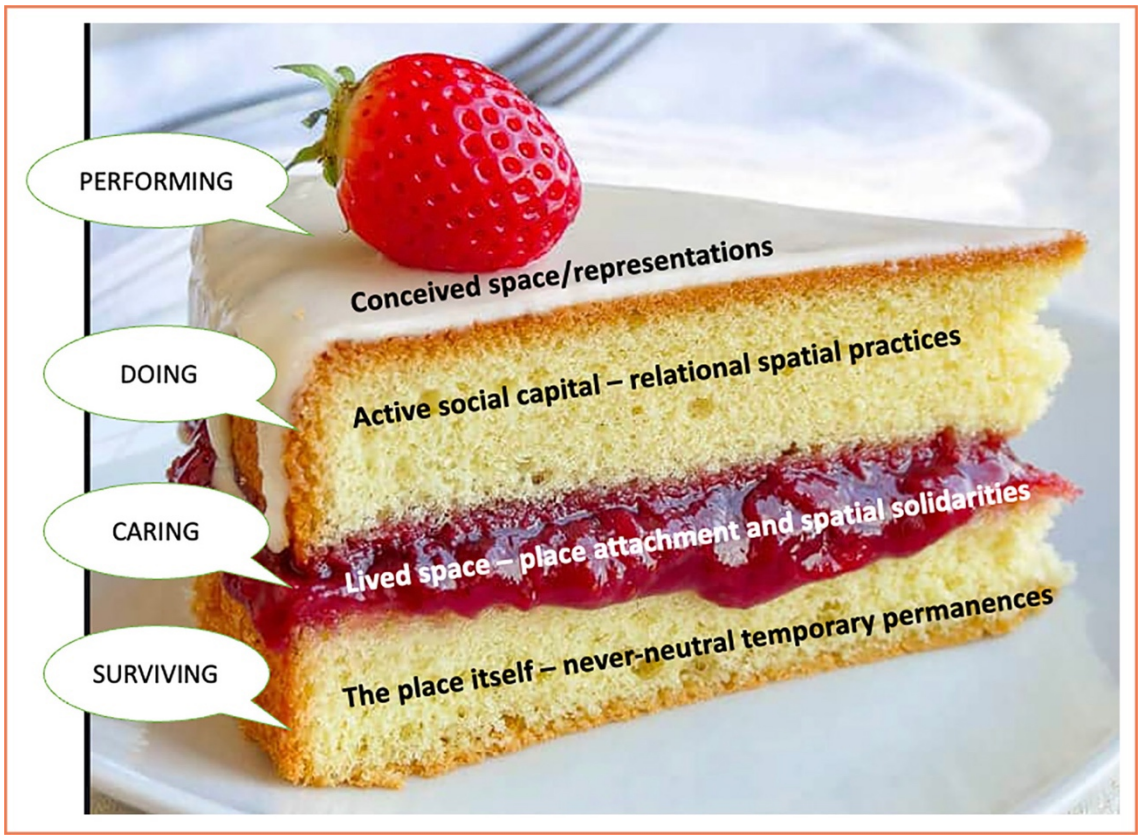
Neighbourhoods are produced through processes of uneven development, capital mobility, changing patterns of ownership and governance, contested definitions of community. But they are constructed, as people are, through *organic not mechanical processes*. This is a process of everyday making, responding and remaking in which the relationships between personal and spatial identities are mutually and iteratively constitutive (Fincher and Jacobs 1998; Jackson and Butler 2015). "Places are peopled and people are placed" (see figure 2.1) is a simple way to state this complex relationship, but with enough force to hint at Adrienne Rich's 'politics of location' which is a politics of rootedness, in our bodies, in our places, in "the ground we're coming from" (1986: 34).

Beyond acting as backdrop, the place has a life, story, memory and character of its own. It changes over time as people do but remains recognisable as long as it is not too badly damaged (see Brand 1997 for the same point about buildings). So the character and personality of small places can be established through thick description of their layered identities, as I have attempted in this thesis. I am searching for a way to capture essentials about places even while agreeing with Massey that it's a fool's errand! While we can agree that everything is socially constructed and mutually constitutive, the focus on humans as the only agents is less strait-jacketing now, given the literature (see for example Bozalek and Pease 2021) about nonhuman relations and 'alterontologies' (Papadopoulos 2018). Why not, then, allow ourselves to view *places* as spatialised, temporalised products of human interaction that take on a life of their own? Their development is both path-dependent and complex-chaotic. Looking back we find ways to tell (part of) their story as if it made sense.

When I think about the neighbourhood-self I picture a layer cake. The bottom layer represents 'the place itself' – the sediment of located historical relationships, the never-neutral 'permanences' (Harvey 1996) that are "the stabilisation of the outcomes of the conflicts and relationships that produce localities" (DeFilippis 2004: 28). The

upper layer is the active social capital, the diverse economy hard at work (relational spatial practices reiterated, adaptive, responsive). The jam is the way people live in and value the place (lived space). This caring about the place ('place attachment') is the glue that binds strangers because it makes you care about them as well, which spreads the attachments quicker than you can talk. If we share this space together then 90,000 of us can be a community rather than just the 1,000 that could have conversations with each other. "Place-based work is the work of solidarity because it is the thing that normalises everyone no matter who – I care about you because you are here, simple as that – it is the antithesis of communities of interest and thus vital in civic life" (Jess Prendergast, personal communication, 11/3/21).

Figure 9.1: The neighbourhood-self as a layer cake



In thinking through this layer cake, I found I was leaving out Lefebvre's second category – representations of space by 'others', the power of cartography and masterplans, displays of ownership, exclusion and disposal. I feel that the owner-cartographer's production of space is an outside force impacting on this layer cake

rather than integral to it. It impacts at each of the three levels – disciplining spatial practice, packaging the lived experience and continually establishing and contesting (some of) the never-stable permanences. The cake itself ('the neighbourhood self') is made by us – the producing/consuming neighbours – however constrained the possibilities might be by the impositions of owner-cartographers. Perhaps these representations of space could be seen as the icing – both covering something differently real underneath and because icing changes what the cake looks, feels and tastes like?

9.1.3 Tethered to Place

DeFilippis shows how people in poor neighbourhoods "suffer not from a lack of capital but from a lack of power and control over… the place called home" (2004: 89). This is primarily because of the mobility of capital which he argues is both inefficient because it "destroys the worth of investments fixed in places" (ibid: 3) and unjust because it "is a redistribution from society as a whole to the limited number of individuals who are able to realise wealth from that mobility" (ibid: 5). To understand local social structure, Kevin Cox urged focus on those agents and institutions that are 'dependent' on the place through "some patterned set of local interactions" (1998: 20), those "that simply need to be in a place and for whom mobility… is de facto not an option" (DeFilippis 2004: 27). So instead of chasing mobile capital we need to pay attention to the 'functionally immobile', those tethered to place. This insight is at the heart of the successful 'Preston Model' and the wider 'Community Wealth Building' approach (Hanna, Guinan and Bilsborough 2018). In my view they do not take the concept far enough: beyond auditing where local institutions spend their money, we should be seeking to tether capital to place by increasing the asset base held in place-based community custody and influencing regeneration spend to attract tethered rather than flighty capital partners.

It is important to remember that it is not only those institutions with the place-name in their title that are rooted. People still live very local lives. "Much of life for people, even in the First World, still consists of waiting in a bus shelter with your shopping for a bus that never comes" (Massey 1994: 163). "Some people, in effect, are more 'local'

than others, and this is, fundamentally, a class issue" (Williamson 2002 cited by DeFilippis 2004: 6). People in these marginal neighbourhoods could be expected to 'be more local' with lower car ownership and minimal disposable income (RAC 2011;[68] DCLG 2020). Although they are quite different from each other because White Rock is town centre and Granby is not, in both the SRN encourages people to stay local, to enjoy local and take their sustenance there. This *localisation* has recently become a much more widely-understood concept through the national experience of three long Covid lockdowns. As she looks forward to retirement in Granby, Hazel has merged Anne Hidalgo's concept of the 15-minute city (Moreno et al 2021) with Mel Bartholomew's (1981) 'square foot gardening' and is hoping to squeeze her backyard for a year's worth of veg for one. "Maybe I can, maybe I can't, but if it works we can move that out on to the street and start proper food production" [210706 Hazel].

In a more positive version of functional immobility, a focus on rootedness or *jus nexi* (Shachar 2010) can make more feasible "a certain kind of urban intervention – attentive, painstaking, regular and open to contingency" (Tonkiss 2013: 316), in other words self-renovating neighbourhoods. The SRN work in White Rock and Granby could be seen as 'emplacement', the polar opposite of the displacement of Bon Pastor in Barcelona described by Portelli (2020). The elements he describes as lost – spatial forms, interactions, place attachment, political capital, neighbourhood housework, visibility *en calle*, collective and decentralised control – are those that are gained through SRN, including "forms of cohabitation and relationships that make vulnerable existences liveable" (Portelli 2020:348).

9.1.4 Neighbourhood as narrative

The definition of neighbourhood given above – stated more simply as "multiply variegated land where different people spend time in propinquity and through their relations produce and consume distinctiveness" – has already been deepened by the concept of dynamic space connecting a plurality of trajectories into temporary constellations. Here I go further to consider the more deliberate, discursive production

[68] Nearly 14,000 people (33%) in Hastings did not own a car or van in 2011 (Liverpool 46%).

of neighbourhood as and through narratives and framing. Using Snow and Benford's (1988, 2000) heuristic of motivational, diagnostic and prognostic framing, and inspired by Martin's (2003) work on collective-action place-framing, figure 9.2 explores the place-frames of SRN as demonstrated by White Rock and Granby. Such 'frames' help individuals to organise experiences and make sense of events (Goffman 1974). In place terms, they "define the scope and scale of the shared neighborhood of collective concern" (Martin 2003: 733).

Figure 9.2: Collective-action place frames for SRN in Granby and White Rock

MOTIVATIONAL	DIAGNOSTIC	PROGNOSTIC
Exhort action and define/ describe the community	*Describe problems and assign causes/blame*	*Solutions (specific actions)*
EXHORTATIONS Save… [the pier, Granby 4 streets, Observer Building etc] • DIY regen, we can do this together, no one else will • Get involved, make a contribution, create community • 'Own the future together' • Take the sting out of gentrification • Everyone matters and anyone can feel involved CHARACTERISTICS Quirky, diverse, interesting • Poor, neglected, mistreated, maligned • Legacy built fabric generally much-loved but currently unfit for purpose/rotting • Strong community spirit and subaltern stories (America Ground, Uprising)	Neglect and decay – ongoing production of dereliction through state and market failures • Understand that these 'failures' are not accidents and there are no 'market' solutions • Waste – of buildings, people, money • Threat of gentrification and displacement (4 types) • Need to protect the 'soul' of the neighbourhood as well as darn its fabric • Need to create and protect affordable spaces • Local people do not feel they can shape what happens in their town *(Based on Snow and Benford 1988, 2000, and after Martin 2003: 737)*	Bring property into community freehold (assets in custody for community benefit) • Raise consciousness of DIY/ commoning alternative to dominant models of ownership and regeneration • Renovate from dereliction, maximising the social benefits of the renovating process • Cap rents forever to ensure affordability • Commoning – the actively engaged take responsibility together • Promote neighbouring, encounters and collaborations • Build community power and identity • Value base – ABCD – strengths and gifts not deficits and needs • Create de-commodified spaces alongside transactional but affordable and engaged

To Martin's concern that these place-based framings may "rhetorically diminish" alternative mobilisations at other territorial scales or around social identities (ibid: 731), I would counter that 'contentious politics' (McAdam et al 2001) is not a zero-sum game. Indeed I would suggest that the importance of neighbourhood as a ground for

social action lies precisely in its *vagueness* and its *variety* of interactions and exchanges that cut across (without necessarily diminishing) other identities and concerns. These qualities ensure that 'neighbourhood' is not fixed and specific but socially constructed in particular times and spaces in order to discursively legitimate a particular sphere of action (Martin 2003: 732, 746).

> "We have formed new connections. All these tiny actions form a kind of social web that cuts across difference, across streets, class and age. We've reclaimed streets that looked doomed, we've re-created social space and creative space that were destroyed. Now perceived as a safe place, to meet, chat and eat, it's part of a community that is connected, has agency, and can exercise communal control over our lived-in environment" [180610 Eleanor].

Place-frames make choices about how to characterise the neighbourhood and offer specific and partial diagnoses and prognoses. Other narrative tools include boundaries, naming and other kinds of imagineering.

Galster described "the dilemmas of neighbourhood bounding", including the lack of congruence among local actors' perceptions of boundaries and the fact that the spatially-based attributes that bundle to make the neighbourhood vary across spatial scales and themselves do not share congruent boundaries (2001: 2113). It follows that "the investigator would select a different parsing of urban space, depending on the particular neighbourhood attribute of interest" (ibid: 2114) and supports Suttles' (1972) concept of the multi-level spatial view of neighbourhood. For the case studies, these levels could be seen in terms of the fine grain (Cairns Street; The Alley), the natural neighbourhood (Granby; White Rock), and the intermediate community of shared identity (Toxteth/Liverpool 8; seafront and central Hastings and St Leonards). People in these neighbourhoods also have strong affinity with the city of Liverpool and the borough of Hastings, as urban forms if not as systems of local government. For neighbourhood-based organising all these scales are relevant – from the daily life experiences of residents to the local economic and political context and broader national and global forces that affect the urban area – yet the focus remains firmly on the local (Martin 2003: 730-1).

Figure 9.3: Neighbourhood Bounding

NOTES

1 Natural neighbourhoods in Deptford & New Cross, South East London, as nodes defined by local networks (2000)

2 White Rock neighbourhood planning map, the result of a collective and deliberative definition of a fixed boundary line as required by the neighbourhood planning legislation (2015)

3 The Trinity Triangle Heritage Action Zone, White Rock, Hastings, focused on assets and opportunities (2019)

Each of these 'productions of neighbourhood' were the result of extensive local co-creation processes.

Years in the fields of Deptford (Steele 1991, 1993, 2000) and Hastings (Steele 2015, Hastings Commons 2021) convince me that 'natural neighbourhoods' can be configured from popular experience.

The enacting of neighbourhood boundaries may include physical markers and perambulations that act as a learning experience (Blomley 2014) or a bonding opportunity (Ingram 2021). More fuzzily, they can be seen as the edges of networks of spatial identity. There are many different boundaries within 'the local'. Bradley contends that the literal and figurative boundary work performed during neighbourhood planning demarcates the possibility for democratic politics, marking as it does the end of a particular political order and the beginning of a new collective identity (2015: 99). Such boundaries might delineate a space for political antagonism and give voice to residual anger at exclusion from traditional political decision-making (Wargent and Parker 2018; 8). At the same time, they may mark out an alternative claim to space and place.

> "Boundaries are symbolic but not imaginary; they are etched in geography and in people's lives. They delineate territory and symbolically define belonging and exclusion. The significance of spatial boundaries is in the demarcation of similarity and difference" (Bradley 2015: 100)

Getting to set the boundaries, to decide on their quirks, fuzziness and gateways is a key element in the power-games of regeneration. The New Labour period was characterised by more and more Area Based Initiatives (ABIs), including education action zones, health action zones, and policing initiatives, as well as multi-purpose approaches like New Deal for Communities (NDC). The proliferation of TLAs (three letter acronyms) was derided as 'alphabet soup', yet the spatial targeting of ABIs "is both technical and political at one and the same time" (Kearns and Parkinson 2001: 2107). These political choices that define the terms of inter-place competition should "accommodate the pre-existence of neighbourhoods founded upon place-oriented social processes, and this is an ongoing rather than a one-off requirement" (ibid: 2107), yet such sensitivity to 'natural neighbourhoods' has been almost entirely missing over the decades.

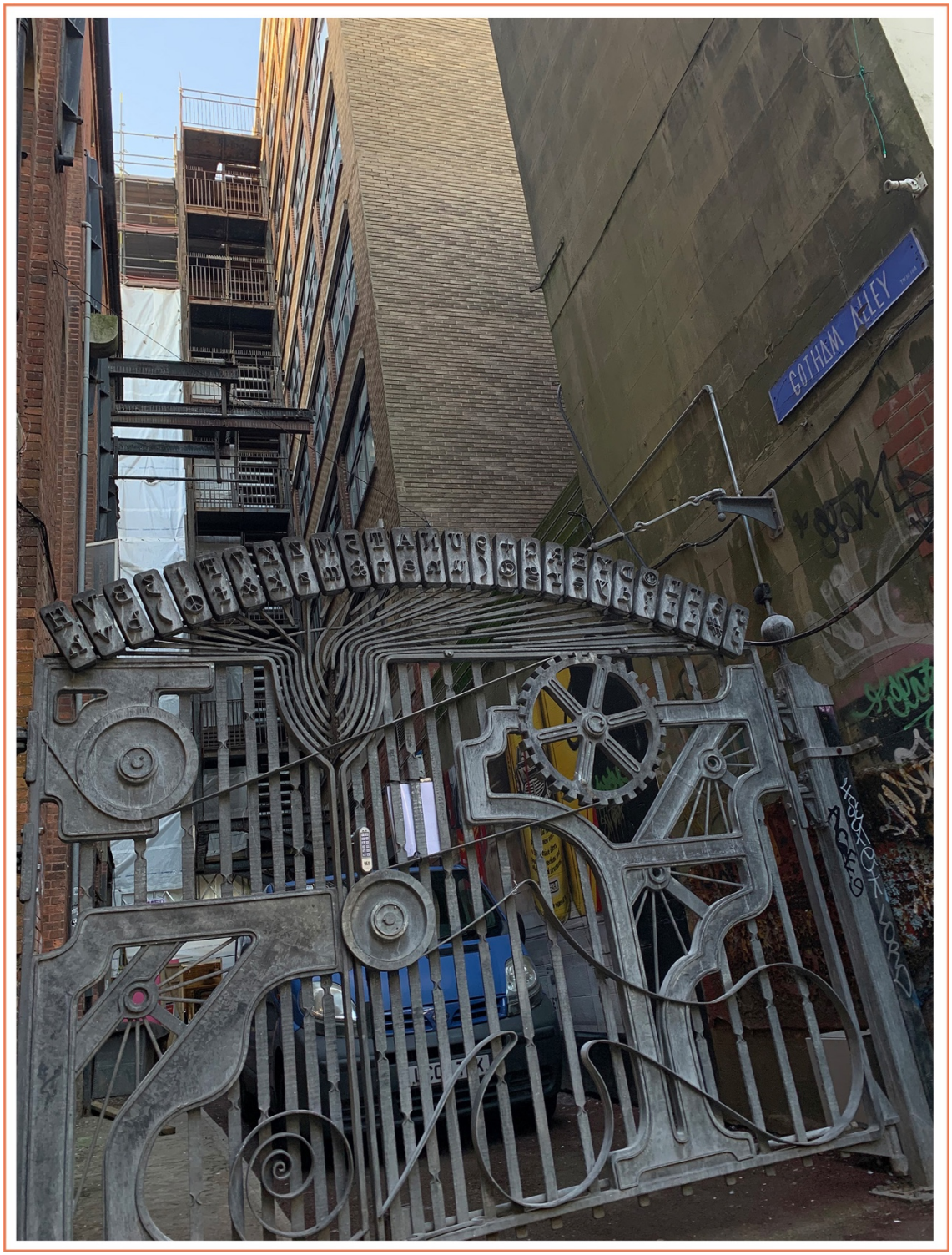
At least as powerful as 'bounding' is place-naming, "a political practice par excellence of 'power over space'" (Pinchevski and Torgovnik 2002: 367), generating in response an academic school of 'critical toponymies' (Berg and Vuolteenaho 2009). Often these studies are concerned with the power of political-techno-bureaucratic institutions to classify and attach definitions to existing social spaces (Celik, Favro and Ingersoll 1994) as states "consolidated their authority and eased their governance through archives and registers of people, places and things" (Nash 1999: 457). Bourdieu stressed the symbolic violence in the "state monopolies of legitimate naming" (1991: 47, 239-43). Notwithstanding the power of the state to intervene in naming, I am more interested in alternative, informal, contested area-naming strategies and outcomes. The state is not that good at paying attention to the local, an incompetence that both spurs and enables SRN.

Li and Zhou use Soja's 'Thirdspace thinking' to investigate area-naming in an historical area of Beijing. Against the grain of urban planning labelling, they find in the plurality of names and meanings a freedom for people "to renew their own understanding" (2018: 16). Place names are 'social facts', "embedded in intricate cultural interrelations and tension-filled conceptions of space… the practices of place naming are also caught up, in any given society, in the power and possibilities of 'making places'" (Berg and Vuolteenaho 2009: 9).

Laclau's description of the symbolically unifying functions of names as performative catalysts for popular identities (2005: 93-124) is exemplified in Granby and a constant challenge in White Rock. In some ways the Hastings Commons was prefigured as long ago as 2013 with the meanwhile lease on the basement of Rock House. It was always about the area, the neighbourhood, the fine grain. We have already seen how HPWRT drew attention to the 'missing zone' of White Rock from 2008 onwards through repeated naming and narrative-framing (Lowndes 2016). That process continued after 2014 with the dumping of the name 'Rothermere House' and its replacement with Rock House and has culminated (for now) in the naming of the Hastings Commons. Arguments over 'Gotham Alley' show that naming is part of the performance of ownership. Since taking possession of Eagle House in April 2021 we have stayed open

about the naming of the alleyway behind which formed the boundary of the America Ground. We have been calling it ‘Eagle Alley/America Alley/Boundary Yard/etc’ while the decision gets made eventually through use and conversations.

Figure 9.4: ‘Gotham Alley’ sign. In the Hastings Commons we call it the Alley. WRNV commissioned the gate from local artist Leigh Dyer



Granby, too, sits within a complex nested naming geography, as Lord Gifford explored (1989: 38-40). These local taxonomies became a matter of national interest, with media coverage of the 'disturbances' of 1981 using Toxteth, Liverpool 8 and Granby interchangeably. Although Toxteth was the name most often associated with the 'disturbances', it was actually the historic name for a large area of south Liverpool mentioned in the Domesday Book of 1086 as Stochestede (*ie* 'the stockaded or enclosed place', from the Anglo-Saxon *stocc* 'stake and *stede* 'place'). Liverpool 8 is a postal district which includes most of the areas where Black people have lived, but also areas like the Dingle which are (still) predominantly White. Granby as the council ward with the highest proportion of Black people, mapped roughly to the Merseyside Police 'Toxteth sub-division' defined after 1981.

More recently as a neighbourhood, Granby has less of an issue with names for three reasons. Firstly, the stories it draws on are relatively recent compared to White Rock and therefore bear less layers of historical naming. Secondly, Granby Street – the former high street which acts as the spine for the series of cross-streets – is a strong organising principle for the neighbourhood. Thirdly, the locational clarity of the Granby 4 Streets community land trust has successfully embedded the name, whereas the White Rock ecosystem includes a mix of organisations, with 'Hastings' and 'White Rock' in some of the names. The Hastings Commons itself, with its new branding and characters, may become more successfully embedded but it will need to work with and celebrate the heritage of names.

I mentioned in Chapter 3 the use of 'conservation' as an attempt to sustain and reincarnate the inheritance. Alongside the 'naming' of place and spaces, this is a process of imagineering. Both in White Rock through the Heritage Action Zone and in Granby through the long-overdue valorisation of the Liverpool terraces and their Welsh builders, these places are using their unique and interesting histories to tell different stories about themselves. This is part of a broader attempt to dislodge longstanding negative perceptions, replacing them with locally-defined versions of the neighbourhood self. While historic conservation has certainly been used to enable and justify gentrification and displacement (Herzfeld 2010), community-rooted history can

be a way of enhancing both intra-community connections and "a future-oriented social ethic" (Labrador 2013).

In places so spectacularly failed by state and market, it is not surprising to find a perceptual disjuncture between insiders and outsiders, lovers and haters, joiners and colonisers. Granby had its reputations within (already-tainted) Liverpool as a safe haven for Black and minoritised communities (Gifford 1989: 67-70) or a place of "nuisance… noise… danger… and dreadful heartache" (Merrifield 1996: 208), a place of acute poverty and great bars (Granby Workshop 2015), a place of riot, rebellion and survival against the odds [Hazel, Eleanor, Ronnie, Erika *passim*]. In Hastings, the case study area had a longstanding subaltern identity – location of the notorious Rock Fair; the beyond-boundaries independence of the America Ground; the secret run-down Alley canyoned by dereliction; the pier slowly falling to its knees; a piece of town time-shared between drinkers (underage on weekend nights, street-drinkers in the day); its history characterised by the continual production and sweeping-away of 'derelict lands'. When the pier was closed in 2006 White Rock was not yet a recognised neighbourhood but rather played two contradictory roles as part of the town centre and therefore to blame for the town's poor reputation and also the 'missing zone' between the new town and St Leonards.

I believe this concept of 'missing' could offer a deeper understanding and more useful language than 'left behind' and also hold clues to the genesis of self-renovating neighbourhoods. When buildings or neighbourhoods are 'missing in plain sight' they become what Douglas Adams called SEP (somebody else's problem), not really invisible but 'almost' so (Adams 1982: 28-29). They get stuck in the 'too hard' tray. To make progress would require unthinkable structural and cultural changes, and therefore progress will not be made unless a new ingredient emerges (Gibson-Graham 1996: xi). Meanwhile the problem-place must be distantiated or only "seen with great difficulty out of the corner of one's eye" (Crocker 2012: 11). Granby was 'missing' because it had been cartographically wiped out long ago, with the threat of looming demolition ever present from the early 1960s until the early 2010s. Indeed large parts of the neighbourhood – buildings and people – kept disappearing. White Rock was

'missing' because the Old Town, New Town and St Leonards were clearly-labelled zones but there was a gap between them, marked with a great big rotting pier which generated a mighty SEP forcefield! These places were not 'left behind'; they were blurred out, obscured, ignored, let down (Watson 2018). And the greatest piece of self-renovation has been to bring them into fine-grain focus.

9.2 Who gets to shape place?

> "And it's almost, it's a neglectful sort of, a sort of slow destruction… It becomes a spiral where people cease to be able to help themselves and so they become the stereotype... Poverty's not [just] about a lack of money… it's also about labelling, it's about not having, or feeling that you haven't got, any power" [151201 Hazel].

White Rock and Granby illustrate the uneven processes of "constantly becoming" within and against the constraints of the representation of their spaces by powerful others. Among many factors[69], two closely-interrelated forces have been dominant in the shaping of these neighbourhoods: ownership patterns and regeneration praxis. My argument is that these two forces continually (mis)shape Granby, White Rock and other poor neighbourhoods. They play out differently depending on context but the problems remain the same:

1. Property ownership and the (lazy, greedy, brutal) dominant ownership model
2. Regen decision-making – the processes and principles of regen set primarily at national level and translated into the local by local government, its selected partners and those it chooses to be legitimate players.

These are relevant both to previous local regen approaches and to the practice of SRN as an alternative. Dominant ownership models are challenged by community ownership and decommodification. Traditional regen praxis is challenged by SRN and commoning.

[69] Including: accidental transformation, botched regen, neighbourhood dynamics and effects, processes of uneven development, and the financialisation of property.

In addition to these active forces, I suggest a third factor – the *crisis of place-keeping*. I will argue in the next section that in order to shape place proactively you have to tackle these three elements – ownership, regen-shaping and everyday place management. First I want to draw out some key points about the ownership and regeneration backdrop for Granby and White Rock.

The ownership patterns are quite different in each neighbourhood. In Granby the dominant ownership is by council and housing associations, alongside a small proportion of surviving freeholders like Hazel and Eleanor. Merrifield's point (1996: 213) about Granby Residents Association primarily representing home-owners is relevant, highlighting the toe-hold on power and agency that freehold provides even in the most difficult circumstances. The Granby clearances of the 1990s and 2000s emptied the area of tenants and of many but not all home-owners.

For Granby neglect and disinvestment was *punitive*, viewed locally as punishment for the Toxteth Uprising of 1981 and as driven by a racist view of Granby as Liverpool's most diverse and troublesome area [151201/160610 Hazel; 151126 Ronnie]. A key task in this process of "putting Granby back in its box" was to disconnect the neighbourhood from the city centre through a swathe of demolitions and the building of a new estate designed to block the routes, described with hindsight as 'neighbourhood kettling' [151126 Ronnie]. Demolition-as-punishment is seen again after the 2011 riots in areas like Tottenham (Lees and Hubbard 2021: 13). Within Granby itself both the city council and the various housing associations were actively clearing out tenants and reducing services. The bins weren't emptied, the street lights weren't turned on, the roads weren't cleaned. There was fly-tipping, old mattresses, "the rubbish collects and the cats shit on it and it becomes just pretty awful" [151201 Hazel]. This was experienced viscerally and personally by the remaining residents, who were living in old houses with neither heating nor neighbours, as the kind of 'root-shock' described by Fullilove (2001), the destruction of a neighbourhood by urban renewal causing a traumatic stress reaction, the slow violence of displacement (Pain 2019; Lees and Robinson 2021). Hazel listed out deaths among those displaced and remaining campaigners. "I remember that some people didn't make it. Our experience

led some to die prematurely. The stress we had. For 20 years we were under the hammer, the area was getting emptied out, it was a constant battle, including against the houses you were joined on to. Fractured lives, early deaths" [181212 Hazel]. Philo's concept of 'geographies that wound' retrieves "a critical sense of attributing *blame*" as well as questioning how the pain of the wounded should be treated, represented and memorialised (2005: 441).

As a town centre neighbourhood with fragmented but mainly private ownership, White Rock is very different though equally vulnerable. With 62% of households private rented, including a high proportion of poorly-managed but lucrative HMOs, there has been less direct local authority leverage. The regen discourse was powerful but was potentiated through the corporate body known as Sea Space, which chose simply to ignore the dereliction of the legacy assets and particularly the abandoned FJ Parsons empire. In White Rock regeneration was a matter of *patronage* – focused on opaque property deals that swept away (most of) the run-down urban fabric in the centre of town to create a series of Grade A office blocks designed as corporate HQs, with no acknowledgement of existing local assets – built or human – and minimal connectivity to the vital and messy local economy of micro-businesses, let alone the 'diverse economies' described by Gibson-Graham (2006, 2008, 2014, 2020).

In both locations the driving powers behind regeneration were distant from and often ignorant of the people on the ground. Indeed, those people were actually *irrelevant* to the regeneration strategy which, as throughout regeneration policy, depended on raising property values. It could be argued that, while rarely explicit, such policies were designed to create and highlight rent gaps that would stimulate inward (speculative) investment and the dislocation of problematic poverty. This is counted as a metric of success:

> "Regeneration can greatly improve an area and the quality of life for its residents. CBRE studied the effect of regeneration on local property markets in London and found that house prices within a 750-metre radius of a regeneration zone grow faster than the wider market, by up to 3.6% per annum on average" (Jennet Siebrits, UK head of residential research, CBRE 2019).

Having experienced decades of judgement and intervention from professionals and government, these neighbourhoods and their respective city/town are 'regen places' (places shaped by their regeneration experience) and cannot be understood without the backdrop of the bumpy ride of regeneration policy and practice over the past 50 years. Liverpool and Hastings have appeared on practically every list of deprivation and been *subjectivated* (Rose and Ricken 2018) by the political and funding initiatives associated with such lists.

Here I focus attention on a few points to highlight the genesis of some key elements of the regeneration canon, illuminating some points of weakness that allow SRN to flourish in the cracks.

9.2.1 'Slash and burn' versus 'darning the fabric'

A shift in the 1960s saw the drivers of 'slum clearance' move from public health and social justice motives to a politics of modernisation (Cameron 2006). This slash-and-burn 'updating' of the fabric of place is a great violence that has been discredited in almost every previous incarnation.

Figure 9.5: Archetypal 'slash and burn' (Milton Court Road, Deptford in 1968)

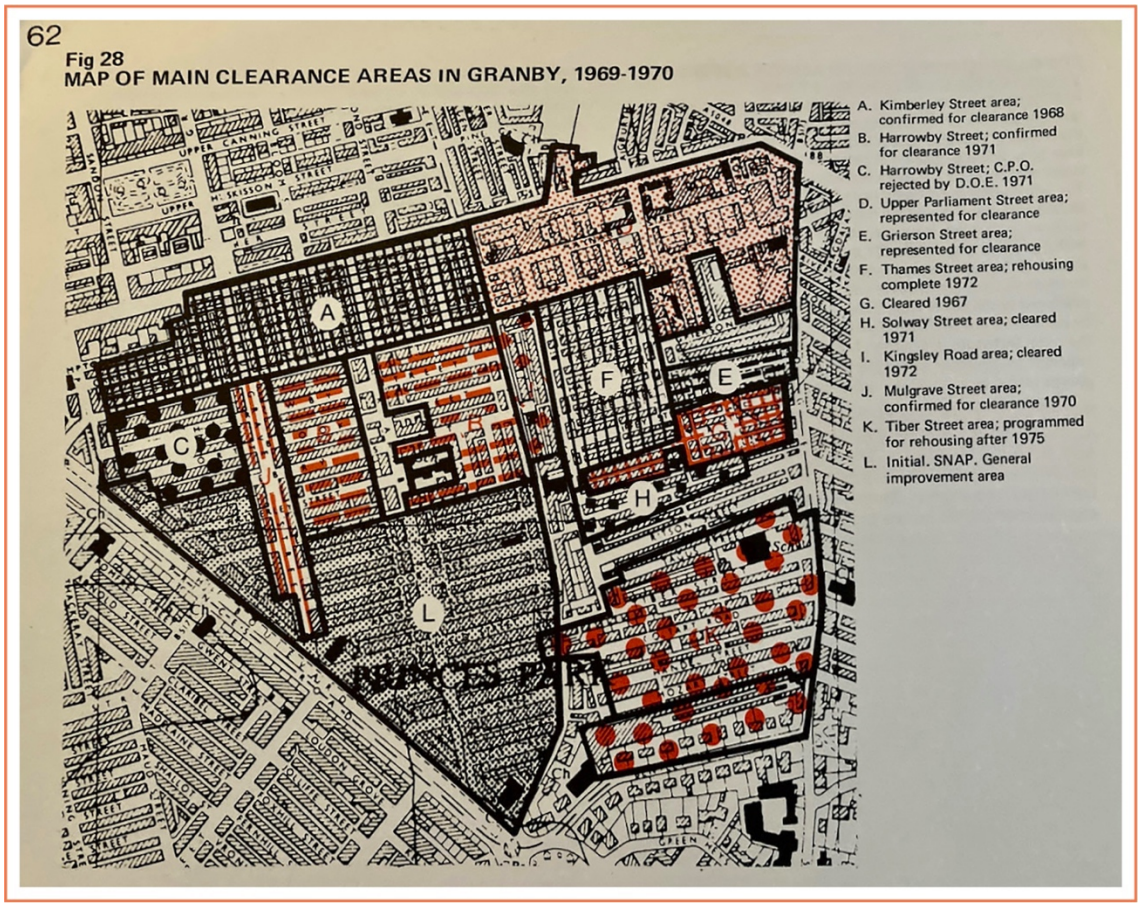
Yet it is has continued to be systemically supported (eg by charging VAT on renovations but not new-build) throughout the past 40 years. This rootless 'renewal through destruction' is rampant again in the 'Build Build Build' programmes of the early 2020s. For the first time since the early 1990s I have seen a *negative output* – "square metres of floorspace reduced" (Towns Fund Indicator Guidance, July 2021) reminding me of "local authority dwellings demolished" (City Challenge Output Monitoring, 1993). As then, this perverse indicator is justified as a 'rationalisation'.

Figure 9.6: Negative outputs (Towns Fund indicator guidance, July 2021)

ToC Results Level	Indicator	Unit of Measurement	Frequency of Measurement	Definition	Evidence	Baseline Evidence
Level 2 Outputs	Amount of floorspace rationalised	m^2 of floorspace	Every 12 months	The sqm of overall floorspace following completion of the project through, for example, demolition or disposal. – Completed means physical completion of the rationalisation – no additonal physical work is required.	• Monitoring form signed by the local authority regeneration manager/ director (or equivalent) confirming the metrics. • Address of premises including postcode. • As built drawings showing floorspace. • Photographs of space (before and after)	• Photographs /floorspace plans of premises before the project

Just as this strand was playing out in the centre of Hastings in the late 1960s with the destruction of a dense town centre street to be replaced by (Joni Mitchell guessed it) a multi-storey car park, in Granby something special was happening that would lay a different thread for the future. The Shelter Neighbourhood Action Project (SNAP) 1969-72 (see Chapter 5 and Appendix B) was a unique attempt at approaching a neighbourhood holistically. Their eventual focus area ('L' in the map in figure 9.7) matches uncannily Granby's surviving Four Streets half a century later. If they had been allowed to focus on the whole area would there be more survival? Regardless, this tradition of 'darning the fabric' is a great inspiration to the concept of self-renovating neighbourhoods as an alternative.

Figure 9.7: Map of Granby clearance areas (SNAP 69-72: 62)



9.2.2 The Production of Dereliction

By the time of the next slash-and-burn in White Rock in the 1980s – a return to pull down the other side of Priory Street to be replaced this time with (you couldn't make it up) a development site called 'Lacuna Place' – Granby was facing a different level and intensity of revanchist policy (see Appendix B). Of course the Thatcher decade and its discourses of failure impacted White Rock as well. While Granby was the exemplary territory on which 'inner city' politics were played out most grotesquely, Hastings was a small coastal town with some big city characteristics. Much of its long-term dereliction began production in that decade, most notably the abandoning of the Hastings Observer newspaper empire and the proliferation of poorly-managed HMOs.

Capitalism requires the destruction of value in order to create gaps (Smith, 1979): Lacuna Place is a pitch-perfect example. This gap at the heart of Hastings town centre was a *construction* as surely as the Grade A offices that eventually filled it (see figure

6.8). “Implicit in such urban renewal projects is a both a fear of the ‘other’ as well as a desire to clear out the untidy elements of the ‘informal city’ and to shape a developed, ordered postindustrial city” (Till 2012: 4).

When it turned out that there was no demand for those offices they were financially, though not physically, ‘liquidated’ to create yet another gap that lured the University of Brighton into the picture. Just eight years later when a new Vice-Chancellor took over, she oversaw a rapid review of value led by property professionals (not educators, not regenerators, not political or community voices) which resulted in the withdrawal of the university from Hastings leaving a new gap – empty buildings with multi-million pound price-tags.

The combination of the 2008 financial crisis and the 2010 election changed the rules and the players of the game in both case study areas. Now the new office blocks of White Rock lay empty alongside the declining legacy assets, and Granby was back in the ‘too-difficult’ tray. The old regeneration was dead but Liverpool City Council (LCC) and Sea Space adapted to this changed world in ways that sustained the intertwined and excluding power of state and market. LCC tendered for a single developer for Granby, while in Hastings Sea Space director John Shaw established a new company – Sea Change – transferring Sea Space’s assets and leaving it dormant with a set of liabilities. While Sea Space had been expert at pulling funds from the New Labour government and its regional development agency, Sea Change would be more ‘Tory-friendly’ and ready to do business with the new Local Enterprise Partnership. John Shaw has been described by HBC officers as “a bully who knows where the money is”. He did not change tactics, but rather lost his shackles. Sea Space had been focused on Hastings and Bexhill; Sea Change covers all of East Sussex. Leaving the Ore Valley liabilities behind, and parking the Priory Quarter masterplan, he focused on cutting the Link Road through the Pebsham Valley – a pristine place with few local residents or legacy assets.

It is my argument and my driving fury that dereliction is not just ‘produced’ by a system we pay for but ‘farmed’ by the private interests that have positioned

themselves to benefit. Indeed in the dereliction in White Rock we have seen a 'system' that clearly failed wider society but worked perfectly over many decades to achieve the antisocial goals of well-placed profiteers and their state and private advocates [EMP: OB planning history 1985-2019].

9.2.3 Geography as ideology / making places compete

The Thatcher decade saw a counter-intuitive expansion of interventionist programmes and policies and the introduction of "geography as ideology" into regeneration (Anderson 1983). The problem facing Conservative small-state governments (that they should not disturb the free market by assisting 'local firms'[70]) was 'resolved' by making *places* compete in the 'market for government support' while channelling social surplus into private hands through subsidising *consultants* and *providers*. As Massey commented in 1982 Enterprise Zones were "another spatially discriminatory policy playing one area, one group of workers, off another" (Massey 1982: 431), and this deliberately competitive approach between places would soon become normalised until we become blind to its idiocy even when the funding under competition is called the 'Shared Prosperity' Fund!

New Labour promised to end 'the ugly parade' of competitive bidding and focus on 'narrowing the gap', 'bending the mainstream' and 'putting communities in control' (DETR 1999; Social Exclusion Unit 2001; CLG 2008). Of course government of any stripe was not going to give up the politico-structural gains of making places compete for its attention. To an extent this pledge held – most programmes from 1997 to 2010 focused on areas of greatest 'need' but, in the case study neighbourhoods at least, that led to an intensification of the ugly parade, a performative process of endlessly repeating the deprivation statistics.

If Liverpool was the city of every regeneration programme, Hastings was the equivalent town (see figure 9.8). For both places the rough reputation was at least as

[70] "If local firms can win business by being fully competitive so much the better. But if they can't, the Government should not interfere with market forces in order to help them." (Letter from Nicholas Ridley's PPS to Thatcher, 23 Sep. 1987, TNA, PREM 19/2463)

impactful as the reality, and both needed to sustain that reputation in the 'poverty parade' of regeneration bidding. Disinvestment and decay had to be regularly put on display. Civil servants from Her Majesty's Treasury remembered (in 2009) a visit to Hastings in the early 2000s where a full turnout of local government councillors and officers "spent the day depressing us with the worst figures… tales of refugees, prostitutes, and no-hopers" [EMP: HMRC 2009]. This kind of repetition directed what could be seen locally and shaped what was overlooked.

Twenty years later, Boris Johnson's breathless 'Levelling Up' speech finished with "the most important factor in levelling up, the yeast that lifts the whole mattress of dough, the magic sauce – the ketchup of catch-up and that is leadership" including the, he says widely-acknowledged, need for urban leaders "to get on a plane and go to the big trade and property fairs and hustle for their hometown" (Johnson 2021).

Figure 9.8 Regeneration programmes in White Rock and Granby

GOVERNMENT	PROGRAMME	White Rock	Granby
	Community Development Programme 1968+	Y	Y
	Urban Programme 1968-94	Y	Y
	Shelter Neighbourhood Action Project 1969-1972		Y
Conservative (Thatcher) 1979-90	Enterprise Zones 1980s		Y
	Urban Development Corporations 1981+		Y
	Estate Action 1985-1994		Y
Conservative (Major) 1990-97	English Partnerships 1992 (became Homes & Communities Agency, then Homes England)	Y	Y
	City Challenge 1992-97		
Labour (Blair) 1997-2008	Single Regeneration Budget 1994-2000	Y	Y
	Regional Development Agencies 1998-2010	Y	
	Neighbourhood Renewal Fund 2000+	Y	Y
	Single Community Programme 2001-06 (community empowerment fund, community learning chests, community chests)	Y	Y
	Neighbourhood Management Pathfinders 2001-05		
	Working Neighbourhoods Fund 2004+	Y	Y
	Guide Neighbourhoods 2005-07		
Labour (Brown) 2008-10	New Deal for Communities 1998-2010		
	Employment Zones 2000+		
	Local Enterprise Growth Initiative	Y	
	Housing Market Renewal 2002-2011		Y
	My Place youth assets 2008-2010	Y	
Coalition (Cameron) 2010-15	Local Enterprise Partnerships	Y	
	Big Local 2010+		
	Community First 2011-15	Y	
	Community Organisers 2011-15	Y	Y
	Neighbourhood Planning 2011+		
	Our Place 2014-15	Y	
Conservative (Cameron) 2015-16	Coastal Communities Fund 2015+	Y	
Conservative (May) 2016-2019	Future High Streets (including Heritage Action Zones) 2019+	Y	
Conservative (Johnson) 2019+	Getting Building Fund	Y	
	Towns Fund (Town Deals)	Y	
	Levelling Up Fund		
	Community Ownership Fund		
	Community Renewal Fund	Y	
	UK Shared Prosperity Fund		

9.2.4 Regeneration as PR

Saumarez Smith showed how the paralysing tensions around the launch of the Action for Cities programme in the late 1980s led to a focus on *promotion*, with the publication of a glossy brochure and a new requirement for projects to acknowledge government contribution with 'prominent signboards' and press notices in the Action for Cities format (2019: 288). This was an innovation that has depressingly featured without fail in every single government programme since.[71]

Mark Fisher connected this PR focus with new kinds of bureaucracy, arguing that the proliferation of audit and regulation was not a "return of the repressed, ironically re-emerging at the heart of a system which has professed to destroy it" (2009: 40) but rather was inherent in neoliberal control societies. His analysis becomes more prescient every day. Managers at every level have, and feel entitled to, more information than ever before and much of this is provided by the 'workers' below them in an intensely hierarchical system. For all the talk of 'delivery partners' in regeneration, the precise position of the SRN fundraiser is at the bottom of a huge burden of risks and constraints sent 'down the chain' from the top funder via all kinds of 'accountable bodies', snowballing on the way. Fisher's description of how "work becomes geared towards the generation and massaging of representations rather than to the official goals of the work itself" (ibid: 42) perfectly fits the experience in regeneration in the case study neighbourhood and reminds us of the power of representations. In Fisher's words: "[in capitalism] all that is solid melts into PR, and late capitalism is defined at least as much by this ubiquitous tendency towards PR-production as it is by the imposition of market mechanisms" (ibid: 44).

Fisher suggests that audit is the "fusion of PR and bureaucracy" (2009: 50). He describes the horror of free-floating bureaucracies "independent of any external authority; but that very autonomy means that they assume a heavy implacability a resistance to any amendment or questioning" (ibid). This un-pindownable yet

[71] Indeed in 2021 the Community Ownership Fund was both delayed and developed in secret because "they want it to clearly come from UK Government" [EMP: 210706 PCA Inquiry meeting].

immensely heavy bureaucracy is exemplified by one particular programme in Hastings [EMP: CHART review 2020], but is recognisable to different degrees in all the funders. It is not an 'error' that can be simply tackled – it is an entire mindset and 'way of doing'. As the prophet of bureaucratic control, Kafka is an inevitable reference, and certainly the case studies are weighed down by Kafkaesque tendencies. Eeva Berglund captures the problem: "The information that audit creates does have consequences even though it is so shorn of local detail, so abstract, as to be misleading or meaningless – except that is by the aesthetic criteria of audit itself" (2008: 326).

To Fisher's fusion, I would want to add a third focus – surveillance – which is both part of and a step beyond the bureaucratic process. The concept of the 'accountable body' is a roving eye that sees all and will report – the super-grass. Those that actually play this role are generally as rubbish at the surveillance as they are at the bureaucracy, but the burden falls on SRN nonetheless. Both the surveillance and the bureaucratic processes are unnervingly unattributable, abstract and heavily weighted on self-assessment, positioning the supplicant as their own auditor[72].

9.2.5 Stigma and Subalternity

Neglect and disinvestment (marginalisation) are used by both state and market as tools that create opportunities for future change (profit). Both Hastings and Liverpool have experienced specific, spectacular failures of regeneration that set the context for their later experiences of gentrification/decline.

In both locations, there is an embracing of subaltern identities, partly reflecting their wider city/town contexts of Scouse pride and Hastings quirkiness, but in each case also identifiable as its own neighbourhood characteristic, drawing on locally important 'marginality stories' from the America Ground to the Uprising. In both places there is positive independence, eccentricity, and resourcefulness in adversity, an inheritance from sailors, smugglers, fishermen, musicians and other free and roaming spirits.

[72] "There is a sense of the lab-rat working out which levers to press to unlock the resource, but while we can get cannier, we can never overcome because the experiment appears to be investigating the impact on rat health of constant and arbitrary change" [210701 Fieldnote].

Theirs is a Millwall FC-style reaction ('no one likes us we don't care') to territorial stigmatisation (Wacquant et al 2014; Tyler 2020).

'Spatial taint' (see figure 5.5) has certainly been relevant in both Granby and Hastings and perhaps the biggest change that has happened to both of them during the research period is the stripping away of that stigma, the cleansing of the spatial taint (Spain 1993). This process has felt (more in White Rock than Granby) scratchy and irritating like carbolic. The change can be seen in journalist Tom Dyckhoff's Let's Move To pieces in *The Guardian* from 2010: "seaside dereliction a-plenty" and 2012: "if only [the old town] wasn't saddled to Hastings itself. But at least that has kept house prices low", to 2019: "Don't mention the G-word, or call it, as some property column or other (was it me?) did a decade ago, 'Portobello-on-Sea'. It is not, although the interiors bloggers are coming". "This is St Lenny, as the locals call it…" said another 'Move To' article in *The Times* in November 2020, except they don't or at least not till recently.

Figure 9.9: "St Lenny's on Sea", comments below the line on The Times article, 6/11/20

Alan Esdaile... I've never heard it called St Lenny. Must be the newbies!

Chris Jolly... It's going up in the world Alan... great news!

Judy Atkinson... nor me

Paul Marshall... or FILTH – Failed In London Try Hastings. As my daughter advised me

Pauline Richards... or the d.f.ls

Perri Anne Haste... I have heard Lenny Beige Aka Steve Furst refer to it affectionately as St Lenny in his shows before.

Russell Field... Perri, that's where it's from. X

Steve Amos... Nor me!

Janet Rennie... yes it is. Seen it so much more recently

John Paul Veness... someones trying to boost their house price 🙁 lol

Harry Randall... I always new it as "Bedsit Land"?

Angela Frances Gardner... We've never called St Leonards 'St Lenny' and I've been here since 1962!

Nicola Dobson... Never heard it either and I was born here

Rob Ramsden... Move to St. Leonards they said. It will be fun they said.

Gin Genie... I heard it referred to as lennies last year

Liane Carroll... It's a Lenny Beige thing!! Xx

John Coleman... Some of you dinosaurs need to get down there it has changed a bit.

Alan King... St Lenny ? my arse, never heard it referred to that

Margaret Trowell... quite like "St Len's" ..why not? I've lived here since 1965. Don't even know who St Leonard actually was.... nothing been made of him as far as I know ...no statue etc

Mark Triggs... Dalston-on-sea

Judie Struys... St Lenny? That's a new one on me. Mind you, I've only lived in St Leonards since 1969, apart from 2 short periods in Hastings and Heathfield.

Bernard Goffredo... Never heard it called that but it was built as a town for the well off

Howard White... I call is St Leonards. Just cannot stand this '-on-Sea' thing.

While I would not want to romanticise marginality, there is abundant evidence that it has been a factor both in social and heritage preservation and, perhaps counterintuitively, in enabling efforts towards collective ownership. The successes of the case study SRN approaches are partly because these are marginal places in themselves and the spaces the community agents focus on are particularly "interstitial" (Mann 1986; Fisker et al 2019). "Spaces which are marginal to capital inherently exist in the flows of investment within the capitalist economy" (DeFilippis 2004: 12). As Kevin Lynch said, "dealing with the existing city is the search for under-used space and time, and its readaptation for a desired activity" ([1968] 1995: 776).

The history of the development trust movement is littered with specific time-space constellations in which spaces in the trough of capital flow – "unlikely spaces and unpromising conditions… unregarded sites of alternative value" (Tonkiss 2013: 321, 316) – became a focus for people motivated by social justice, neighbourhood preservation and/or economic need. At those moments particular spaces within particular neighbourhoods became open to unusual solutions and "the possible city" (Lynch 1968) opens up. Two of the most famous are the spaces under the 1960s Westway flyover which were taken into custody by the North Kensington Amenity Trust (now Westway Trust) and Coin Street Community Builders who took 13 acres of Thames-side property in Waterloo in the early 1980s for just £1M.

Granby and White Rock have taken the same approach, seeing the value in and reconfiguring spaces that were "dormant, disregarded or dead" (Tonkiss 2013: 322). Similarly the thrust of the argument behind meanwhile use is the inherent "pauses in the property process" [EMP: 121107 DTA Convention plenary speech). These are the moments when the grip of the dominant ownership model is weakest and, taken at the flood…

9.3 Shaping place proactively

> "This space has nothing innocent about it: it answers to particular tactics and strategies; it is, quite simply the space of the dominant mode of production" (Lefebvre 1991: 360)

No space is 'innocent' and they all answer to particular tactics and strategies. Can we steal and adapt the hegemonic tools to create alternatives (DeFilippis 2004: 12-13)? If places are dramatically shaped by their regeneration experience then some of those lessons become accumulated locally. After so many programmes, consultants and plans, a local 'regeneration imagination' builds up, both as a set of skills (often unremarked) and as shared stories of past failures and what should have been but was disallowed by various manifestations of the dominant mode of production. The case neighbourhoods illustrate how, sometimes, the process of 'constantly becoming' can be purposively, deliberatively shaped by local people drawing deeply on the specificities of their history and their dynamic social and physical topography.
There is now a widespread view that since capital can go anywhere, all that localities can do is try to attract it. Investment flows are seen as "noncorporeal and *placeless*, while cities are trapped by their location" (DeFilippis 2004: 8). Economic restructuring has left places competing with each other for mobile capital in a battle of "placeless power vs powerless place" (Castells and Henderson 1987: 7). Localities have always been produced in unequal relations with the extra-local. Increased capital mobility means that "in order for agents within localities to realise autonomy, they must construct structures and institutions of capital accumulation that limit the potential for mobility by transforming the scale at which capital is dependent"(DeFilippis 2004: 30). I think of this as 'tethering capital to place' [EMP: JS speech Waitekere NZ, Feb 2010].

Discussions of local autonomy often see 'local' as equivalent to the local state, a situation further problematised by the evisceration of local government in the UK since 2010. The limits of devolution have created conditionally-powerful subregional players such as Liverpool City Region Combined Authority and the South East Local Enterprise

Partnership.[73] While Liverpool City Council remains Granby's main power player, for White Rock two-tier local government adds complexity, along with a plethora of strategic boards, executive delivery groups, and 'project prioritisation working groups' [EMP: Town Deal 2020-21].

* * *

The different patterns of ownership and regeneration described above have dominated the unfolding of SRN in the two places. In Granby the critical shift was in convincing Liverpool City Council to tolerate the concept of 'piecemeal' rather than 'comprehensive' regeneration. In White Rock it has been possible to critique but not obligatory to overturn the dominant regeneration strategies while engaging with private owners and land agents to get a 'foot in the door' and begin stake-building.

In both case studies, to lay claim to some kind of *shaping power* (Harvey 2013: 4) and achieve a measure of *hyper-local '*autonomy' (with all the necessary caveats and qualifications of that word) has involved the development of a solution to an SEP ("somebody else's problem") issue. In Granby this was the impasse in the redevelopment of the Four Streets; in White Rock, the failing pier and the 35-year dereliction of the Observer Building. In both places these roots in the specifics of the problematic built fabric are intertwined with a struggle to wrest some control over how the mini-locality is conceived, invested in, constructed, and owned. Local autonomy is not a matter of productively fitting into the global economy but rather "controlling how the very interactions between the local and the larger scale take place, on what kind of playing field, and with what rules and values" (DeFilippis 2004: 24). Neither Granby CLT nor the ecosystem of people and organisations making the Hastings Commons are *in control* but they have begun to reshape the playing field.

73 These replaced the previous Regional Development Agencies, and will no doubt be replaced in their turn, undermining vertical relationship-building and thereby heightening the need for DIY approaches sustained over time.

9.3.1 Three Tools

The SRN leaders in Granby and Hastings have made use of the three tools of ownership, regen decision-making and place management to challenge the dominant models/ discourse.

Figure 9.10: SRN uses three tools to challenge dominant models

	Dominant model	SRN practice
OWNERSHIP	Market led speculative financialised exclusive exploitative focus on exchange-value	Community led custodianship socialised inclusive protective focus on use-value
REGENERATION/ PLACE-SHAPING	Dominating regen Renewal through destruction, slash and burn Technocratic, risk averse Naming	Bottom up development Get inside or DIY Active, collaborative, ongoing production and use of space Naming
PLACE-KEEPING	Managed decline, reduced contact, hoarding, policing, waiting.	Neighbourhood housework, sustained contact, meanwhiling, commoning, care

It is essential to achieve some kind of ownership stake. As well a physical base and space to do stuff, it provides a tangible, blatant and ongoing challenge to the dominant ownership model simply by demonstrating that ownership can mean something different[74]. The SRN ownership approach is socialised, inclusive, protective and decommodifying. It is also succession thinking, a reminder of Lynch's call that "the guerrillas of the future will need a base of operation" ([1968] 1995: 780).

Beyond the protection of spaces, it is also necessary to challenge the decision-making processes, protocols and outcome-focus of conventional regeneration. For me personally this is the most exhausting and least rewarding of the SRN tasks. Our attempts have ranged from 'getting inside it', as we tried with the Hastings Town Deal, to taking it on ourselves though strategic integrated neighbourhood regeneration in the form of the Trinity Triangle Heritage Action Zone [EMP: 200124 Town Deal ToR;

[74] Local land agent Ollie Dyer told me in 2018 'there is no market in Hastings for offices, but you've made a market'

201219 TTHAZ programme]. One way or another we seek to disrupt the canonical tenets of conventional regeneration, including the competition between places to attract 'new people'. SRN's roots in asset-based community approaches (see Russell 2020) mean focusing on how positive change can happen from within, enabling and incentivising existing residents, businesses, asset owners, etc to take action for the good of the place and the common benefit.

> "We've got two things going – the Hastings Commons itself and the broader picture thing that happens to be the HAZ (Heritage Action Zone). It could have been something else – a health action zone, an enterprise zone, a community economic development approach. The important thing is to be able to draw down some resources that can be led with passion and from Commons values. It's not massive, £2M over 4 years – if it had been bigger we wouldn't have been allowed to get on with it in the way we wanted" [201010 Reflection].

The third factor emerging from the case studies as shaping place and therefore to be added to our tools for doing so proactively, is everyday space-making and ongoing place-keeping. These are intertwined but the former might be seen as the ongoing creativity required to keep shaping place for common good and the latter as the maintenance of the place in all its human and non-human relatedness. Both these aspects of everyday local sustenance are done badly by authorities most of the time in poorer neighbourhoods. Indeed it is hard to imagine why we might think they would do it well. In the face of horrendous decline (the withdrawal of all street services in Granby, the extreme dereliction in White Rock), local people developed communal responses that took these 'classic' needs (for clean streets and safe, productive buildings) and made something more of them through piecemeal experimentation, organic processes and a different way of seeing space. The Granby market and the White Rock Pocket Park are examples of evolutionary space-making with "temporary designs and colloquial uses that remake space in provisional or rigged up ways" (Tonkiss 2013: 312). The 'creative caretaking' in Granby "transformed the whole feel of our streets; they were horrendous, now they're nice" [140509 Eleanor]. The Trinity Triangle Maintenance Club is an example of experimental place-keeping that both cleans the gutters now and lays the foundation for future collaboration between owners to embed a long-term maintenance regime [EMP: 210531 Maintenance Club].

Figure 9.11: SRN compared to conventional regeneration

SRN	Conventional
Piecemeal	Wholesale
Organic phased	Linear phased
Slow – to gain benefits along the way	Fast – to get it done
Collaborative	Controlled
Seeking community benefit	Seeking private profit
Tethered to place ('rooted' or 'functionally immobile')	Mobile ('grasshopper' or 'helicopter')
'Creative caretaking' (Eleanor 140509)	Maintenance designed down and contracted out
"Using slow money and non-monetary investments to produce gradual spatial, social and economic value and continued returns to actual users" (Tonkiss 2013: 320)	'Cataclysmic money' leveraged to produce rapid returns to distant investors and *"to build the physical and economic ruins of the crises to* come" (Tonkiss 2013: 320)
In what ways is the empirical experience of SRN different from traditional regeneration and property development? It is different in approach, values, scale, and outcomes. It focuses on 'darning the fabric', renewal without destruction. It is asset-based rather than deficit-based. It seeks to be rooted, engaging and transparent. In terms of scale it prioritises, indeed idolises, the fine grain of neighbourhood rather than the 'strategic' scales that non-grassroots approaches favour. It is thrifty, impatient and sociable. For all kinds of both negative and positive reasons it has to be 'phased organic development'. Above all it seeks to be sustainable development with triple bottom line outcomes and a commitment to the long term common good.	

Self-renovation is not a task-and-finish mission but an habitual process of ongoing stewardship, development and management. Funders, politicians, and PR-auditors are increasingly creating unrealistic 'get it built' deadlines and then installing high-bureaucracy processes that need to be achieved in order to get started (direct personal experience of Getting Building Fund 2020, Community Renewal Fund 2021, Levelling Up Fund 2021). We need to take a deep breath in and shift the focus of our RENOVATING lens to see inside 'real, ongoing life' from the neighbourhood's perspective. What matters to the healthy life of the neighbourhood? Suddenly users and uses come to the forefront, along with judgements about 'highest and best use' that can be radically different from those that drive the locational seesaw of uneven capitalist development.

9.3.2 Ongoing place-keeping

There is increasing interest in 'place-keeping' [eg 210318 Local Plan event] and maintenance[75] as forms of 'caring-in-common' (Moebus and Harrison 2019). The neighbourhood housework described in Chapter 5 involves "extending the care that you give your own space into the public space" (Vancouver resident quoted Blomley 2004: 17), with "domestic activities, nurturing, and a sense of home… explicitly brought outside" (Schmelzkopf 1995: 379). Taking the cleaning, caring and maintenance beyond the boundaries of private homes and out into the shared realm was a key emergent theme within the national Community Organisers training programme (2011-15) (Community Organisers b; Cameron et al 2015).

This was by no means always an entirely female activity but it certainly reflects a gendered approach, focused on traditionally-feminised tasks of caring, cleaning, nurturing. Women have long been at the forefront of community-led regeneration (Hall 1999), while lagging far behind in paid roles with decision-making power (Lowndes 2004; Maddock 2005). It is interesting to see a current generation of female community business leaders playfully but defiantly crafting a different language of regeneration – darning the fabric, neighbourhood housework, piecemeal not wholesale, a 'mistress-plan'[76] (Community Business Patchwork 2021).

> "Yeah, to have a scale of ambition but know it starts with tiny things and that big things come out of lots of little tiny things. So our whole proposition for the area was to say, not that we have a plan for the area but why not have lots of… what if the RSLs did some and the housing co-op did some and we did some and somebody else did something else? What if we gave everyone a little bite-sized chunk? Because we can all do [that]. The RSLs have been doing quite big bite-sized chunks, almost too big. We wanted them to be squeezed a little bit" [151126 Erika].

I was delighted when Nudge Community Builders in Plymouth chose to embrace the misquoted word 'piecemeal' to describe their work taking back the half-derelict Union

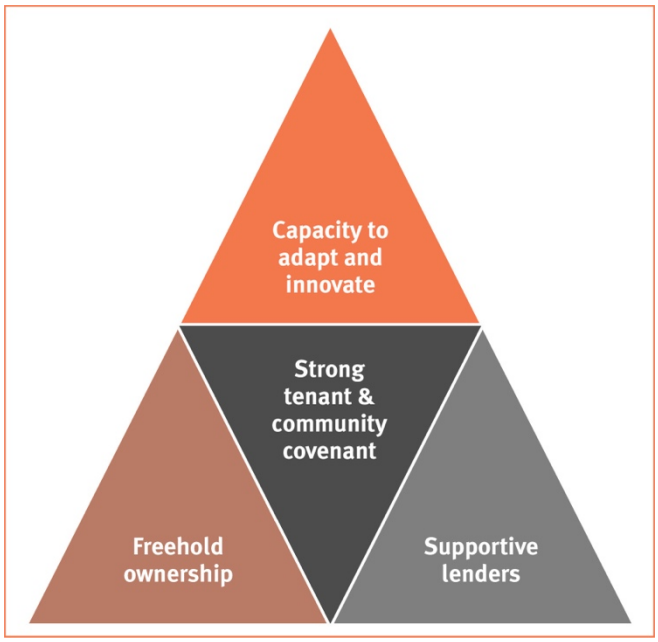
[75] The Maintainers (https://themaintainers.org/ https://twitter.com/The_Maintainers)
[76] A 'mistress plan' would involve "talking more about the trauma that the street encounters, and how those buildings might be informed by that trauma and be welcoming… We disrupt not for disruption's sake but because we want to do it this way, on our terms. Our community are experts, so why not try to turn the usual things on their head?" [210628 Wendy Hart personal conversation].

Street one building at a time As in Granby and White Rock, their work demonstrates that piecemeal approaches rooted in the fine grain can be transformative.

> "We told a local business reporter that we use a very deliberate approach of step-by-step and piece-by-piece. We don't do predict and control; we don't write up a huge plan on the building. We want to be iterative and hear from people. When he published he described our approach as 'piecemeal redevelopment'. It felt patronising, but after talking with Erika Rushton and her team at Kindred we felt we should reclaim the word and turn it round" (Wendy Hart, 210629 CB Patchwork, https://nudge.community/).

Through such urban commoning, shared and porous urban spaces become "not only the setting but also the means to collectively experiment with possible alternative forms of social organisation" (Stavrides 2016). At the heart of 'dweller control' (Clark 2005) is the practice of community self-management, the term used in Rock House to describe the ideal form of tenant contributions to the social, cultural and physical upkeep of the building. But it is always in tension with the temptation to return to traditional landlord-tenant behaviours. When the first member of staff started work in 2016, I stressed how important it was that he did not become 'building manager'. His role was to encourage tenant engagement. Over the years we struggled with the 'tenant development' role – trying lots of different approaches. In such relational work personality is everything, continuity is key, and reliability is a bonus. We identified the need for 'redundant capacity' and a strong 'customer relationship management' system to sustain those relationships during times of change.

Figure 9.12: Key features of WRNV's success as a social enterprise developer and landlord



9.4. Dangers and Dilemmas of SRN

The work of self-renovating neighbourhoods is beset by dangers and dilemmas. Appendix G outlines a dozen of these, from being an unwilling accomplice in the gentrification process to the balancing act between achieving (steady-state) sustainability and positive (disruptive) social change.

Some of these dilemmas are inherent. If we 'do it ourselves', are we excusing public sector cuts by obscuring the need for state action (Williams, Goodwin and Cloke 2014)? Are we providing "alibis (or, worse, seed-funding and ground-breaking) for more conventional rent-seeking urban development" (Tonkiss 2013: 318)? Are we obsessing over small spaces that "don't scare anyone" (Naegler 2018) and neglecting wider structural reform (Levitas 2013)? Should we rather be sweeping away these old neighbourhoods of physically degraded and environmentally inefficient buildings, replacing them with thousands of units of social housing, as Militant might have done to Granby (Frost and North 2013), or with big employers and high net worth individuals as some of the Hastings regeneration bids would (rather implausibly) have it?

While there are clear benefits to keeping the embedded carbon in the buildings (Harrabin 2021), it is the social preservationist that is most unwilling to give up these multi-faceted neighbourhoods, their historic built fabric saturated in stories, their 'thrown-together' communities, their ability to generate passion, energy, and leadership, to demonstrate that things can be different. In the careful restoration of dereliction into pleasant productive space, however, we lower the stigmatic defences against gentrification and speculative capital. When no longer ignored, missing or blurred out, the previously 'left behind' neighbourhood comes into focus for many interests and the value of the work achieved through SRN becomes available to all, with their highly differentiated power to exploit or protect it. In this way, SRN like all neighbourhood improvement, invites gentrification. The 'just green enough' idea – environmental remediation without gentrification (Curran and Hamilton 2012; Wolch, Byrne and Newell 2014) – is an important contribution although as Rigolon and Nemeth (2020) have shown even small parks are heavily associated with gentrification.

Is SRN therefore, as Chiappini and Tornberg describe the maker-space movement, “merely something that flows downstream… part and parcel of the processes of welfare neoliberalisation” (2019: 86-87)?

Co-housing has historically been associated with ‘intentional communities’ – like-minded, self-selected and highly-driven groups of individuals that lead the development, management and governance of co-housing projects. Bonding allegiances can reproduce privilege by selecting relatively wealthy participants (Caffentzis and Federici 2014: i100), leading to homogeneity in terms of social class and ethnicity and disconnection from the broader neighbourhood (Williams 2006; Ruiu 2014).

> “Sameness means the absence of the other, the different one, surprise and mischief created precisely because of the difference, the alien... what looms therefore on the horizon of the long march towards 'safe community' (community as safety) is a bizarre mutant of a 'voluntary ghetto” (Baumann, 2001: 116)

In both my case studies there is a clear rejection of this ‘sameness’ and calls for radical inclusion in the imagining of a homed community [EMP: 180612 Dec of Alliance HoH-PAW; 151201 Hazel]. Both areas prioritise need and local connection in their tenant selection. In White Rock the additional criteria of “enthusiasm for the ethos and contribution to the social and physical upkeep of the building and the neighbourhood” could be challenged as filtering out difference. In practice that has not happened: instead there has been a welcome realisation that many people from a wide range of backgrounds share a strong interest in belonging and an excitement about dweller control and community self-management, however unevenly those elements are played out in practice. Noterman’s concept of ‘differential commoning’ gives this unevenness a positive spin as offering “a more dynamic view of commoning… that recognizes, allows for, and even embraces difference, while weaving individual commoning into a flexible collective project” (2016: 436).

Traditional co-housing groups tend to have existing financial equity, social capital, access to expertise and a strong sense of personal and collective efficacy. SRN starts from the position that these critical elements can be built from scratch, and nourished

over time, rejecting social closure and repositioning co-living communities as diverse, outward-looking and embedded within a wider civic and community infrastructure. Other intentional communities have arisen from a squatting or activist background (Scheller and Larsen 2020). If commons are developed and built through a sharing economy in which access, participation and peer-to-peer exchange is prized over private ownership, they nurture a community of residents and catalyse a community of place by prioritising horizontal co-dependency and the power of the collective, rather than vertical dependency on the powers of state and market (Steele 2018).

Other dangers in the work of SRN arise because we cannot, in fact, do it all ourselves so will need to interact with what Alinsky calls "the world as it is" (1971: 12) in the enactment of property and the harnessing of resources. Since land and buildings are where power is stored and property relations are mediated through a murky world of profit-driven agents, the negotiators of grassroots alternatives have to 'jump in, do the deal, climb out, wash off'. This is not a single occurrence but an ongoing experience of compromise, deepened and complicated by the parallel but often contradictory compromises arising from funding processes and regimes.

Prefigurative local action is seen by some as especially liable to co-option (Srnicek and Williams 2015; Kulick 2014), particularly in the process of upscaling, when pressure to conform can lead previously agonistic projects to become complicit in reproducing dominant norms (see Vasudevan 2015 on the pacification of squatting, appropriated as 'alternative living', and Steele 2018 on SRN co-living within a report funded by commercial co-living developer 'The Collective').

Tracing the 'loss of community' in community land trusts as their primary purpose evolved into the provision of affordable housing, DeFilippis, Stromberg and Williams (2018) identified a subduing of radical transformational aims and a reduction of community control. They argue, following Piven and Cloward (1979), that the "flowing surge of energy" that powers a movement can become frozen into formalised organisations fitting into existing power structures that they cannot challenge without endangering themselves. Such organisations "eventually align themselves with the

elites who control access to both practical and political resources and shed the confrontational energy that created them" (DeFilippis et al 2018: 756-7). SRN in both Granby and White Rock has had to understand and demonstrate alignment with the concerns and strategies of more powerful players while remaining driven by the same values and, for now at least, sustaining their challenge to the dominant ownership model just by their existence.

If the SRN leaders are exhausted by the challenges or demoralised by the conflicts, they may become defensive or withdrawn, so the gaps start to show, leaving local supporters confused or alienated (as with Hastings Pier 2017-18). I have been learning and 'preaching' about engagement for three decades and have not lost faith, but I have learned how easy it is to fall down. As the SRN work in Hastings becomes more established, with a growing property portfolio and staff teams, the sense of the horizontal, rhizomatic connectivity comes under threat.

> "As we are seeing currently with the OB, we don't have enough capacity for the engagement required to truly bring everyone along the journey. People get disgruntled, there is mess, noise and disruption. It's hard for people to see the long term benefits always. And we could communicate this better, manage expectations better. But there is always so much to be doing, fires to hold back, information to absorb, new skills to develop in record time. People can turn from supportive to resentful very quickly and where reputation is so core to what we do, this brings a high risk. We care what people want, think and feel, but we can't care all the time or we wouldn't get anywhere!" [210713 Emily].

Alongside these dangers of co-option, complicity and exhaustion is the different problem of the 'distracted patience' of urban governments (Steele 2020). The evaluation of the Get Set for Citizenship programme in Deptford (2000-03) concluded that it had successfully reached thousands of people and built skills, structures, and citizen-led strategies to tackle key challenges. But that 'they' (the powerful) were still not listening and indeed were 'waiting it out'. When Magpie Resource Library ceased operations in 2007 I finally understood that we should have bought some assets and we should have leveraged the powerful network we had built. My 'career' since then has focused on those two aspects of community power.

In seeking “culture-led neighbourhood transformations beyond the revitalisation/ gentrification dichotomy” Gainza concludes that “[t]he symbolic dimension of consumption… is not a minor issue in the transformations in motion, but represents another conflictual sphere for the ‘right to the neighbourhood’” (2017: 965). One of the risks identified in Appendix G is this ‘aesthetic coding’ of spaces. SRN cannot simply sit back and laugh at the cultural tropes of gentrification, outraged at the price of a pint or the proliferation of Prosecco and cup-cakes. In taking on dereliction and promising productivity we have to make many aesthetic decisions that will have impacts in terms of inclusion/exclusion. In Granby, Assemble found and revealed the beauty of ordinary terraced houses, while weaving ‘new-from-old’ touches into the reconstituted rubble fireplaces, light pulls and vent panels. In Hastings, Rock House was relatively easy – a 1969 building with hollow-pot ceilings reminiscent of the moon-landings, so we worked with the grain of the building and added a Bowie quote!

Figure 9.13: Bowie quotes added to the 1969 Rock House soon after acquisition

However, with the Observer Building, the Lower Alley and Eagle House – all with multiple ground floors and leisure uses – the design choices are much more complicated. My only mitigations are get started quickly, experiment and learn, do lots of listening, stick to the mission but be willing to change your mind on the detail. As with the property approach that chooses to use freeholder power for purposes of radical inclusion, so in our development of leisure spaces we are attempting to use consumption as an inclusion tactic rather than "a means of keeping others out" (Zukin 2008: 735).

Overall, SRN involves substantial risk-taking in the face of an increasingly uncertain world. It absorbs the risks of private property development, multiplies them by promising integrity, transparency and public goods, and takes action, at least initially, from a position of absolute and relative powerlessness. Now that both Granby and White Rock have significant commons assets, we are constantly managing the fear of loss against the potential for gain (Weiss, Sczesny and Freund 2016). We must *both* protect *and* expand the commons (Huron 2018: passim) but, for example, tenants would probably have voted against taking the mortgage on the successful Rock House to fund the purchase of the derelict Observer Building. Given these barriers there needs to be some 'survivability' built into the SRN infrastructure (Lees, Annunziata and Rivas-Alonso 2018; Lees and Robinson 2021). The Granby women, being home-owners, were able to survive and, to an extent, resist the clearances. More recently Hazel used her own money to bail out the CLT at a critical moment [210114 Hazel]. In the White Rock ecosystem, one of Jericho Road's roles is as a 'survival resource' – filling gaps, stepping in with solutions, holding up the umbrella [200420 Reflection].

Adapting the tools of capitalocentric power to create alternatives is audacious and fraught with dangers that keep me awake at night and eat away my optimism. When does it become hard for power-holders to undermine what you've done? When is the commons safe? The answer, now that I better see the power and limitations of asset-holding, is never. Yet there seems to me no better option available now than to use the tools of capitalism – property ownership, loan finance, rents and service charges – to achieve 'postcapitalist' goals of stewardship, mutual aid and dweller control.

9.5 Utopia in Progress

There are two roots for the word: *Utopia* from the Greek *ou* for 'not' and *topos* for 'place' and *Eutopia*, a homophone in English, from the Greek *eu* for 'good'. So it depends whether you think utopia should mean 'good place' or 'no place'? Or both – a good place to which we can never come, or a 'no-place' that we can make good?

Tonkiss argues that our kinds of interstitial and temporary urbanism should be understood "not as utopian but anti-utopian projects, given their commitments to making actual places in the void spaces of grand designs, and their readiness to live with urban imperfection" (2013: 321). Drawing on Lynch ([1975] 1995), she asserts that "[t]he grounds for utopia are not to be found in some ideal version of urban space but in the re-making of existing places whose capacities are unrealised and whose sources of value are overlooked" (ibid). This process of imperfectly but persistently re-making actual places to unlock capacities and create new communal value is at the heart of SRN. However, rather than relinquish the word, I choose Sanchez Gordillo's version:

> "Utopias aren't chimeras, they are the most noble dreams that people have. The dream of equality; the dream that housing should belong to everyone, because you are a person, and not a piece of merchandise to be speculated with; the dream that natural resources – for instance energy – shouldn't be in the service of multinationals, but in the service of the people. All those dreams are the dreams we'd like to turn into realities. First, in the place where we live, with the knowledge that we're surrounded by capitalism everywhere; and later, in Andalusia, and the world" (Juan Manuel Sanchez Gordillo, mayor of Marinaleda, quoted in Hancox 2012).

Another version would see utopianism as "the ability to look beyond what is (current material/ideological paradigm) and envision a fundamentally different and better future" (Small et al 2020), to move from 'what is to what if' (Hopkins 2021). Along with Levitas' use of utopia as method in 'the imaginary reconstitution of society' (2013), this concept of utopianism as future-thinking reflects our work through Hastings Emerging Futures to become more skilled future thinkers and to develop shared tools and language to unleash imagination [EMP: 210614 HEF report] and envision heterotopia (Johnson 2012; 2013).

Utopianism always contains a critique of the current situation. As Thomas More himself put it, sounding astonishingly like Robert Tressell 400 years later:

> Existing society is nothing but a "conspiracy of the rich to advance their own interests under the pretext of organising society. They think up all sorts of tricks and dodges, first for keeping their ill-gotten gains, and then for exploiting the poor by buying their labour as cheaply as possible. Once the rich have decided that these tricks and dodges shall be officially recognised by society – which includes the poor as well as the rich – they acquire the force of law. Thus an unscrupulous minority is led by its insatiable greed to monopolise what would have been enough to supply the needs of the whole population" (Thomas More, *Utopia*, 1516 quoted in Harvey 2000: 279)

According to Andy Merrifield, Henri Lefebvre "towards the end of his life, as he sat in an armchair in his old house at Navarrenx, with a rug over his legs and a cat on his lap… still wanted to talk about the future", arguing that "utopia is never realized and yet it is indispensable to stimulate change" (Merrifield 2006: 163). If utopian thinking is a "method of delivery of new ideas" (Hudson 1982: 54), it is to be expected that self-renovating neighbourhoods will have elements of utopia. Oscar Wilde said that "a map of the world that does not include Utopia is not even worth glancing at" (2016 [1891]: 14) but as Harvey contends, in order to realise change rather than just dream of it, utopian social process must "crystallize into the material world" (2001: 110).

Jeffrey and Dyson (2021) highlight three aspects of prefigurative politics that are critical to understanding how SRN crystallises utopia in White Rock and Granby. First and foremost, such work demonstrates a productive ('restless') *improvisation* involving trial and error and intense reflexivity (on what to do, what to say, looking for signs, looking for slippages). The work in these neighbourhoods is proleptic, "enact[ing] practices that are quite radically at odds" with their environment or prior experience and "anticipating greater competence and possibility for success even before such skills and opportunities have emerged (Swain 2019: 13).[77] One clear example of this is the Public Living Room established in White Rock in September 2021 (see figure 7.10) as a completely free and non-transactional comfortable space for anyone and

[77] A formulation mirroring my definition of an entrepreneur as someone who sets out to do something without yet controlling the resources to achieve it.

everyone, a space for "being alongside each other" (Camerados 2021). Not only is such a space unique in Hastings and rare anywhere, it was opened with no plan beyond "a presumption of yes" and a pledge to review in six months [EMP: 210905 PLR catch-up notes]. This process of 'reaching ahead' and setting contrasts with norms that are thereby exposed as pathological (Chatterton et al 2019: 3) can sometimes "bring into being the missing elements of authority, recognition, science or entitlement required to make an enactment real" (Cooper 2020: 5).

Secondly, prefiguration involves creating *institutionalised* spaces of relative protection as has been achieved in Granby and White Rock with capped-rent homes, affordable workspace, and quality living spaces like the Winter Garden and the Public Living Room. Institutionalisation is both about the creation of some protected spaces and also a "thickening of social practice rather than the inevitable emergence of named organisations" (Jeffrey & Dyson 2021: 649). Improvisation is ongoing, within the institutionalisation, through sociability, compromise and alliance building. In White Rock, as we have seen, the 'named organisations' are themselves fluid and intertwined in an ever-evolving ecosystem.

The third feature of prefigurative politics is its capacity for wider *impact*. Jeffrey & Dyson "debunk the myth that prefigurative politics is ineffective" (2021: 652), highlighting four types of impact that have all been features of SRN in Granby and White Rock: 1) upscaling beyond an original site, 2) creating durable skills, knowledge and resources, 3) triggering attitudinal change, 4) affective importance in galvanising people and expanding the sense of the possible.

> "Acting 'as if' can challenge dominant claims about there being no alternative to existing structures of power, reinforce a sense of what is possible, enhance cohesion among participants and unsettle dominant paradigms of 'the real'" (Jeffrey & Dyson 2021: 649).

"The core of utopia is the desire of being otherwise" (Levitas 2013: xi). Prefiguration takes this further "not just to imagine, but to make, the world otherwise" (ibid: xiii). In both Granby and White Rock SRN has created an alternative milieu: "a complex network of mainly informal social relationships in a limited geographical area, often

defining a specific external ‘image’ and a specific internal ‘representation’ and sense of belonging, which enhance the local innovative capability through synergetic and collective learning processes” (Camagni 1991: 3). The SRN gaze shifts around the neighbourhood, its focus moving from building to building, from individual spaces to the neighbourhood as a single structure, and between attending to the buildings (the common-ground resources) and nurturing the behaviours (the commoning).

SELF / RENOVATING / NEIGHBOURHOODS is a circular concept because the neighbourhood is the self that is renovating itself and becoming/changing/evolving/ creating and therefore the new neighbourhood-self is constantly emerging and making new decisions about how it will remake itself next. This thesis has ranged widely over the historical and current constitutions of Granby and White Rock as self-renovating neighbourhoods. It is based on the notion that we can act now to create legacies of affordable, community-owned spaces and agentive, collaborative commoners, but it cannot predict whether or how those will struggle, survive and grow.

CHAPTER 10: CONCLUSIONS on the edge of impossibility[78]

"Marginality is the space of resistance. Enter that space. Let us meet there."
(bell hooks 1990: 152)

In this thesis I have argued that poor neighbourhoods are offered a 'false choice' between gentrification and decline. This choice, that is not a choice but a surrender to the capriciousness of capital, is the manifestation at neighbourhood level of dominant models of ownership and 'regeneration'. These models dominate, like all vested interests, because they deploy TINA. Any of us can say 'there is no alternative', but power can make it so. It puts up barriers and signs, lures and decoys, directing the sight and continually validating the only vision allowed to make sense. It disciplines us all as subjects, and punishes or incorporates the peculiar.

I have drawn on a series of 'unsettling' literatures (Massey, Harvey, Lefebvre, Soja, Gibson-Graham, Law and Mol, Blomley, Butler, Nancy, Haraway, Holloway) to find ways to see and speak of the invisibled but existing multiplicity and the openness of the future. Insisting on the relationality of space, place and politics, I see neighbourhood as continually being woven *in situ* through local production-consumption-contribution practices (Pratt 2009), pushed by TINA into specific channels and behaviours and always both open to and vulnerable to external forces. Both path-dependent and complex-chaotic, these power relations are played out within a spatial triad (see figure 2.2) of perceived/material (things in space and spatial practices); conceived/mental (thoughts and representations about space); and lived/experiential (thick, all embracing, 'fully lived', what Soja calls "thirdspace" (2002: 114)). This 'thirding' as a deconstruction of an established binary inspires my own disruption of the gentrification-decline axis which helps imagine (and bring into being) urban neighbourhood commons as 'proleptic prefigurations' of postcapitalocentric neighbourhoods.

[78] "on the edge of impossibility" (Holloway 2010: 71)

My aim has been to explore a phenomenon and construct a conceptual framework to describe, analyse and help to perform a genuine alternative to false choice urbanism, an approach to neighbourhood change that is rooted instead in social justice and communitarian solutions. This has led across and shaped a terrain including: agency, commoning, conflict, difference, ecosystems, future thinking, hope, impatience, meanwhile, naming, neighbourhood housework, organising, ownership, sociability, solidarity, stigma, survivability, thrift, utopia, wealth. These mainly conceptual words directly impact upon *things in space* (the common-land resources), *spatial practices* (commoning and place-keeping), *representations* (locally generated narratives and imagineering), and the quality of the day-to-day intensely located *lived experience*.

10.1 Shaping neighbourhood-becoming through SRN

SRN is an emerging political imaginary in which we can have our neighbourhood revolution now – beginning by taking care and persisting with sustained impatience, as Granby and White Rock have both shown. These case studies illustrate the process of *neighbourhood becoming*, and how this ongoing process of 'becoming different' can be actively shaped by drawing on their specific (counter) histories, topologies and demographies. In choosing radically incremental (Pieterse 2008) collective DIY approaches, the people involved in this 'renovating' have embraced a role as "strategic agents tackling the strategic selectivity of structures" (Jessop 2005) through productive improvisation (Jeffrey and Dyson 2021) and constituent imagination (Shukaitis, Graeber and Biddle 2007).

Beyond noting the extent of their achievements in bringing property into custody, I did not aim to evaluate the specific impacts of either case study, nor to interrogate them from every perspective. Instead I have sought to identify and outline the *coordinates* of an 'ethical praxis' of local neighbourhood regeneration, and then wrap those *vectors* (self-renovating, renovating-neighbourhood, neighbourhood-self) in a thick description of the performed reality of a commons-based approach to vital places. I have asked the questions 'who is we?', 'what are we doing?' and 'what does it mean to make place?'. With Gergen, I have sought a "future forming orientation to research",

suspending the metaphorical research mirror through which we aim to see 'reality' and instead closing our eyes and beginning to imagine the world of our hopes. Then "the aim of research would not be to illuminate *what is*, but to create *what is to become*" (Gergen 2014: 294, emphasis in original).

SELF has been considered in terms of the act of collective DIY power, the claiming of the right to make place, and the potentially generative fiction of seeing neighbourhoods as selves or at least as shared ventures that people are explicitly self-making. This chapter explored the individual and collective selves involved in SRN through considering motivations, agency, emotion, attitudes, and capacitation. I finished by committing to 'some crazy kind of hope'.

RENOVATING focused on the 'doing' of SRN, placing it in the context of temporal landscapes and moments in space which build the relationships, trust and shared values that underpin the work and enable the taking of necessary risks. Six key activities were identified as pieces of the pie rather than linear activities – enacting property, harnessing resources, capacitating together, physical renovation, producing and protecting communal wealth, and the ongoing care and attention required for SRN which is not a 'task-and-finish' mission but a habit of place-stewardship.

NEIGHBOURHOODS laid out an argument for neighbourhood scale as a level at which we can make progress through relational place-making, especially in places that have been declared 'missing', blurred out because they are simply too difficult. In the face of the 'bumpy ride' of the regeneration backstory – slash and burn, the production of dereliction, enforced spatial competition, and regeneration as PR – the chapter argues for a politics of rootedness and relations in which local people play proactive roles in locality construction and maintenance despite the challenges. Three elements of SRN were foregrounded: establishing an ownership stake, intervening in regeneration decision-making, and ongoing place-keeping (including everyday space-making; creative care-taking; boundaries, naming and narratives). SRN is beset with dangers and dilemmas, but the chapter ended with a discussion of 'utopia in progress', imperfect, improvised and only-almost impossible (Holloway 2010: 71).

Both case neighbourhoods are examples of holistic approaches to regeneration, not so much by policy as by nature. For them the fine-grain built environment is utterly intertwined with the community, economic, cultural and social fabric. They readily connect the rescue, renewal and re-use of buildings and spaces with the life-enhancement they seek for local people, and see the creation of opportunities to shape place as important, not only to make better places but to build agency. The Hastings Commons impact themes (see figure 8.11) are an attempt to categorise without disaggregating this holistic vision.

SRN in both neighbourhoods is doing two things at once – making spaces and making place. Each of the spaces needs to work hard – some have to work hard financially to contribute significantly to the whole and others in terms of their intensity of use and how they support neighbouring and sustained contact. Like the Granby Winter Garden, Eagle House in White Rock is a very special space because the overt plan was to occupy it collectively, with open minds, and see what happened.[79]

Alongside these space-benefits SRN aims to support more people to be directly involved in making the place. The Granby women took charge and re-made Cairns Street, practically with their own hands. They went on to take ownership, raise the money, renovate the properties into perpetually affordable homes, create an industry in the corner shop and a wonder in the Winter Garden. Within the Hastings Commons we have direct control over the buildings which means we can use the power of freehold to be inclusive and innovative in our world-forming (Nancy 2007). In the Alley we must work with other freeholders, business tenants, interested locals and wider publics, to substantiate and sustain its role as a genuine urban commons. The Heritage Action Zone provides a route to influence the neighbourhood more widely and indeed, through the Maintenance Club, to begin to see it as a single structure. Other grassroots activities[80] have promoted wider conversations and collaborations around shaping place, both the physical fabric and the narrative. These nested spatial multiplicities –

[79] The Common Room at Eagle House opened 10th September 2021 as a public living room. See figure 7.10

[80] Eg. Hastings Emerging Futures, the Common Treasury, Isolation Station, and Changing Hastings

like ghostly Russian dolls that do not just fit together but can overlap and intermingle – offer opportunities to mobilise for common good driven by thrift (as thriving), impatience, and sociability and using ownership, influence and place-keeping as the tools of change.

10.2 The Characteristics of SRN

The case studies confirm and illuminate all six of the originally hypothesised characteristics (Steele 2012), while qualifying and adding further detail. While the 2012 SRN characteristics have held up well and become more nuanced, there are others that I would add or emphasise differently now (see figure 10.1). I would place more focus on organisational innovation. The ecosystem in Hastings has emerged during the research period and this might be my greatest original contribution to knowledge – the vast majority of CLT and commons literature assumes some kind of single organisation (or none). Even the institutionalists who come across more complex arrangements do not explore them in depth and the alter-globalizationists tend to take messy organisational form for granted without considering how it might shape what can be achieved (Huron 2018: 12-13).

I note that within the original characteristics there was no clarity about the agonistic nature of SRN. It always and everywhere raises the question of false-choice urbanism and problematises gentrification. These actually-existing commons have not just fitted meanwhile and quietly into unattended gaps but actively and noisily intervened in the regeneration game, using hard-won proprietorial power to rescue a set of legacy assets from the stagnation of farmed dereliction and managed decline, placing them 'in custody for community benefit', and changing the trajectories of whole neighbourhoods, challenging TINA by proving TARA.

Figure 10.1: The hypothesised characteristics, updated 2022

	Original hypothesised characteristics (2012)	Thesis conclusions (2022)
1	A focus on self-defined fine grain neighbourhoods	This is a strong feature of both case studies – the four streets in Granby and the eclectic assemblage of difficult buildings in White Rock. Now I would add **the nested micro-geographies of the immediate neighbourhoods; the continual and contested processes of neighbourhood self-definition**.
2	Initiated and driven by local residents and small businesses	Yes, in both places, though some of the White Rock drivers are 'area-loyalists' rather than immediate area residents. Now I would add the **critical importance of agency and collective self-efficacy, of harnessing help from 'outside'**, and of **organisational innovation**.
3	Importance of self-interest as a motivator	Most obviously in terms of Granby residents protecting their homes and WRNV investors risking capital for impact, but more widely with the community organising view of 'self-interest' as the embodied passion that drives action, the generative mid-point between selfishness and selflessness.
4	Grassroots virtues of thrift, impatience, sociability	These are 'attitudes for SRN', now understood as attitudes to resources, to time and to others. Now I would add **distributed leadership, a civic imagination, 'innovation' (creative flexibility in the face of challenges)** and, critically, **survivability**.
5	The neighbourhood as enterprise	This is a powerful metaphor for an aspirational approach to the collective construction of place in which everyone is a contributor. For now what has been created in both Granby and White Rock are **ecosystems and urban commons that act within and upon their neighbourhoods**, prefiguring and preparing a time when more of the neighbourhood fabric will be commons and more of its players commoners.
6	Explicit protection of diversity and action to avoid displacement	Strong statements and behaviours of inclusion, mechanisms in place to protect low income or otherwise more vulnerable residents and businesses within the commons. Now expanded to include **action for ultra-inclusivity and awareness of the 'coding' of leisure space and to acknowledge a clear and acutely-felt inability to prevent wider displacement beyond commons control**.
+	Raises the question of false choice urbanism and problematises gentrification	**It seems important to be clear about the agonistic nature of SRN, even while playing the games that need to be played.**

10.3 Creative Disruption: TARA vs TINA

While we live among the "sedimentation of social understandings" (Gergen 2014: 289) and within narratives of land and property that pretend towards fixity, we know that these 'temporary permanences' can shift: it doesn't have to be like this. In each of the case study areas steps have been taken towards different futures. People have been finding new ways to make and re-make their neighbourhoods, creating alternatives to

the false choice of gentrification or decline, finding ways to enact property that challenge the dominant model. Political alternatives to domination do not exist as possibilities simply waiting to be chosen (Deleuze 1988) but there are forces for transformation inherent in every moment (Sharpe 2014: 34). Only if we understand the present as "fractured, cracked by the interventions of the past and the promise of the future, can the new be invented, welcomed and affirmed" (Grosz 2004: 260).

Can DIY regen and mission-driven ownership be disruptive of negative-impact capitalist and statist forces at neighbourhood scale? Does SRN make any difference to dominant models of ownership and regeneration? If so, is this just locally or can it make wider ripples? What happens if the neighbourhoods join up? This PhD aimed to confront the denigration of 'folk politics' by Srnicek and Williams (2015) and to explore whether neighbourhood action 'in, against and beyond life under capitalism' (Holloway 2016) could be <u>both</u> parochially prefigurative <u>and also</u> more widely disruptive by "weaving together cracks that can purposefully crack the capitalist system" (Chatterton 2016).

Both elements are challenging. Any given example can teach us lessons about potential futures but the localised action-effort required to genuinely prefigure a better future is significant and sustained. We ask people in the movement to be bi-focal – both do this fine-grain work in your own place and also be part of a "diffuse and networked spatiality, where non-contiguous projects, ideas and people are strongly connected through counter-topographical networks (Katz 2001) that create islands of post-capitalist commons" (Chatterton 2016). This is an accurate definition of my experience within the socio-local sector over the past 30 years. It has implications for 'scaling up' – not through traditional growth or replication but via rhizomatic structures (Deleuze and Guattari 1987; Forno and Weiner 2020; Varvarousis 2020) and networked micropolitics that are "about critical emancipation, not necessarily *from* systems, but *towards* other types of open systems" (Scott-Cato and Hillier 2010: 880). The novel and tangible forms created by SRN are part of a process of scaling-through-deepening (Chatterton et al 2019).

Using the Three Horizons framework, the question becomes: is this work H2+? Does it innovate to support the achievement of Horizon 3? By exposing false choice urbanism to scrutiny, SRN highlights the injustice of dereliction, the dangers of gentrification and the possibility of alternatives, both discursively and in physical form. It cannot prevent the displacement of individuals from spaces beyond communal control, or bring back those who have already been priced out, but it can demonstrate a different way of doing neighbourhood development and provide some perpetually affordable homes and workspaces. Neither Granby nor White Rock will be again the cheap, interesting and disregarded places that kept and attracted 'diverse marginals'. The SRN activity has undoubtedly contributed to the reputational recovery that precedes development pressure and price rises. In Granby this is mitigated by significant housing association ownership. In White Rock we have a greater responsibility to stay vigilant and active in order to protect and expand the commons (Huron 2018).

I have been challenged from within the White Rock selves about the idea of 'creative disruption'. Richard remembered Mark Zuckerberg's famous memo to his staff 'move fast and break things' and compared it to both Dominic Cummings and Donald Rumsfeld, while also drawing on the Leninist idea of 'permanent revolution'.

> "Is a constant state of disruption actually a sustainable (or desirable) model for any group or collective trying to build things? I happen to think it is, but – and it's an important but – in whose name is the disrupting taking place? How 'democratic' is such a philosophy and how do you ensure that you don't end up with a 'cadre' of activists leading the revolution and hoping or expecting everyone else to keep up?" [210714 Richard Wistreich, trustee in White Rock].

Firstly, I'm not 'leading the revolution'. I'm busy spinning gold out of straw for the public good, making space and ensuring it lasts forever. Other people will make things happen in the space (or not). Secondly, what I mean by disruption is going beyond surviving and resistance to find the gaps and disrupt the cycles of the dominant model, "creating alternatives to the more pathological elements of… neoliberal capitalism" (Chatterton et al 2019: 3). More importantly, from Richard's range of examples, clearly the idea of 'creative disruption' is malleable and multiply-ownable. So what do I mean by it? In the footsteps of Blomley's 'Unsettling the City', DeFilippis' 'Unmaking Goliath',

Harvey's 'Rebel Cities', Gibson-Graham's iceberg and Massey's space as explosive possibilities, I mean having a go at tripping up TINA. Do you know what, *there are real alternatives?!* But enacting that alternative does require disruptive behaviour – it really does! Not shouting and spitting, but doing things differently in front of their eyes. There is no recipe; this work cannot be tidied and tamed and tit-bitted.

> "Being disruptive means being seen as trouble. We are used to being difficult women and have learned to welcome that. This thesis, itself, is a disruptor of norms – it's amazing it was ever written (lovely past tense!)" [210808 Reflection[81]].

SRN involves acting interstitially, provisionally, in good faith, to "shape the landscape of possibility" (Williams 2018: 470), underpinned by the radical action of considering the neighbourhood as a single (physical) structure in which everything is interdependent and nothing is not our business. Since places are made *relationally* – through the endless interactions of local neighbours and non-local players like speculators and authorities, the strategic spatial question is about the power dynamics of those relations. The role of grassroots place-makers, in Hastings, Liverpool, and elsewhere, is always to shift the power balance in favour of use-value, dweller-control, community-building, and the interests of future generations.

> "An alternative disposition to the production of urban space emits a radical potency to recast the status quo and can therefore be understood as interjecting revolutionary potential." (Fisker et al 2019: 6)

The opening up of possibilities, both in language and in material practice, involves "vulnerable, on-the-ground work that cobbles together non-harmonious agencies and ways of living that are accountable both to their disparate inherited histories and to their *barely possible but absolutely necessary joint futures*" (Haraway 2003: 7, emphasis added). This is the breadth and limit of our ambition: to make positive impact right here on our own turf, on our own terms, in our own time, and to nurture each other rhizomatically, within an ethics of care and a drive for community power.

[81] Talk about meta!

Responding to Gibson-Graham's provocative question (introduced in Chapter 2): "Why can feminists have a revolution now while Marxists have to wait?" (1996: 252), I argued that SRN could be the "ingredient for a new political project of configuring" (1996: xi). Like feminism, neighbourhood action is intimately and daily concerned with situated social transformation, thereby avoiding the long wait to "transform something that cannot be transformed" – that is 'capitalism' as Marxist discourse has produced its object (Gibson-Graham 1996: 252, see also Sharpe 2014: 27). The feminist remapping of political space and possibility "suggests the ever-present opportunity for local transformation that does not require (though it does not preclude and indeed promotes) transformation at larger scales" (Gibson-Graham 2006: xxiv).

10.4 Neighbourhood Commons: an alternative imaginary

Although SRN ideally requires everything to be different and does not abandon macropolitical ambitions, it can operate through micropolitical means to make change. While oppressive powers of capital and state separate us from our potentiality, becoming empowered is "not a question of winning back something taken but of exploring potentials immanent in the present situation" (Sharpe 2014: 29). A hopeful, world-building sense of the power inherent in humans challenges the colonisation by capitalism of "the economic imaginary – and thus the ground of fantasy – for both those who love it and those who love to hate it" (Graham, Healy and Byrne 2002: 56-7). In both Granby and White Rock, the grassroots reconstruction of neighbourhood mobilises an alternative imaginary to disrupt this hopeless fantasy. My experience in Deptford and with neighbourhood activists across the country over the past 30 years has been that people feeling overwhelmed by the massive challenges of neoliberal, patriarchal, racist, planet-destroying systems have been activated by and found inspiration in neighbourhood communitarianism. Some would no doubt say they are giving up, finding lazy solace in the 'folk politics' of constrained possibility (Srnicek and Williams 2015). I marshal two arguments against this. First, Alinsky's insistence that we tackle 'the world as it is' means we have no choice but to work in the cracks within the dominant models of ownership and regeneration – *jump in, do the deal, climb out, wash off*. Easy to say and sometimes it works (Rock House, Cairns St); sometimes it

doesn't (Ore Valley, Ducie Street). Often it requires long and vigorous campaigning in order to be allowed to enact property rights (Granby, Hastings Pier), and it could result in portfolios burdened with unsustainable deals. Yet, for now, it is all we have. Secondly, like water freezing in cracks, we help to break them open: by proving TARA as beacons of already-existing SRN to inspire others; by highlighting the inequities, incompetence and inefficiencies of current systems; and by seeking to "play with the rules of the game" (Thompson 2018 *passim*).

The case study areas are tethered to the spatial as the plane of possibility, multiplicity and politics but place is "not some kind of hearth of an unproblematic collectivity" (Massey 2004: 17). These neighbourhoods are far from discrete or self-contained. Rather they are located in landscapes of power, policy, and discourse that both shift and persist over time. The routes these stories could take were not pre-defined but neither was every option visible or possible. People and collectives ('selves') made decisions about whether and how to attempt the renovation of their neighbourhoods. They made those choices within the imaginative constraints imposed by habitus. The reactions to their actions were structured by social, economic, and political forces outside their control. And everything took much longer than expected.

These places may find themselves overwhelmed in any case by capital flooding into the rent gaps, as is certainly the case in Hastings where both displacement pressure and exclusionary displacement are increasingly significant forces. Indeed the SRN approaches themselves – while achieving permanent affordability for some property – may be seen as participating in, or even inviting, the wider change which has seen de facto 'housing market renewal' (rising rents and prices) and attracted new people bringing new resources (while often failing to recognise the existing assets in communities). This concern about involuntary collusion is a proper and permanent challenge to all neighbourhood improvement work[82].

[82] When I wrote *Turning the Tide* in 1993 it aimed to celebrate Deptford and 'turn the tide of neglect'. Even then I was ambivalent, recognising that neglect is a blessing (Steele 1993: 225). Deptford now groans under the weight of development pressure, while key assets like the old Thames jetties remain derelict.

The street market, the Granby Workshop and the Winter Garden are clear and tangible additions to the diverse economy of the neighbourhood while SRN in White Rock has created a whole ecosystem of community economic institutions and activities rooted in the fine grain of the place. In both neighbourhoods, SRN leaders strongly mobilised communitarian narratives about land and buildings while simultaneously 'playing the game' within dominant ownership and regeneration models in order to enact property, harness resources, build and extend the commons.

My interest in the idea of the urban commons has been a parallel and intertwined process of responding to emergent ground-level needs for descriptors in White Rock and engaging with the emerging literature. Since one can only move "at the speed of trust" (Russell 2020: 157), in challenging (all at once) widely-held views about gentrification, regeneration, property development, organisational infrastructure and the strategic value of neighbourhoods, I have frequently found myself so far 'ahead of the curve' as to be in danger of dropping over the horizon and losing connection. Introducing the idea of the commons, commoning and the celebration of ourselves as commoners, has not been without dissent. I am, therefore, delighted by the extent to which these notions have taken root rather than worrying that they remain to some extent confusing, fragile, and extremely hard work. The commoning situations in Granby and White Rock represent sustained instances of Harvey's never-stable, always-contested 'temporary permanences'.

For SRN to be a genuine alternative, available to all disinvested neighbourhoods, it will need to prove its ability to survive setbacks and hostile flak, while seeking to move from playing the game to changing the rules. Two kinds of sustenance are required. On the one hand we rely on the business models of housing, workspace and leisure, and the financial tools of grant, loans and mortgages to ensure ongoing viability. On the other, sustaining the values behind the work will depend on "construct[ing] an ideological hegemony, as opposed to seeking concessions" (Allen 2008: 3) and continuing to take actions that perform that new world, making it visible and undeniably real. To get this far we have had to innovate organisationally with legal structures, organisational cultures, and an ecosystem that is both bounded and

porous. To survive we will have to continue to adapt, creating “slowly widening circles of trust and inclusion through processes of consensus-building, compromise and conviviality” (Jeffrey and Dyson 2021: 649; see also Neal et al 2019).

SRN has proved itself an alternative to the false choice of gentrification/decline in White Rock and Granby showing that, if they can be constituted as such, neighbourhood-selves have choices beyond the capital-driven seesaw of gentrification and decline. The people and organisations that consume neighbourhoods are also those that produce them. They are tethered to place, within ‘the body multiple’, and they can make it different. Anyone can do this and those with resources (the ‘gentri’ of gentrification) will do it first, unless we intervene and make it instead that people who are tethered and invested and engaged get maximum say in what happens ‘round here’.

That does not mean, in either case, that the whole neighbourhood is protected, but rather that places that were stuck in destructive spirals have been unlocked and revitalised through practical grassroots DIY action, harnessing resources in order to enact property and create long-term communal wealth. To demonstrate the core idea that people in and of neighbourhoods might be able to darn their own fabric is a radical act. To claim that the most important action in that work is “neighbouring – sustained contact and place-making in the space of the neighbourhood” (Walter, Hankins and Nowak 2017) is an audacity that must be premised.

I hope this SRN framework can be useful as the Hastings Commons in White Rock and the reborn Granby 4 Streets continue to develop and embed, as well as to existing and emergent commons-based approaches in neighbourhoods everywhere.

“We can take some [land and buildings], we can’t take it all without revolution, but we can take some. The more often we take it and the clearer we are that we are not making little enclaves but beacons of alternative property enactment, the more likely these might, with a fair wind, escape and go viral. That way property can be understood differently, treated differently because we will have breached the hegemony and exploited cracks in the Ownership Model to create prefigurative examples of positive and holistic neighbourhood stewardship” [161001 Reflection].

La lucha continua!

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Neighbourhood Attributes of Granby and White Rock (after Galster 2001)

	GRANBY	WHITE ROCK
Location	Liverpool NW port city Marginal Deprivation: 4/317 local authorities (2019)	Hastings SE coastal town Marginal Deprivation: 13/317 local authorities (2019)
Topographical	Surviving southern triangle of 4 streets cutting across Granby Street on flat land. Influenced by position in relation to city centre	Nested series of neighbourhood elements on and around the White Rock sandstone promontory. Strongly influenced by topography
Historical	Subaltern community – black and diverse Uprising, 'kettling' of the neighbourhood Thatcher	Subaltern community – pay no rent America Ground Crown
Structural (type, scale, materials, design, state of repair, density of the built env)	Terraced residential streets built by Robert Owen. Granby Street was retail and bars but almost all shops gone. Housing options range from 2-beds (Cairns) to 5-beds (Ducie) Dereliction from neglect ('managed decline')	Dense 1850s town centre with shops, churches, pubs, cafes, library and housing. 62% private rented. Many Houses of Multiple Occupation. Prices and rents rising, especially since 2020. Dereliction from extraction ('farming')
Demographic, inc class status	Most ethnically diverse part of Liverpool for many decades. In 1% most deprived in England. Worsened from 199 to 196 in 2019.	Second poorest part of Hastings. In 1% most deprived in England. Worsened from 398 in 2015 to 333 in 2019.
Public services	Many services suspended during the long period of attrition (1981-2014)	Services under pressure from a decade of austerity
Environmental quality (parks and pollution)	Princes Park to the south and Sefton Park to south east.	Tiny Cornwallis Gardens. White Rock Gardens to the north west.
Proximity (access to major destinations)	Divided from the city centre by post-1981 estates	Divided from the town centre and from the station by poor public realm
Political (including how residents exert influence in local affairs)	Long experience of imposed regen Housing Market Renewal (cancelled 2011) Area divided by LSOA boundary	Long experience of imposed regen SRB via Seaspace (ended 2011)
Social-interactive (networks etc)	Strong neighbourly networks built up over many years among those that stayed and encouraged by the CLT for newcomers	Strong networks of businesses, ecosystem of interlinked values-driven organisations
Sentimental (sense of place, histories, narratives)	Very strong sense of place and narrative including of diverse (multicultural) vibrancy and rebellious radicalism	Very strong sense of place and narrative including of diverse ('quirky') vibrancy and rebellious radicalism
TINA choices	Destruction or decline	Gentrification or decline
The Alternative	CLT broke the regen deadlock for the triangle and shaped it as social space, especially Cairns Street as commons	WRNV broke the cycle of dereliction for FJ Parsons legacy and shaped it as social space, especially the Alley (Hastings Commons)

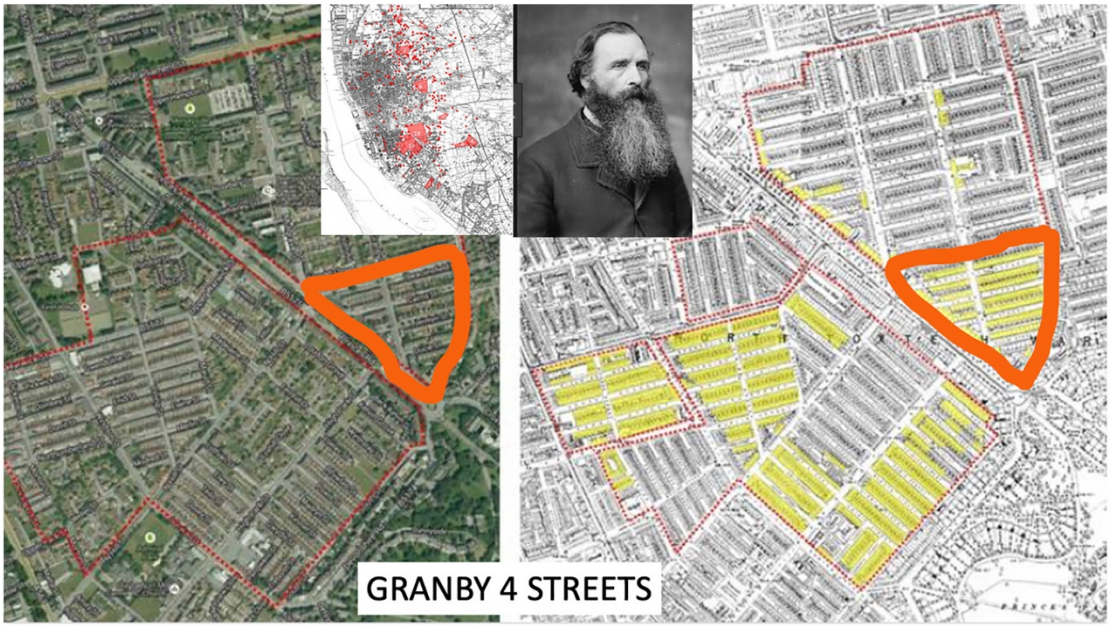
	GRANBY	WHITE ROCK
Organisational	Granby 4 Streets CLT. Plus Bloomin' Green Triangle. Plus Winter Garden. Plus Granby Workshop. Assemble. Penny Lane Builders. Support from North West Housing Services, Steve Biko Housing Association	Heart of Hastings CLT, plus fully conscious ecosystem of 'tools in the box' including Hastings Building Services. Support from Practical Governance, McMath, Crowe, professional teams
Relationship with local authority	Longstanding hatred and mistrust slowly replaced with pragmatic relations, mainly legal-transactional. Local ward councillors absent. Political leadership difficult and now unstable. Main shifts – CLT as vehicle, with money from Steinbeck and 'pretty documents' from Assemble. And then the Turner Prize.	Longstanding frustration and mistrust replaced over time with more active partnership – pier, coastal communities fund, Town Deal. Supportive ward councillor (more recently). Political leadership distracted. Main shifts – track record, increased stake-holding, especially the Observer Building. Still quite distant.
Cultural traits	Port city - sailors, slaves, migrants. Worldly. Irish. Black. Anti-authority. Eccentric (coastal).	Pirates and smugglers. Anti-authority, communitarian, independence, eccentric (coastal).

APPENDIX B: Granby histories

1. Richard Owens and the Liverpool estates

Granby's story begins in Wales. Arriving from Caernarvonshire aged 20, Richard Owens, Architect and Surveyor (1831-91) became 19th century Liverpool's most prolific housing specialist, building an extensive series of planned but speculative estates of workers' housing on more than 325 acres of land which maps onto the concentration of Welsh-born residents in 1871 Liverpool (Carr 2018).

Figure B1: An aerial view of the four estates as they exist today [left] and an illustrated contemporary map that records (in yellow) all that remains of the original fabric [right]. Granby 4 Streets occupy the southern triangle of the estate to the north of Princes Road. From Dr Gareth Carr heritage statement, March 2018



From Dr Gareth Carr heritage statement, March 2018

Four of these estates were developed 1864-1882 by D Roberts, Son and Co in Toxteth Park. Dr Gareth Carr has argued that the surviving remnants have heritage value, not only as examples of Owens' work and "of the industry and productivity of the 'Welsh builder', whose contribution to the development of housing in Liverpool is now well established" (2018: 3), but also because they demonstrate serious urban planning 40 years before the first qualification in the subject was established at the University of Liverpool in 1909. Since the Granby Four Streets were the last to be built, it is possible to "see the sequential development of architectural form… the evolutionary process of

the design of workers housing by the hand of Richard Owens" (ibid: 4). Earlier versions, for example, were content to allow the gable end of houses to present themselves to the transverse principal thoroughfare but by the time Granby was laid out "the articulation of the corner plot had taken on much greater significance in planning the intersections of streets" (ibid: 6). This historic development of "articulating intersecting street geometries" (ibid: 6) was picked up in the 21st century self-renovating of the Four Corners at the junction of Granby and Cairns Streets.

2. The historic focus of the Black[1] community

Liverpool has one of Britain's oldest Black communities, perhaps three centuries old, with some Black Liverpudlians able to trace their roots in the city for as many as ten generations. From its beginnings in the slave trade which Liverpool dominated, it has been a hyper-diverse and endlessly diversifying melting pot. As Costello (2017) points out, this is an inevitable result of more male settlers than female – whether slaves, seafarers or later migrants – but the terms to describe the resulting community are inadequate: even 'dual heritage' may not be suitable when any intermarriage may have taken place generations ago and many individuals have more than two influences in their background. The 'mixed-race' Liverpool-born Black community is the second largest group in the City after UK White, yet it "feels invisible… an almost homogenous people, derived from many nations, eking out their existence as a secret under-culture in a state of suppression for over two and a half centuries" (ibid). Until the inclusion of an 'ethnicity question' in the 1991 census, as recommended by the Gifford Report (Gifford 1989: 39), this large group were statistically invisible.

The extent of the historical concentration of Liverpool's non-White communities in the Granby area is quite different to most other major cities (although there are similarities to other sea-ports like Cardiff). By the time of the slave trade's abolition in 1807 a substantial number of Black people were living in the city and many more came in as seamen during the 19th century, settling in the area of the south docks. In itself

[1] I choose to capitalise both Black and White throughout this thesis, in agreement with Kwame Anthony Appiah (https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/06/time-to-capitalize-blackand-white/613159/)

this is not an unusual settlement pattern: the strangeness is in how this spatial segregation has been sustained for over 200 years. The National Dwelling and Housing Survey of 1976 showed that 30% of Granby's people were from racial minorities. Other nearby wards had figures of around 10% while there remained large areas in north Liverpool where scarcely any Black people lived and the total for the city as a whole in 1981 was estimated at 4-6%. The active reproduction of this isolation has been fuelled by a combination of *endemic racism*, *state attitudes* to spatialised poverty, and the *territorial stigmatisation* which swept up all of Liverpool 8 as a symbol of Liverpool's wider decline and depravity, particularly after the 1981 'disturbances'.[2]

Until 1911 Black and White seamen were paid the same wage but that year a national seamen's strike resulted in discrimination whereby higher wages for British seamen were partly funded by reducing wages for African seamen. In 1919 the resentment of unemployed workers returning from the war, fuelled by the racism of the time, broke into a wave of racial attacks in Liverpool with up to 10,000 White rioters attacking Black people in the streets, in their homes, and in seamen's hostels, including the drowning of young sailor Charles Wooton by a mob of hundreds with the police present (Fryer 1984: 20).

The interwar period saw a worsening in official discrimination in a series of 'Aliens' Orders and the National Union of Seamen's open policy of keeping Black sailors off British ships. By 1948 there were an estimated 8,000 Black people in Liverpool, of whom 30% were seafarers, 10% had shore-jobs and the others were "chronically unemployed as a result of the colour bar" (Gifford 1989: 31). That year there were further mass attacks on Black seamen and when they barricaded themselves into the hostel the police forced their way in and arrested those under attack. Despite such evidence of 'police partiality', Liverpool's Assistant Chief Constable told local Black leaders "There isn't any colour question in Liverpool… I am responsible for law and

[2] Here I use 'disturbances' because it was this aspect of the 1981 events that was stigmatised and punished. Below I have used "uprising" and "riots" interchangeably to recognise that both terms are true in their own right. These were violent riots in the streets as a tactic in a rising up of people suffering injustice.

order and I'm going to get it". This kind of denial reappears in the policing of the 1981 riots and in the four-year Militant rule (1983-87) when race was seen as a 'distraction' from class-based politics.

Despite the challenge of finding the right words, it is essential to understand Granby's specific kind of diversity. People had been coming from all over the world for generations, mixing together as people do and creating a natural blending of genetics and cultures that was both longstanding and continually being renewed. In other ways too, Granby was a full-range community with people of every age and a 'mixed economy', both in terms of mixed uses (homes, shops, clubs, church, school, synagogue etc) and in terms of tenure and wealth.[3]

Such "distinctively polyglot" (Merrifield 1996: 206) diversity, in any world unscarred by racial and class prejudice, would be recognised as community resilience. Yet the 'pernicious' attitudes behind the term 'half-caste', already visible by the mid 19th century, "undermined the very process which ought to have integrated Black Liverpudlians in the stream of common humanity" (Gifford 1989: 27). Instead, those small areas where Black people lived became stigmatised and their populations of all backgrounds were subject to extreme prejudice from the rest of the city.

The Liverpool 8 Inquiry led by Lord Tony Gifford in 1988 was an exemplary process, using a wide range of methods. After the first nine days of hearing evidence the Inquiry team felt "compelled to express its shock at the prevalence of racial attitudes, racial abuse and racial violence directed against black citizens of the city", to set out their fundamental anti-racist principles and to appeal "to everyone who has any influence to bring to bear to look at their own responsibility" and for those "with positive and effective experiences of dealing with racism" to contact the Inquiry (Gifford 1989: 22). In this same printed poster-text they made the claim that the racism they found in Liverpool was "uniquely horrific". Black people were effectively kettled, facing racist taunts, threats and violence if they moved any distance outside

[3] The Toxteth survey of 1982 showed 36.5% in council housing, 28.7% in housing association property, 23.6% owner-occupiers, and 11.2% renting from private landlords (Gifford 1989: 41).

Liverpool 8. White people known to be associated with Liverpool 8 also "suffered deeply from this racism" and the inquiry team were dismayed that many, both Black and White, found such prejudices to be 'only natural'. (1989: ibid). Three decades later, my research informants stressed the special character of Liverpool's racism from the very first interview. Ronnie described the housing association he worked for in the early 1980s creating 20 new build homes in the north of the city and offering half of them to people from the south of the city who were all Black. "And they didn't last beyond the first year, not one of them, because of the prejudice of the people around them… It's not as bad now but you still see hardly any Black people in the city centre" [151126 Ronnie].

3. Slum Clearance and SNAP

Alongside and intertwined with the racial segregation described above, is a story about the tendency of the state to respond to spatialised poverty with 'clearance'.

Liverpool had been the first city to build public housing in 1869 in response to squalid conditions. With rapid loss of its economic base, Liverpool's population halved between the 1930s and the end of the 20th century (Cocks and Couch 2012). Post-war municipal policy focused on large-scale demolition 'slum clearance' – up to 160,000 residents were decanted to new towns and estates on the periphery. Thompson calls this removal of working populations from economically fragile areas, 'designing-in-dereliction' (2015: 1029), a public sector driven approach which contrasts with my analysis of the private 'farming of dereliction' in Hastings discussed in Chapter 6.

Labour had controlled Liverpool City Council from 1955 until 1973, pursuing large-scale demolition and council house-building across the inner city wards known as the Slum Clearance Programme. This term – in use nationwide at the time – illuminates the fundamental violence of abstract space, *directly* through enforced displacement, *symbolically* through the "homogenisation, flattening or simplifying of lived meanings" (Thompson 2017: 110) and *structurally* through the dynamics of capitalist value flows. Karen Till has given us the term 'wounded cities' to describe "densely settled locales that have been harmed and structured by particular histories of physical destruction,

displacement, and individual and social trauma resulting from state-perpetrated violence. Rather than harmed by a singular 'outside event', these forms of violence often work over a period of many years, often decades, and continue to structure current social and spatial relations, and as such also structure expectations of what is considered 'normal'" (Till 2012: 5). This point about the continuity of harm that justifies the term 'wounded' will become clear as we traverse the next four decades of Granby's history.

In addition to the broader 'clearance' for the sake of 'the modernisation agenda' (Cameron 2006: passim), in the early 1960s Granby was blighted by proposals for the M62 and later for a ring road, neither of which ever arrived. It became categorised as a 'twilight area' (Hughes 'A Sense of Place' 5/3/16) where the envisageable futures all related to 'comprehensive renewal' or (terminal) decline.

Into this environment came SNAP – the Shelter Neighbourhood Action Programme 1969-72 (McConaghy 1972; Thompson 2015: 1029-31; Thompson 2017: 112-114; A Sense of Place 5/3/2016). This pioneering action research project, motivated by widespread agitation for better housing conditions and resistance to displacement and community fragmentation, aimed to "experiment with participatory rehabilitation of inner-city terraced neighbourhoods as an alternative to comprehensive renewal" (Thompson 2017: 108). SNAP would work with local residents, articulating their needs to the council, while delivering essential improvements to the 'stock'. Most importantly, they got LCC "to co-operate on an experiment where they work with all of the people of Granby to see if the area's multiple deprivations can be tackled in multiple ways" (A Sense of Place 5/3/16).

Figure B2: Extract from SNAP 1969/72 Another Chance for Cities (1972: 55)

THIS WAS HOME OF 16,000 PEOPLE; GRANBY WARD, A SMALL PART OF TOXTETH, LIVERPOOL 8. IN 1966, WHEN THE COUNTRY'S UNSKILLED WORKERS TOTALLED 8%, GRANBY'S EXCEEDED 19%. WHEN 3.3% OF THE NATION'S HOUSEHOLDS SHARED DWELLINGS, 34% SHARED IN GRANBY. WHEN 12.5% DID NOT HAVE A HOT WATER TAP, 54.5% OF THE HOUSEHOLDS IN GRANBY HAD NO HOT WATER AND 66.6% NO BATH. WHEN BRITAIN HAD 1.6% OF ITS HOUSEHOLDS OVERCROWDED, GRANBY HAD OVER 10% AND, OF COURSE, IT WAS THE SAME CONTRAST FOR ADULTS MENTALLY ILL, CHILDREN DELOUSED, EDUCATIONALLY SUBNORMAL, PHYSICALLY HANDICAPPED, ILLEGITIMATE OR TAKEN INTO CARE. IN 1966 WHEN NATIONAL UNEMPLOYMENT WAS 1.3% OF REGISTERED WORKERS, IT WAS OVER 9.4% IN GRANBY. GOD KNOWS WHAT IT IS AT THE MOMENT SINCE IN GRANBY, OR IN TOXTETH, NOBODY ELSE KNOWS: BUT MERSEYSIDE UNEMPLOYMENT NOW STANDS AT 7.8%. CLEARLY WE HAD ARRIVED IN AN AREA OF MULTIPLE-DEPRIVATION.

Influenced by Colin Ward's concepts of "dweller control" (Ward 1974), itself influenced by the 'barefoot architect' John FC Turner (who, in a small-world twist, is a long-term Hastings resident and great friend to Heart of Hastings CLT), SNAP operated within a context of a generous funding regime for rehabilitation (after the 1974 Housing Act) and supportive infrastructure, with the secondary coop development organisation CDS providing wide-ranging tenant education and support that left over 50 coops across Liverpool. However, while it fitted with this aspect of social housing policy, it was a striking alternative to contemporary 'thinking' on urban renewal which remained generally focused on demolition and rebuild (not least because any *thinking* being done by the subaltern groups on the 'to be regenerated' list was unseen, ignored or belittled). Instead SNAP took a holistic approach: "The transport, policing, health, kerb crawling, greenery, landlord issues, benefits and much else is also looked into and discussed along with the housing. And many newsletters get produced" (A Sense of Place 5/3/16). SNAP took the unhelpful step of blocking the end of Granby Street

which was to cause even greater isolation. No-one gets everything right[4]! And, as SNAP 1969-72 makes clear, there were all kinds of conflicts with local community workers, who saw Shelter's charity status as a problem, and with politicians and local authority officers who felt threatened[5]. This enabled SNAP workers to share with local people "the only valid real experience… a most profound sense of powerlessness" (SNAP 1969-72: 49).

The four surviving streets of the Granby Triangle map neatly onto the original SNAP boundaries, suggesting that early rehabilitation efforts were relatively successful in protecting these spaces – both through improvement works and through resident engagement, perhaps recalling Lefebvre's point: "In space, what came earlier continues to underpin what follows" (Lefebvre 1991: 229).

This kind of rehabilitation became the blueprint for the approach supported by the city's 1973-83 Liberal council and delivered by the housing associations. But in Granby, SNAP operated in just one small corner with the rest still earmarked for clearance and redevelopment (see figure 9.7).

The council-led redevelopments involved the total erasure of existing 19th century street patterns, replaced by identikit suburban designs, with blocks arranged in internally facing culs-de-sac. Without coherence or legibility, this approach destroyed the delicate social fabric and its unique urban identity: "a directly, as well as symbolically, violent act – replacing social space with an abstract space of homogenous housing estates" (Thompson 2017: 110-11). We can see how clearance vs rehabilitation has a long pedigree as *the* key question in dealing with degraded and stigmatised spaces.

At my first walkabout in 2016, Ronnie spoke of the 'gone streets' Cawdor and Arundel

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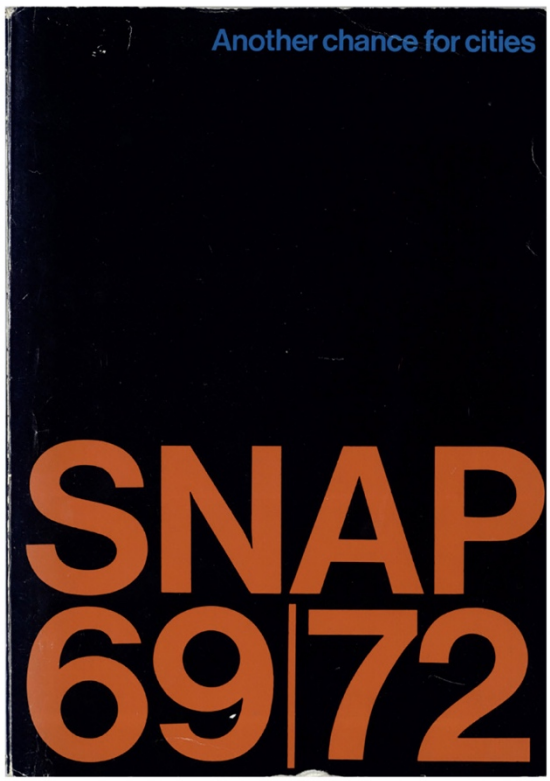
[4] Granby St was opened up in 1993 at the junction with Princes Avenue - previously "social isolation was arguably exacerbated by its de facto physical isolation and fortress-like quality" (Merrifield1996: 208)

[5] "On the second day in Granby the SNAP Director was told by the Labour Councillor for Granby Ward: 'If you get in my way I will twist your tail", and told by the Planning Officer they "should 'notify local people that the Council is working on an action plan for the Neighbourhood and will be asking people to 'participate' in that" (SNAP 1969-72: 49)

[160506 Ronnie]. These were apparently the ‘progressive streets’. “It was suggested that from these people would evolve the essential leadership for the area… the disadvantage was that this leadership did not necessarily identify with the more unfortunate people and, in some case was downright intolerant” (SNAP 1969-72: 59). These streets had long-term residents, no multiple-occupation, and with “a good proportion of owner occupiers” contrasted “with multiple occupation streets such as Ducie Street, where residents were transient, terrified of landlords and had little confidence in their own or anybody else’s ability to improve their situation”. In areas already confirmed for clearance, ‘unauthorised tenants’ added to the mix.

Shelter wrote their 225-page report ‘SNAP Another Chance for Cities 1969-72’ because “it is usually the aggregation of detailed difficulties which frustrates any attempt at individual betterment” (SNAP 1969-72: 5). They tried hard to make a multiply-readable document – with bold type, diagrams and photographs. In 2020 I chose to pay for Ronnie’s precious copy to be non-destructively scanned so that this superb document can be an accessible resource. Quotes from just a single page of that document (p5) demonstrate this richness.



The report identifies many barriers to "the rescue of deprived urban areas" but foremost and repeating were the "disastrous lack of communication… formidable barriers between the man in the street, academics, professionals, politicians, and, most of all, between the vast reticulated apparatus of local, city and national bureaucracies" and the "absence of any strategic response by successive Governments in terms of general policy, individual recovery programmes and in the operation of most legislation."

The proposed Housing Act 1969 and planning legislation 1968 offered "an excellent opportunity to combine the energies of the mass of the people with those of their local authority. But to spend one week in such a 'real-life' situation is to realise that much of our legislation has a terrifying irrelevance for the urban poor. One month is to appreciate the inevitable conflicts between the deprived and bureaucracies. In one year we had realised that any total process of improvement lay outside the fiscal and management competence of the beleaguered cities. By the end of three years it was evident that national government needed a completely new orientation to urban problems: a new urban programme".

With my strong focus on the SELF in neighbourhood regeneration, I find it interesting that SNAP staff "were stripped of any professional or bureaucratic status"; they were non-technical, non-party-political, not "cocooned in an institutionalised structure". They could not and did not "assume the role of urban managers: the caretakers, the personification of authority for the urban poor, the local officers whose expertise cannot be questioned and who control all the levers to future betterment". Yet they recognised that they were not "value-free. Quite the reverse. We were contentious, arrogant, opinionated and heavily biased in favour of an immediate new deal for the deprived. We wanted jam on it and we wanted it today". But they were "completely unaligned and independent of other actors in the urban crisis… we felt that the collapse of our older cities was so total that it amounted to an indictment of our whole culture and, consequently, all the agencies and authorities, no matter how excellent and conscientious were, to some extent, collaborators in urban decline".

What a fascinating time-space position to occupy! There is no doubt that SNAP – both as a project and as a legacy narrative – helped to shape Granby long after it ended in 1972, both in terms of what happened next (the Uprising, the long and partial survivability of the community, and the success of the community land trust) and in the story-telling. Perhaps it provided something of a justification for the neighbourhood's exceptionalism.

Alongside endemic racism and the state response to spatialised poverty, the third feature of Granby's story is the territorial stigma associated with the neighbourhood. For Granby this dates back at least into the 1960s when it was a 'red light area' and

SNAP commented on “the general stigma felt by everyone because they had an address in the area” (Gifford 1989: 101). When Hazel arrived 20 years later this reputation was intact: “30 years ago, you see, if you were a white woman living here it was because you were a prostitute. Yeah. And you were a nigger lover, because people are racist in this city… I have been arrested for soliciting. I was coming back from Iceland on Lodge Lane with shopping bags and my friend’s child, so it was quite clear. But the police had watched me leave this area and then had watched me come back, so it was clear [to them] that I was up to no good… We only popped out to the shops” [151201 Hazel].

Such attitudes from other parts of the city had “an appalling impact and the place becomes cheaper and it becomes easy for charities to buy houses, so it becomes a repository for the ills of the world and the woes of the world. So you’ve got a lot of stuff going on that doesn’t help. *And it’s almost, it’s a neglectful sort of, a sort of slow destruction*” [151201 Hazel, my emphasis]. Merrifield spoke of Granby becoming *synomymous* with drug dealing and crime and a paramilitary style of policing, with the forced closure of the post office in 1994 “because of successive hold-ups” (Merrifield 1996: 208-9). Hazel and Erika both found it difficult to get bank loans, In the late 1980s Hazel was told “if you choose to live in a cowboy place you can employ a cowboy builder and you don’t need a loan from us as a bank” [151201 Hazel; 151126 Erika]. This spatialised financial exclusion, known in the US as ‘redlining’ and there controlled to some extent by the Community Reinvestment Act 1977 (Berry and Romero n.d), has never been adequately tackled in the UK.

Yet there was such life in Granby - in 1957 there were 23 clubs and shabeens. “Granby was desperately poor, but still dancing in spite of it” (Granby Workshop 2015: 7). Staff of Granby Methodist Centre told Lord Scarman that “white and black families are interwoven in a complex web of loyalties and friendships and kinship networks… [and share] a mutual lack of trust and feeling of isolation and rejection in relation to the rest of the city” (quoted ibid: 8).

I described in Chapter 5 the attitudes of cab drivers when I first started coming to Granby in 2014. Although attitudes have shifted Hazel worries that the stigma has not

gone: “Because the new mythology that’s going round is this is a special place, it’s being built for Muslims and you’re not going to be allowed to live here if you’re not Muslim. Yeah. And that came from a Liverpool cab driver who dropped me, he said, “Oh you can’t live here unless you’re Muslim, can you, love? ‘Cause this has all been done for Muslims’” [170804 Hazel].

The nasty description of Liverpudlians’ ‘flawed psychological state’ in a leader piece in Boris Johnson’s *The Spectator* – “they see themselves wherever possible as victims, and resent their victim status; yet at the same time they wallow in it” (The Spectator 2004) – is merely the most famous of the goading dehumanisations that excludes despised sections of the population as moral outcasts, “represented from the outside with disgust as the dregs of the people, populace and gutter” (Tyler 2013: 19).

These fragments speak to the specific topography of disrepute identified as ‘spatial taint’ (Wacquant et al 2014) summarised in figure 5.5. The riots of 1981 were a kind of ‘moment of truth’, a moment that reveals and entrenches existing ‘truths’ about a place, and requires a response.

4. The 1981 riots and ‘managed decline’

The uprising in Liverpool 8 that began on 3 July after the arrest of Leroy Alphonse Cooper[6] on Selborne Street in the north of the Granby Triangle lasted for 8 days and was the longest and most ferocious of the civil disturbances that year. 460 police were injured, more than 70 buildings razed. Tear gas was used for the first time in mainland Britain.

The most popular causal explanation given at the time was that the L8 riots were apolitical – “a hooligan element pursuing common criminal motives” (Cooper 1985: 61). Merseyside police chief Kenneth Oxford said it was “completely different from Southall or Brixton. There was no racial connotation whatsoever. It was just a group of black hooligans with some criminal elements among the whites streaming in to help,

[6] Leroy Cooper has been photographing people in Liverpool for decades: https://www.liverpoolecho.co.uk/news/liverpool-news/man-whose-arrest-triggered-toxteth-17092910

who were hell-bent on provoking the police. Their fight was with us. My message to them is that they can't win" (*Liverpool Echo* 6/7/81). The Liberal leader of Liverpool council agreed it was "hooliganism on a grand scale" (*Liverpool Daily Post*, 6/7/81) and this message was repeated in local radio and TV coverage. However, as Cooper (1985: 61) gently points out, rowdy behaviour and crime are features of urban life but the fact that in a riot it is *on a grand scale* means that it is far from normal. When confronted by the police, youths involved in ordinary vandalism or street violence will attempt to escape, de-escalating the event, whereas a riot escalates and expands the engagement to include people who would not usually participate in such behaviour. The dismissal of social rules should not be minimised. Riot lacks political target, ideology or organisation but "the violence of the rioters makes a fundamental statement about themselves as people" (ibid: 62). Paul Rock in the *London Review of Books* (September 1981) called rioting "an attempt to gain symbolic control over areas and lives in which people feel they have lost mastery".

Quoting Martin Luther King's definition of riot as 'the voice of the unheard', Philip Waller in *The Times* put forward a liberal causal explanation – "ineloquent though they may have been, the rioters have something to say, and that is about the intolerable circumstances which they have been condemned to endure" (*The Times* 7/7/81). Riot is not triggered by absolute poverty and discrimination but rather an awareness of inequality and powerlessness, *not just the right to equal treatment but the right to treatment as an equal* (Dworkin 1977: 273).

> "Riots, in all their rage, confusion and contradiction, constitute momentary expressions of a violent social *dis*order: they are not exceptions to the norm but rather vessels that contain its prevailing social processes, condensed and crystallized into events of apparent extremity" (Matt Wilde, *Counterpunch,* Aug 2011)

Analysing over 500 Merseyside Police arrests for that summer, Cooper concluded "the explanation is better located in the marginalised status of the riot communities, in the impact of coercive policing therein, and in the need for marginalised communities to assert their right to equal concern and respect" (1985: 60). Nearly half of the arrests were made in Toxteth, half of those had never previously appeared in court, and half

were over 21. Nearly a fifth of those arrested in Toxteth were female. Cooper concludes "those people who were arrested came from a wide cross-section of the community" (ibid: 64). The narrative that many rioters had travelled from other parts of Liverpool was used to downgrade its political significance but across all those arrested, 88% lived in the incident area or within the adjacent area. While unemployed people were over-represented in the arrest figures, more than one-third of those arrested were not unemployed. This supports Field and Southgate's (1982) suggestion that "the individual experience of unemployment is less likely to be a casual factor in riots than a sense of grievance communicated by unemployment to the whole riot community" (cited by Cooper 1985: 66). 70% of those arrested in Toxteth were white which was approximately the proportion of the local white population. Cooper concludes: "It was a Toxteth riot, and not a 'black' Toxteth one"[7] (ibid: 65-66). This is not to downplay the uniqueness of the discrimination facing Black people in Liverpool (Gifford 1989: 82-83) with 31% of local employers admitting to acting in a discriminatory way towards black applicants and "the exposure to threats, taunts, abuse and violence which obliged the population to self-confine within the Liverpool 8 district" (Parker and Atkinson 2020: 166). As we pass the 40 year anniversary of the riots there is more talk of the "exhilarating sense of liberation" and an appreciation of "conviviality… fine-tuned interactions between black and white participants" (tweet by @InertiaPi, 10/4/21[8]).

By 1981, with male unemployment in Toxteth at 31% (18% for rest of Merseyside) (Census 1981), and young Black male unemployment at 70-80%, it had become obvious that there was no "right to equal concern and respect". Merseyside Police statements emphasised a coercive strategy rather than policing by consent. The triggering event – the arrest of a youth by a routine police traffic patrol, met by hostility by others present and police reinforcements called – angered and further

[7] According to Michael Simon, former Granby resident and worker for Granby CLT in 2016:
Not much happened to Granby Street in '81… One or two shops, it kind of more or less got defended, I think. And one person whose shop got burnt, I'm pretty sure he done it himself. But the chemists, like, someone went to do there and the windows got smashed but then people protect it, thinking, hang on, we need a chemist. So not many shops really got touched. [Whereas] Lodge Lane got devastated" [160402 Michael Simon].
[8] See https://twitter.com/InertiaPi/status/1380890972570189832

alienated members of the community and exposed the fundamentally weak position of the police. At such a moment, "[t]he marginalised status of community members is emphasised while, simultaneously, the opportunity for the community to assert power through violence is demonstrated" (Cooper 1985: 68). Merrifield points to "the immanent volatility of a city life forged out of racism and one that is forced to react to the shoves, pokes and cajoles of the invisible hand" (1996: 206).

Viewed as a long-term issue on which the opposition was relatively weak, the 'inner city' was a useful concept for the Thatcher government, allowing senior Tories to remorselessly jibe at Labour authorities. Saumarez Smith calls it "a spatially manifested locus for arguments about physical, social and economic decline... race, the north-south divide, the persistence of poverty and social polarisation… de-industrialization, law and order and the perceived breakdown of civil society and the family" (2019: 276). The 'inner city' had become a replacement for the word 'slum' - both a slur and a call to action, and the 'Granby district' of Toxteth, Liverpool 8 was its supposed epitome.

The papers from the first Thatcher government (released in 2011 under the 30-year rule) illuminated a contested urban policy at national level between 'managed decline' and interventionist regeneration. Building on their work showing how stigmatised and excluded spaces come into being as a process of neglect (benign or planned), Parker and Atkinson have explored the disorders in this context. They show how Liverpool became "a veritable test bed for exercises in the depoliticisation of urban government" (2020: 163) with the introduction of the Urban Development Corporations "questioning the very raison d'etre of local authorities" (Imrie and Thomas 1999: 4). 'Managed decline' and 'urban regeneration' were established as opposing positions emanating from Geoffrey Howe (the 'Treasury view') and Michael Heseltine (Minister for the Mersey), but both were part of a diminishing of municipal authority, committed to lifting "the dead hand of Socialism" (Heseltine [1987] 2012), leaving national political elites "deciding the means and terms upon which social mitigation should be provided or denied by the state" (Parker and Atkinson 2018: 4).

In a letter to the Prime Minister in August 1981, Geoffrey Howe called Liverpool "much the hardest nut to crack" and suggested "we must not expend all our resources in trying to make water flow uphill" (quoted by Parker and Atkinson 2020: 168). This set up Liverpool as the author of its own demise and Liverpool City Council's refusal to set a rate and begin spending cuts bolstered the view of Thatcher and her hawkish Cabinet colleagues that "such insurgent spaces and communities should be required to face the economic consequences of their political choices" (ibid: 170). To these politicians "the riots offered the possibility for legitimising a strategy of neglect" (ibid: 172).

Meanwhile, Heseltine crossed the normal boundaries of separation by experiencing the city personally and directly and concluding "that we must make good the degradation of centuries" (Heseltine 1987). Thatcher's own conclusions from a visit to Liverpool in July 1981 were that the housing is not the worst, that the young people got into trouble through boredom but there was so much to do (grass-cutting and litter): "they had plenty of constructive things to do if they wanted… how people could live in such circumstances without trying to clear up the mess and improve their surroundings. What was clearly lacking was a sense of pride and personal responsibility – something which the state can easily remove but almost never give back" (Thatcher 1993: 145, quoted Parker and Atkinson 2020: 172-3). It seems obvious now that a sense of pride could not flourish until there was a sense of ownership and agency.

The response by central government to the 'uprising' split into contesting positions configured around 'managing social abjection' versus "progressive interventions that opened the way for more assertive forms of control by denuding local government" (Parker and Atkinson 2020: 174). The false binary of destruction/gentrification versus decline was manifest at national policy level as another poisonous choice between 'a concerted presence' (top-down public-private intervention) and 'managed run-down' (in practice an arbitrary combination of containment policing, demolitions and service withdrawal).

While a simplistic reading might show that Heseltine's interventionism won out, establishing new geographies of governance and taking 900 acres of 'polluted wasteland' into the Merseyside Docklands Corporation, a witness to the 1988 Gifford

Inquiry said “all we got from Mr Heseltine was trees in Prince’s Avenue and even they were planted by contractors from outside” (quoted Gifford 1989: 51). Parker and Atkinson conclude that the state “attempted a complex patterning of both managed decline and forced incorporation” (2020: 175) which remained salient in wider urban policy long after the Howe vs Heseltine moment of 1981, and that ‘strategic abandonment’ is never finally off the policy agenda.

For my purposes, it is important that this binary was also being played out within the city specifically in relation to Granby. Strategically abandoned and dehumanised is exactly how my Granby hosts see the story of their neighbourhood for the 30 years after the ‘uprising’. “It was town planning as epic punishment, and a market that valued people’s lives at little more than zero… This great clearance went on for decades” (Chakrabortty 2018).

> “We were condemned. It was punishment for the riots. Bins weren’t collected, streets weren’t swept and a mythology built up: people came here to buy their drugs or dump their shite” (Hazel quoted in Wainwright 2014).
>
> “After the riots an invisible red line was drawn around the area – it was an unspoken policy of no maintenance and no investment. Once houses are boarded up it sends a signal” (Eleanor quoted in Wainwright 2014).

Policing was punitive: “After ‘81 the area started to be seriously written off by police officers, aided and abetted by the local authority and, as the years went by, also by the housing associations. They stopped Granby Street going out on to Upper Parliament, put a very low quality estate across the end of the road and effectively started to *kettle* the area, as we now call it” [151126 Ronnie]. Alongside this ‘Belfast approach’, Hatherley says “it’s as if the city were straining all sinews to actually become as boring as Southampton” (2011: 335).

The area was portrayed as dangerous and menacing. Services were withdrawn – street lighting, bin collections, road sweeping. There was fly-tipping, old mattresses, “the rubbish collects and the cats shit on it and it becomes just pretty awful” [151201 Hazel]. “Local children would walk to school past all this filth, knowing the world saw them as little better” (Chakrabortty 2018).

Meanwhile, politically the strange rupture of the Militant Years 1983-87 and their impact on Granby are captured in the Gifford Report (1989: 54-57, see also Frost and North 2013). Broadly, the bullish insistence that everything was "a class issue not a race issue" meant that the council became thoroughly 'alienated' from the majority of community groups and especially from Black groups throughout the city.

Erika Rushton, later to be first chair of the CLT, worked at the city council in the early 1990s. "I saw and heard things that I wouldn't have otherwise. The institutional… it wasn't just racism, it was a reaction to the riots and everything else, was so ingrained." She tells a funny-not funny story about a senior council officer turning up for a drive round Granby in an old banger (that broke down), to avoid bringing her car to Toxteth. "Now this was the Head of Housing Strategy for the city council who had never been to Toxteth. You kind of think, oh right… She'd worked up to that role from the day she left school, worked forever at the city council" [151126 Erika].

Ten years after the riots the Liverpool City Council Quality of Life survey (1991) found that six in ten people in the inner city wards lived in poverty with half of them in 'intense' poverty. A year later the Granby Housing Condition Survey (1992) showed 25% of properties as vacant with a further 5% derelict and a total of 50% unfit or seriously unfit for human habitation. In the mid-1990s Merrifield commented that Toxteth, like many inner cities, "blends hatred, squalor and violence with grass roots organising, hope and dynamic cultural creativity" (1996: 206). The vibrancy remained uncommodified but broke (acute poverty for residents, perennial funding crises for community organisations). Unemployment for black teenagers was estimated at 80-90%. For them, "[o]pting out of the system invariably proves advantageous and rational as an alternative survival mechanism" (Merrifield 1996: 208). Drugs in particular served as a route to as urban entrepreneurship [151201 Hazel]. One of Britain's first crack factories was discovered at Kelvin Grove just over the south of Granby Street in 1987; the Granby Street post office closed in 1994 because of successive hold-ups; kerb-crawling and racing stolen cars were rife. These factors gave justification for a para-military style of community policing, including low-flying 'chopper squad' patrols, which in turn fanned local conspiracy theories.

5. The Impasse 1992-2002

In this environment, the logic of 'comprehensive renewal' had taken hold as if it was clear common sense (ie hegemonic). In 1992 LCC received £9M of central government funding via the Housing Corporation as part of the Merseyside Special Allocation for a programme of rebuilding in Granby, a paltry amount compared to the c£25M annual budgets for the Merseyside Development Corporation, and to the scale of the local challenge but nevertheless a lot of money (equivalent to £17M in 2021). It is tempting to imagine what a self-renovating neighbourhood could have done with those funds. Elsewhere in the country development trusts were stirring (Hull Goodwin 1994, Bradford Royds 1992, Hastings Trust 1991) inspired by the extraordinary success of Coin Street Community Builders who took over 13-acres of London's South Bank in 1984. The Development Trust Association was formed in 1992 and grew quickly, but these were maverick out-riders and the overwhelming experience of regeneration in the 1990s was less like the flourishing agency of Coin Street and more like the depressing war of attrition in Granby. As Ray Quarless, Director of Steve Biko HA from 1989, described (quoted Merrifield 1996: 220), government officials parachuted into Toxteth like 'excited missionaries' and made little difference.

It was not until the summer of 1994 that 'consultation' took place between LCC and the local housing associations, with an attempt to broaden this to local residents by "inviting them to exhibitions and asking them to complete questionnaires" (Merrifield 1996: 209). LCC blamed the slow progress on the absence of an agreed strategy for the area and officers were panicked that the funding resource would be lost which would be "disastrous for the area without which any solution would be impossible… The options are clear: do nothing or find a common sense compromise that allows a meaningful regeneration plan to go ahead" (Report of Joint Meeting of Policy and Resources and Housing Committee, Nov 1994, quoted Merrifield p210). This locking of local government focus to central government money is part of the urban failure machine. In the end, the solution in Granby did not involve either LCC or central government funds: it came down to local people trying something new. Considering the 'options' as presented, "do nothing" is clearly the decline side of the false choice while the "common sense… meaningful regeneration" meant the obliteration of the

existing neighbourhood. In Granby "no conception of legitimate compromise" (Merrifield 1996: 211) was established, which led to inaction. Merrifield seems to blame local groups for this, with their "diverse demands and vested interested" meaning they "failed to pinpoint commonality within their own community differences" (ibid: 211), leading to "a stubborn stalemate". Could it have been otherwise? The various groups did not realise that they might have had the power to generate a shared vision: that option was never on offer. Merrifield has a great paragraph about how the institutional and bureaucratic decision-making process - "itself defective and riddled with its own place-specific ineptitudes" - is constrained within a broader national context, embedded in a European and global capitalist system, "all of which takes place, as it were, 'behind the backs' of residents in Granby and is so abstract that it's immediately out of reach within their daily life practices, even though it weighs down terrifically upon it" (ibid: 211).

The 'consultation', remembered locally as "when the Corpy sent out letters about demolition" [151126 Ronnie], led to the formation of Granby Residents Association (GRA). The 16 years of 'Granby Residents' would merit a proper historical research project. Here I can only summarise some key aspects that are relevant to a thesis about what came after. First, it is important to recognise the heterogeneity of the Granby community at this time and the contingency of the outcome. As Merrifield (1996) points out, there were different tenure groups and very many different community associations[9]. The 'Granby women' so fundamental to Granby 4 Streets CLT were those who stayed, those left behind or not removable. It was not inevitable that the clearance would have been so complete – other possibilities could have come to pass. Choices were made, fashions were followed, the status quo was upheld by destroying as much of it as possible on the ground. Power dynamics were performed through the continued abstraction of space.

Locally there was disagreement about whether redevelopment should focus on clearance or rehabilitation, the council promoting the former as "neater, more

[9] Merrifield estimated 60 community groups and associations with listed addresses in Liverpool 8 (1996: 215)

efficient and cheaper in the long run" (Merrifield 1996: 212). Merrifield talks about conflicts of interest between different tenure groups and repeats what appears to have been a council line about GRA as "selfish owner occupiers who want to spoil it for everyone else" (ibid: 213). Tenure differences could map onto length of residence, ethnic status and other power differentials. Black people were three times as likely to be housing association tenants as Whites, although proportions in council tenancy were comparable. Granby's heterogenous social landscape engendered diversified forms of activism. Relations between minority ethnic groups were sometimes acrimonious including antagonisms between newly-arrived Somali immigrants and Liverpool-born Blacks. "This maybe what makes Toxteth cultural life so vibrant and rich, yet makes its politics so frustratingly elusive and piecemeal" (ibid: 214).

Viewing this period of resistance as the precursor to the self-renovating neighbourhood, the key factor is how today's SRN leaders incorporate it into the story, what they learned from it both privately and publicly. Hazel and Theresa both worked really hard in Granby Residents, although Theresa stopped at the end of the 1990s. I remember Hazel talking about it on social occasions in the early 2000s; it was a time of jangled nerves and ongoing grief. Eleanor says by the end GRA was "controlling, combative, traditional, hierarchical, and unsuccessful" [151109 Eleanor]. Yet importantly, the work of Granby Residents was a demonstration of 'survivability' (Lees, Annunziata and Rivas-Alonso 2018; Lees et al 2020). Without bodies in front of bulldozers, without the stubborn determination not to be obliterated, without the continuous denial of cooperation with plans for 'renewal' through destruction, there would have been no Granby 4 Streets - either physically or institutionally.

Figure B3: First issue of the Jangler (GRA newsletter), Dec 2002

Neighbourhood Renewal Unit

MOTTO
"WE'RE BACKING GRANBY"

Sefton

GRANBY RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION - NEWSLETTER

The Jangler

138 Granby Street, Liverpool L8 2US Telephone: 0151 728 8693 - 1st Issue - December 2002

Vision Week End Seminar

GRA came into existence out of a campaign against the City Council and the RSL's housing clearance policy in the Granby Triangle.

Although housing is key to any regeneration strategy in Granby, residents are beginning to take a wider view that regeneration of housing stock needed to go hand in hand with social, economic, cultural and environmental issues in the area, in order to reverse the many years of decline and make Granby a sustainable community. Developing a vision for Granby is the first step in this direction.

On 26th September 2002, GRA organised a week-end Seminar for residents at Burton Manor College, Cheshire to develop and agree a vision for Granby. Participants worked in groups at every stage of the programme. There were plenary sessions where groups gave their reports. People treated each other as equal partners with mutual respect and understanding of each others views and perspectives.

The vision framework was about improving the housing stock, shops and environment, developing social and community facilities, leisure and amenities and improving the relationship between the Police and the community. The framework was comprehensive and coherent and tailored to meet the special needs of the area.

Participants agreed that the event was very successful. It lifted their morale and gave them a sense of direction. Chief Angus Chukwuemeka

6. Housing Market Renewal (2002-11)

Experientially, Housing Market Renewal (HMR) was not new to Granby. It appeared designed to give legitimacy and finance to the approach LCC had been taking since the Uprising. If the 1980s had been about 'kettling the neighbourhood' [151126 Ronnie], the 1990s reignited the clearance approach, and in 2002 LCC successfully lobbied not just for money but for a *programme* from government to justify and fund the 'slash and burn' that would 'solve' Granby (and many other stigmatised parts of the city) once and for all. This would not only sweep away the 1880s buildings (well past their expected lifespan) and permanently change the landscape, layout, look and feel of the neighbourhood. It would lobotomise community memory, historicising the decades of multiple failures into an unjudgeable past. And it would bring into being a 'neighbour-hood' (a conceived space of blankness) in which LCC had all the power and relatively little responsibility.

Distinct from the superficially similar slum clearance programmes of the 1890s through the 1960s, HMR was "a programme of class cleansing. The new housing is not let to those who had been cleared but is allocated for the 'aspirational'" (Hatherley 2011: xvii). This was 'market Stalinism' where the state works in the service of property and land, representations matter far more than reality and "all that is solid melts into PR" (Fisher 2009: 39-53).

In the midst of the programme and in its aftermath, the academic jostling between HMR's advocates (Nevin et al 2001; Cole and Nevin 2004; Nevin 2010; Nevin and Leather 2013) and its critics (Allen 2008, Webb 2010, Cameron 2006) illuminates deep differentials and dilemmas in regeneration praxis and how the supposedly rational-scientific 'HMR paradigm' is a political construct, a "marketized mindset" based on sharing out the problem of low demand beyond housing providers (Webb 2010: 232). Cameron particularly explores the shift in HMR discourse from a focus on abandonment and falling prices to a wider 'modernisation' agenda. He draws analogy with the shift in 1950s/60s 'slum clearance' from targeted clearance based on technical public health criteria to comprehensive redevelopment to eradicate the old and replace it with new. This 'politics of modernisation' contrasted with a 'politics of

social reform' (Cameron 2006: 13) can be readily mapped onto axes of 'done to' / 'done by' or 'top down' / 'bottom up'.

Of all the regeneration programmes this was the one that wrote its values on the tin. Measuring the success of a place by the value of its housing stock extends the commodification and financialisation of housing into a full-frontal attack on the neighbourhood. This was the quintessential programme of renewal through gentrification. Chris Allen saw HMR as a programme arising from the politics of middle class domination, viewing class as constituted in distinctive consumption practices: "in a nutshell, then, the new middle class achieves its class position by accumulating, storing and deploying cultural capital in the market for houses"(Allen 2008: 4-5). Allen suggests that a defining characteristic of working-class existence is "proximity to necessity and insecurity" (ibid: 9) but avoids staying with this deficit model which compares working class consumption with middle-class equivalents and instead focuses on what it means to 'be' working class in the market for houses. Middle-class people "view the market for houses as a space of positions… a symbolic economy" ibid: 7) whereas working-class housing consumption is practical, seeing houses as dwelling space - a place to live - and resenting the imposition of positional labels such as 'unpopular neighbourhoods'. He draws attention to the role of institutions who constitute the field of housing as a space of positions and use regeneration programmes to impose this view on 'declining', 'disconnected', or in the 2020s 'left behind' neighbourhoods.

HMR valorised an 'outward-facing approach, a focus on 'market change', the opposite of listening to local people. Cole and Nevin recognised that "the initial strategic focus may struggle to gain support from members of the community in question, who will understandably be more exercised about improving current conditions" (2004: 25). This idea that local people only want mitigation rather than transformative action is part of a mindset that cannot see that 'preservationists' are also interested in the future.

In *A New Kind of Bleak*, Hatherley refers to the importing of Belfast's frontline urbanism to Liverpool – "the open plan of streets, hard to police and easy to riot, were made into something controllable and enclosed… brick cul-de-sacs separated by

perimeter walls. What a visit to West Belfast does is make crystal clear the military roots of contemporary urban planning" (2013: 321). This was the kind and quality of 'intervention' that Granby was used to. They could expect nothing better from HMR – either more of the same, or in the seemingly unlikely event that the market actually shifted to make Granby 'aspirational', then displacement through unaffordability. Like the little Gaulish village in *Asterix*, only the Granby Triangle held out against the Romans who would destroy and control them. In December 2006 the *Liverpool Echo* reported "Our 10-year battle with the bulldozers". There were many meetings, ongoing actions, years of staying alert, holding the fort through the long clearance. This period should be explored in terms of survivability and performativity but that is outside the scope of this thesis. The actions, disruptions and non-cooperation stance of GRA kept the four streets from demolition. In the venerable tradition of the suffragettes and Greenham Common (Parkins 2000, Laware 2004), putting vulnerable bodies in front of bulldozers saved the buildings for another day; but there is no doubt that day came eventually through the force of positive 'self-renovating' actions.

7. Neighbourhood housework

One Saturday in 2006 Eleanor started gardening outside her house in Cairns Street. It was a relief to be doing something. She had been living in a degraded and increasingly empty street without basic services and "the rage that had been building inside her for years drove her outside that morning, with no other objective than to put down a line of plants connecting her door with those others left on the street" (Chakrabortty 2018). She saw this cleaning up in contrast with Granby Residents which was "boring futile, unadventurous, bossy and bombastic. They didn't like me because I didn't realise I was supposed to keep quiet" [151109 Eleanor].

> "It was filthy, because everything was all empty it had become almost the official dumping ground for Liverpool. The Council's good-natured but bone-headed response was to build a fence round the whole place. So obviously they [the women] said 'Well we're not having that'. So they decided to clean it up. It was really long, long months of hard work, cleaning up. They got no help, except from each other. They all say 'Oh, Eleanor guilt-tripped us into it'. But they did it, and then the painting and planting spreads to the other streets. It was a core group really of about a dozen women who did it" [151126 Ronnie].

Other neighbours began to join in and in 2008 'That Bloomin' Cairns Street' apparently won an 'outstanding' award in the Royal Horticultural Society's North West Street in Bloom, although this may be a local myth!

Being outside together, *occupying the space over time*, they started to come up with other ideas. Soon they were painting the tinned-up fronts of the empty houses with curtains, adding coloured pigeons to the window sills, creating more planters and putting furniture in the street.

Figure B4: Cairns Street, Granby 9/6/2016

> "It can take many small acts of courage, but it has turned out to be a powerful thing. We started to take some very small actions, which began with cleaning and clearing rubbish, and endless brushing and painting, and the very female, undervalued domestic activities that normally take place in the home but now moved out into public spaces and started to stretch over entire streets. This breaks taboos" (Eleanor, quoted in Waterson 2019: 16)

The covert radicalism of the action reminds me of the JE Davis story about land reform 'hiding behind the tomatoes' (see Chapter 2). Chakrabortty understood it at once in 2018: "Yet they were not only prettifying their streets; they were upending the property system. Now these terraces had been abandoned by everyone else, the women were turning them into a commons for anyone left to protect." There is now a significant and growing literature about the production of alternative urban spaces (Fisker et al 2019; Eizenberg 2012; Tonkiss 2013; Rock 2018; Fernandez 2020). A common feature is the interstitial nature of these spaces. It is interesting to consider the difference between small strips of waste ground and actual city streets. Granby's experience shows how easily the latter can become the former, but also how in turn such spaces become potentially available for reclaiming.

Experience from across the social sector demonstrates that it is not just the *active tidying* of space which is powerful but the *simple occupation* of space. Building familiarity, ownership and pride, the conditions and outcomes of 'commoning'. Spending time together 'outside' reclaims and reconstructs the streets and pavements, while simultaneously putting in place layer upon layer, node after node of the neural material that comprises the collective relationship. The weeks go past, plans are made, actions taken, the place looks a bit better, cakes are made and shared, memories triggered of leaving orange squash on the doorstep for the children playing back in the day, sadness as you stare across at the empty, boarded-up row. Knowing Eleanor will be out there makes it easy – you wouldn't want to let her down and she'll only make you feel guilty. Anyway, it's a nice-enough day so… Back indoors at the end of the day you realise you've promised to organise a flier for next week.

> "It completely turned the atmosphere around: now we had a pretty street that we could all be proud of. Even if it was still empty" (Eleanor quoted in Wainwright, 2014).

From 2007 John Earnshaw from the Empty Homes Agency was paid by LCC to be a 'neutral chair of partnership', creating the Granby Community Partnership as the first formal communication channel between the council and the community since the 1981 Uprising. It is likely, though unproven, that this work played a role in the eventual shift, but that formal role is eclipsed by the story of informal self-renovation, in which the next step was the street market, to introduce some vibrancy into the long silence of dereliction and neighbourlessness.

> "A couple of summers ago my walk brought me into Granby. An area of the city that I well knew was in trouble, and had been for ages. And they were having a street market. Of course! Against a backdrop of 130 empty and bricked up houses, the 70 or so people from the rest of the 200 houses in the area had decided to celebrate themselves and their place. It was a jaw-dropping moment for me. They'd recently 'planted up' their four streets. For the pleasure of gardening them, but also to repossess them from the sense of desolation seeping out of all those empty homes. And now here they were out in those streets, buying, selling and sitting around laughing and talking with each other and their visitors" (Hughes, A Sense of Place, 25/4/2012)

The market began in Cairns Street as a table sale, another Eleanor innovation, and grew into an institution, a performance, a celebration, and a signing-up space. Theresa and Joe from Beaconsfield Street took on the responsibility - organising stall-holders, managing the street space, liaising (where absolutely essential) with the council and the police. "Month upon month, every time you see the street market it gets better and better… and that's kind of a litmus test for the area" (Anthony, Assemble 160628). The hypothesised (Steele 2012) grassroots virtues of thrift, impatience, and sociability are vivified by the street market. In Theresa's explanation to Charkrabortty (2018): "It was the spirit of 'Fuck, this is depressing – let's make it a bit better'… The street market was us saying 'We're here. Don't forget we exist'." This DIY recovery was emergent but under the radar and it was heavily focused on the here and now. The future of the neighbourhood remained 'in the hands of the gods', but power relations among those gods were shifting fast.

8. The end of HMR and the formation of the CLT

The Coalition Government was elected in May 2010 on a braying fanfare of 'red tape bonfires' and policy-making based on faith not evidence. From my perspective there were (only) two good things about it - an interest in community organising as part of the 'Big Society', and the cancellation of Housing Market Renewal as an early move in the austerity-driven policy clearout.

> "Even at the point when the money stopped, there hadn't been an agreed and approved plan for Granby. I mean clearly if the money had been available there would have been a commitment I am sure from the Council to come forward with a masterplan that met the approval of local people whilst being affordable and met some other perceived needs" (Liverpool City Council officer since 2009, interviewed by Martina Gross 160531).

There had never been an agreed plan for Granby since SNAP, and that had been within very tight constraints. Not agreeing a plan, not letting any plan stand as legitimate, was a critical piece of resistance throughout the Granby Residents period. The council officer's notion that the council would have magicked a plan 'that met the approval of local people' is a platitude without foundation. There was no way at that time that LCC could conceive of Granby's future as anything other than 'comprehensive renewal'. So as the money disappeared they tendered the four streets for 'best value' bids for a single developer to 'deal with Granby'.

In the meantime, however, the resident-activists of Granby had decided on a new direction. In May 2011 Ronnie Hughes worked with local people on re-thinking the future and made a short film[10] hosted on his blog A Sense of Place (4/5/2011). That November they officially incorporated the Granby 4 Streets CLT.
Thompson's 2020 analysis uses both 'policy mobilities' and 'planning histories' approaches to show Liverpool's CLT movement as "an assemblage of locally and globally sourced components, discourses, practices, materials and actors" (2020: 85). Those involved had certainly shown willing to 'source' widely.

> "We used to pass a biscuit tin round asking for the slummy, the janglers in your pocket. Most people would give 20p and there'd be 50 people there. That was

[10] https://asenseofplace.com/2012/04/05/2011-working-with-granby/

> how we started. And people just giving us stuff. Sweeping the street and planting and making the streets a better place to live. That prepared us to be a CLT. Everybody has to start somewhere" [210706 Hazel].

The new CLT approached all the shortlisted developers "We wanted to make sure that our wishes were included within their proposals, and that the community would be involved. The contract for the renovation of the properties was won in March 2012 by a private developer [Leader One], who had promised to deliver an exciting programme of renovation with involvement of the community" (former text on Granby 4 Streets CLT website, accessed 18/10/15).

The Leader One deal eventually collapsed in late 2012 due to unreasonable demands for the council to underwrite any losses. Suddenly there were no more easy answers. None of the housing associations wanted to take the risk for all four streets so the new CLT "seized the moment and sent a discussion document to LCC looking for a more creative mix of development rather than one-size-fits-all" [140509 Eleanor]. The brilliant idea that the CLT proposed was to abandon the comprehensive renewal approach in favour of a reclaiming of 'piecemeal'. I explore this simple but radical idea of 'organic phased development' in Chapters 8 and 9.

> "For years, community representatives were attending meetings with the council and there was always a plan. The plan never happened but there was always a plan. Whether that was for demolition or refurbishment, it came and went. But none of those plans happened over a 30 year period. It was only when the crash happened and the last big plan collapsed there was an opportunity because there wasn't this regeneration machine that told you the way things should be done. There was an opportunity to sneak in, fast, with a plan 'cause nobody else had one" [151126 Erika].

> "Perhaps in the past, the role of the council has been characterised – perhaps unfairly, but there is probably a grain of truth in this – as coming along to these communities and saying, that's the plan for your area. And possibly there has not been a lot of discussion with the residents. Up to a point maybe the residents get a say in what happens, but we've come along with a proactive plan. I think what's different perhaps now, that's happening in Granby is we very much talk to the partners at that planning stage as well, so they are sort of very much on the forefront in setting the future direction for that community" [160531 LCC officer to Martina Gross].

A series of meetings followed to discuss the possibility of the CLT owning and renovating some of the properties. Plus Dane and Liverpool Mutual Homes were encouraged back to the table “as it began to look as though it would be possible to refurbish the houses if there were three or more interested parties who could share the financial risk of expensive renovations” (former text on Granby 4 Streets CLT website, accessed 18/10/15). In the spirit of the ‘piecemeal’ approach, these plans also involved a local eco-housing group Northern Alliance Housing Cooperative who planned “to ecologically retrofit five houses as Terrace 21 – ‘terraced housing for the 21st century’” (Thompson 2015: 1022).

Thompson (2020) is right to emphasise the importance of other players and ‘outward-facing collaboration’ and this was epitomised by the striking promise in the 2013 film: “we’ll talk to lots of people”. There is a strange limbo time for many community initiatives where they are alert, keeping an eye out, but the opportunity or contact has not yet arisen that will make it possible to progress. With hindsight it is easy to see these critical moments although impossible to know what might have happened in an ‘otherwise’ version of the story. For Granby one key contact set them on a particular version of the journey. Xanthe Hamilton came to Granby, initially through Jonathan Brown of SAVE, and she brought both John Davey and Assemble to the area.

Some members of Assemble had been working on a project in nearby Lodge Lane. Anthony used to play in a band with Lewis and “the singer, Molly, her friend Xanthe was interested in doing a project in Liverpool. Molly and Xanthe used to work together on a film festival in Jersey and she’d met a social investor [John Davey] and Xanthe was kind of leading him around, courting him” [160628 Assemble]. A self-made man, one of 5 kids of a single mother, top of his class, made money in finance, sold his firm, workaholic, no children, nothing to spend his money on, happy to have a dabble”, Davey became known as ‘the secret millionaire’, perhaps more because of the fantastical quality of his arrival and the Granby women’s desire to keep him to themselves than his own reticence. "At one swoop it changed our fortunes" [151109 Eleanor].

Xanthe asked Assemble to get involved and “it was weird that we were in the area anyway” [Assemble 160628]. Initially the idea was to do Ducie Street first – they were

the grandest houses and in the worst condition “so if you can make that stack up economically the rest should be easier”. But then they worked on a document specifically for the CLT – taking their ideas and “putting that into a document that looked pretty, that could be presented to the council with this social investor saying ‘there’s money, this is a real thing, this is something you should take seriously’. A lot of the initial ideas were more intuitive and needed to be put in a format the council understood” [160628 Assemble].

After the Leader One deal failed in 2012 “the crucial time was two or three years of just quiet conversation at the end of street markets with Ann O’Byrne and Eleanor connecting” [151126 Ronnie]. Eventually the CLT vision became “the only viable option left on the table” (Thompson 2015: 1037). With funds from Steinbeck and the ‘pretty document’ by Assemble, suddenly the possibilities of community-led approach began to cut through and by November 2014 the transfer of an initial 10 houses was agreed. “It’s a tipping point,” said Ann O’Byrne, Liverpool’s cabinet member for housing. “The council has abandoned these people for the last 30 years and left them to fester. But now we’ve gifted the homes to the CLT and they’re showing that this will be the place to live, right on the edge of the city centre” (Wainwright 2014).

9. Ten Houses, Four Corners and a Workshop

At last, the CLT had the promise of some buildings, a loan to get started and use as leverage, an architect and a project-managing QS. Assemble’s design for the houses valorised the structural shapes, used simple, low cost materials and included “a number of playful, handmade architectural elements that help re-establish the character of the homes following their long neglect” (Granby Workshop 2015: 12).

Now that the houses are complete and occupied they have become a core part of the story, yet the process was far from straightforward. The first five houses were renovated by a large contractor in a deal brokered by Xanthe that was meant to include training for young people. “The tender was in Nov 14… but by Feb 15 the £54k budget had gone up to to £84k per house. £54k was never a realistic budget. Kind of budget where someone has said to Xanthe ‘stick to the figure’. It's very much a man's

world" [151109 Eleanor]. For Granby 4 Streets CLT this contract became the classic 'horror story' that all development ventures have, the comparator ('let's never do it like that again').

The second five houses were undertaken much more successfully by Penny Lane builders while Assemble's temporary use of 48 Cairns Street gave way to the development of the Granby Workshop in the old newsagents on one of the 'Four Corners'.

> "There's a group of young, Black artists who have gathered around Granby Workshop that are just the best thing. It is the first time I have seen, in this city, a group of young powerful Black artists gather with some sense of confidence, rather than feeling they are on the margins or left out or hard done to. And I just think, yes, power to them. Hopefully they'll take over the CLT and we can all retire" [151126 Erika].

> "Mantelpieces cast using brick and rubble construction waste from the Four Streets, ceramic door handles smoke-fired in sawdust filled barabeques… All products are manufactured using processes which embrace chance, so that each is unique, developing in the hands of the people making it" (Granby Workshop 2015: 3).

Erika felt that Granby Workshop had flourished partly "because it is not the CLT, it is a completely different bunch of people… it's almost got a free-ness and a freshness that's nice and separate. We definitely talk and meet together and they're starting to engage with us and we're starting to engage with them, but we'd have held them up. They just got on with it. We'd have got in the way because we were bogged down in our first five houses and the detail of delivery" [151126 Erika]. Such separations in order to protect the entrepreneurial spirit also feature in the White Rock case study.

10. The Street that won the Turner Prize

The winning of the Turner Prize in December 2015 by Assemble for their work in and with Granby was a moment of triumph. Such awards can act as instrumentally as grant or loan funding to progress self-renovating neighbourhoods but, as demonstrated by the failure of Hastings Pier Charity to capitalise on their Stirling Prize win just two years later, it takes a strong base and good fortune to make the best of such opportunities. Granby was in just that position.

Unusually, I would like to give the floor to a council officer to explain:

> "What are the factors behind the success? I think a lot of that is down to the core of people, who lived, continually lived in the area, when properties were being abandoned, boarded up by the council, lying empty for many years, but they clearly saw something there. And you know, they took matters to their own hands by the gardening projects, starting up the market and I think slowly but surely people started to listen to them. And I think to be fair to the council and particularly Ann O'Byrne, when she was the lead on housing policy in this city, she was very receptive to them and a real sort of desire to work with that community.
>
> I think what the housing associations have brought is a degree of scale to the refurbishment, you know it is taken a long time to do the 10 CLT properties and they are not quite finished yet and it's more sort of a hand-to mouth existence where I suppose with the housing associations they've been able to come in and develop quite big programs, which I think have been part of the transformation of the neighbourhood, so I think it is a combination of things coming together. It's obviously an expression of perfect storm that for once things seemed to complement each other. And I think there is a lot of things which seemingly happen in isolation but they have a knack of coming together and working well" [160531 LCC officer to Martina Gross].

11. The Winter Garden

There is something particularly moving about the drive to inject genuine quality into ordinary working class places. Assemble's Turner Prize included fireplaces, light-pulls and vents beautifully made from fired demolition waste and Granby Workshop now sells tiles and crockery from Granby all over the world. The Winter Garden, opened in March 2019, is the epitome of that commitment to build beauty into the lives and surroundings of poor people.

> "I get massive delight out of the winter garden. Nobody expects a poor community to have such a little gem in the middle of it. I get enormous pleasure that they're making really beautiful stuff at the bottom of the street, and it goes all over the world" [Eleanor 181212].

The Winter Garden reopened after Covid lockdowns on 3rd July 2021,"40 years to the day after the Liverpool 8 Uprising" (Hughes, A Sense of Place, 3/7/2021). "Something happens there every day but it's not making its living yet because we do a lot for nothing for local groups" [220218 Hazel].

It is hard to write these histories. By placing these paragraphs one after another I am creating a linearity that did not exist. For example, in the 2015 Granby Workshop catalogue that Assemble prepared for the Turner Prize, the Four Corners is already a key part of the story. And it reminds me that the same is true of White Rock. These are all parallel threads and the storytelling is complicated. Somehow Hazel always manages to bring it down to earth:

> "The stupid questions that I'm asked: 'How do you feel now that people are moving in?' Well I've waited for it for 25 fucking years, I'm bloody delighted. I love it! I've got neighbours… each side. It makes a hell of a difference to your heating bill. [Before] you could lie in bed and you could hear a piece of wood fall next door. You could hear the water dripping" [151126 Hazel].

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN WHITE ROCK

2006-21

Prepared by Jericho Road Solutions, July 2019
(updated July 2020)

Overview

This report highlights the variety of the community engagement activity undertaken over the past 13 years in the White Rock area.

The story is told in 5 phases which built on each other and were often intertwined.
PHASE 1: HASTINGS PIER
PHASE 2: WHITE ROCK TRUST
PHASE 3: PURCHASE OF ROCK HOUSE
PHASE 4: ROCK HOUSE OPEN
PHASE 5: THE ECOSYSTEM EMERGES

The story is not over yet…

The White Rock Neighbourhood

PHASE 1 – Hastings Pier

In 2006 Hastings Pier was closed for safety reasons due to lack of investment by the private owner Ravenclaw (based in Panama). The Hastings community mobilised to take action.

November 2006

Public meeting about the closure of Hastings Pier. 200+ attendees

Friends of Hastings Pier established as an unincorporated association to keep the pier in the public eye.

> *>> Sustained local outreach through weekly market stall on the pier, table in Priory Meadow shopping centre, coffee mornings, bar quizzes, etc*

January 2008

Hastings Pier & White Rock Trust (HPWRT) established

> *>>Monthly open committee meetings, quarterly coffee mornings for volunteers, well-attended annual general meetings, full use of twitter & facebook*

May 2009

Hastings Pier & White Rock Trust took on Arthur Green's (historic shop on seafront) as the Pier Shop and the central hub for community engagement

August - December 2009

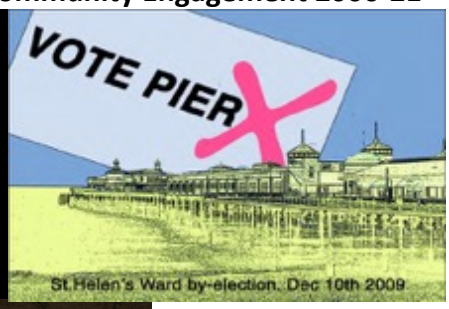
Pier Campaign for Compulsory Purchase

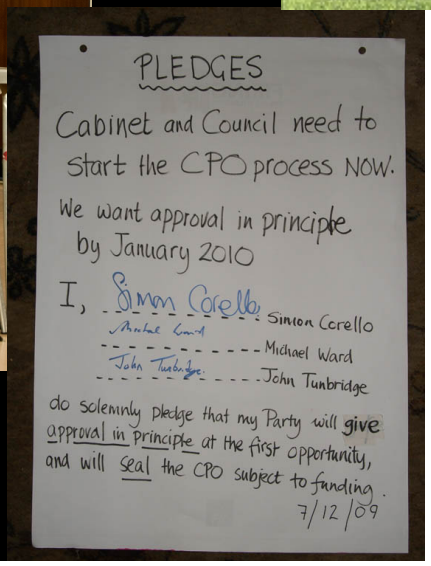
>>March from pier to town hall (2000+ people), survey of what people love about Hastings and what makes them sad/frustrated about the town, door-knocking in St Helen's Ward, public hustings for by-election candidates. Resulted in 'active partnership with Hastings Borough Council from Jan 2010.

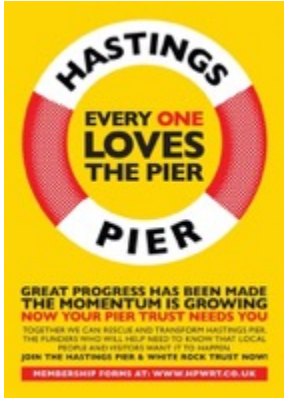
"Listening to Hastings"

People love: the character of the built environment, the quirkiness of the people, the unusual festivals and vibrant arts scene, the old town, the seafront, the fishing fleet and, of course, the pier.

"The wonderful mix of beautiful built and natural environments, the character of the town, the slight anarchy of its people (Jack in the Green, Bonfire Night)." "It is unique, down to earth, creative, fun. It is steeped in history. It has lots of unexpected corners." "Diversity of people - not just old people, sea and beach, music scene, arts, independent shops and restaurants, fishing beach and fish shops." "The beach, the Fishing Huts, George Street, grand events such as Hastings Week, Seafood Festival, Bonfire etc, affordable housing." "Great Old Town; town centre located right by the sea. Having lived here for 6 years, seeing signs at last - albeit at snail's pace - of visual improvements. Festival weeks." "Its quirkiness, artistic vibrancy & sense of history." "The town is studded with artists and musicians and gems that shine out in their individuality, and the town lets them get on with it, with as little prejudice as you could get anywhere really." "It also has St Leonards! Diversity - culture - shoreline - architecture - community - people - surrounded by beautiful countryside - quirky individual shops, great fish." "Mainly the natural things, the landscape, the park,







March 2010

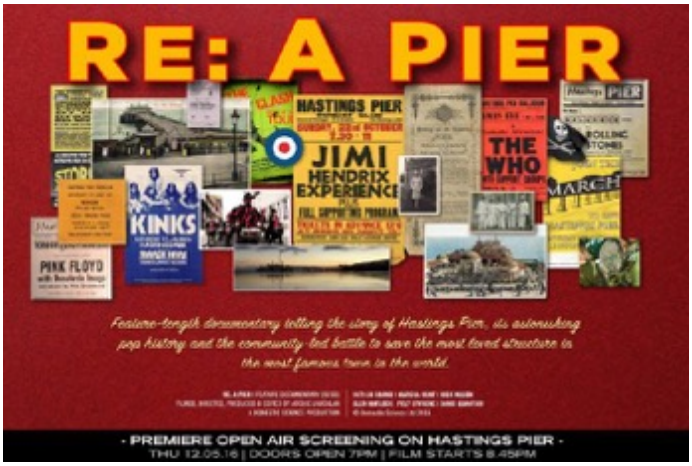
Draft strategy for White Rock and America Ground

>>A snapshot of the current situation and a 10-year vision for the neighbourhood. Produced by the White Rock & America Ground business group through a consultative process

June 2010 onwards

Towards ownership and funding

>>Fortnightly meetings with Hastings Borough Council Deputy Leader and senior officers to progress the compulsory purchase, fundraising of all kinds including frequent grassroots stalls and events, ongoing engagement, making a 'one-year' documentary, Re: A Pier, with Archie Laughlan (eventually completed in 2016!)



October 2010

Pier fire

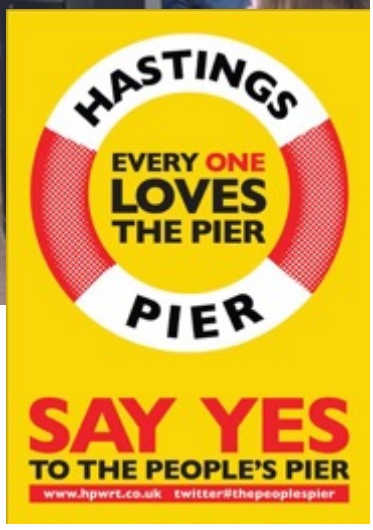
>>Walking the prom reassuring people that we would go ahead with the pier rescue. Rewrote the Heritage Lottery Fund bid in 7 weeks

March 2011

Heritage Lottery Fund bid consultation events

>>Including very successful Party on the Prom (1,500 participants).

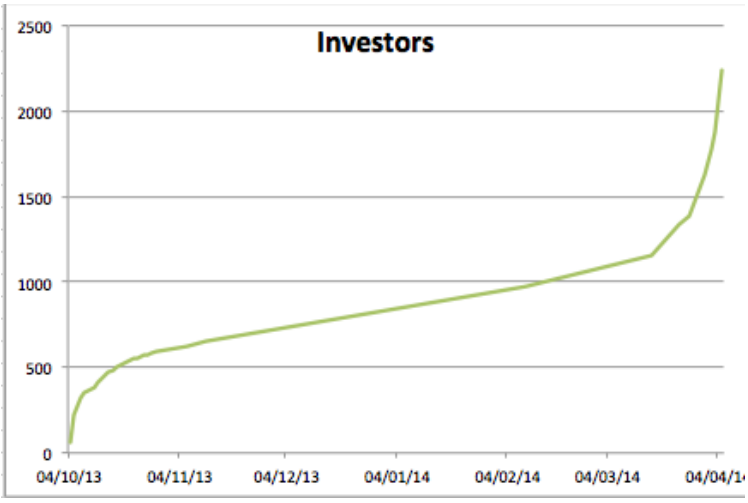
Heritage Lottery Fund assessment visit involved announcements on Network South East and in Priory Meadow ("Hastings welcomes the Heritage Lottery Fund"), with volunteers and posters all along the route.

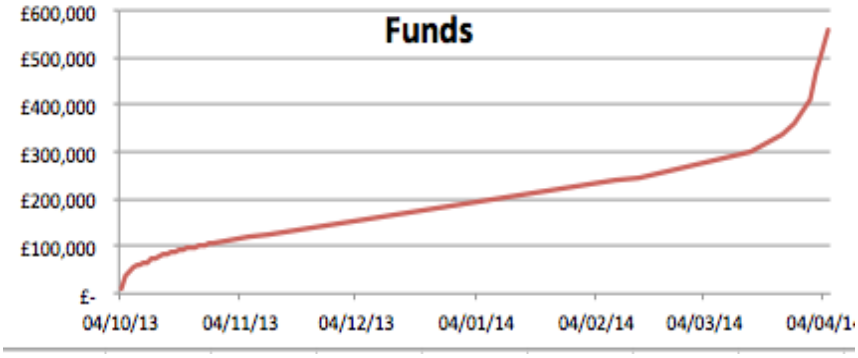


October 2013

Hastings Pier Share Offer

>>the first charity to convert to a community benefit society, achieved a total of 5,000 shareholders, >50% of whom were local to Hastings





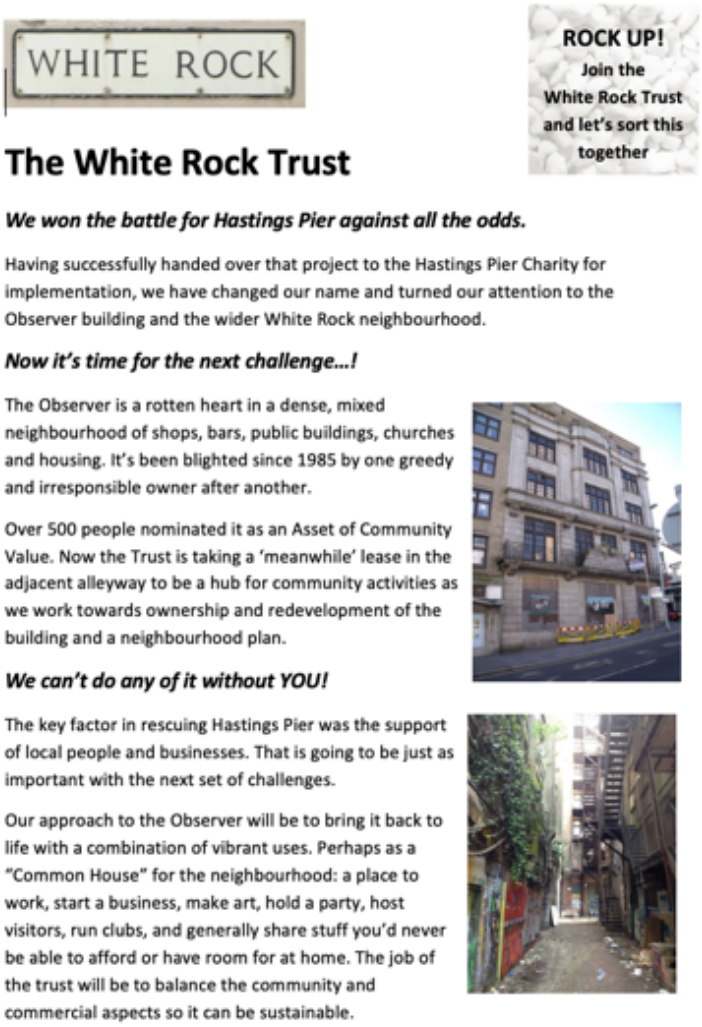
PHASE 2 – White Rock Trust

With the pier now in community ownership, energy was focused on the wider White Rock neighbourhood. White Rock Trust became sister organisation to Hastings Pier Charity, now custodians of the pier, and set about engaging with as wide a group of locals as possible to create a shared vision for the area.

Summer 2013

Hastings Pier & White Rock Trust renamed White Rock Trust (as Hastings Pier Charity took over implementation of the pier project)

>>White Rock Trust membership drive – leaflet drop to all houses, followed by door-knocking, explaining that the new focus would be the White Rock neighbourhood and particularly the Observer Building. While time-consuming this double delivery was very effective.



WHITE ROCK

ROCK UP!
Join the White Rock Trust and let's sort this together

The White Rock Trust

We won the battle for Hastings Pier against all the odds.

Having successfully handed over that project to the Hastings Pier Charity for implementation, we have changed our name and turned our attention to the Observer building and the wider White Rock neighbourhood.

Now it's time for the next challenge...!

The Observer is a rotten heart in a dense, mixed neighbourhood of shops, bars, public buildings, churches and housing. It's been blighted since 1985 by one greedy and irresponsible owner after another.

Over 500 people nominated it as an Asset of Community Value. Now the Trust is taking a 'meanwhile' lease in the adjacent alleyway to be a hub for community activities as we work towards ownership and redevelopment of the building and a neighbourhood plan.

We can't do any of it without YOU!

The key factor in rescuing Hastings Pier was the support of local people and businesses. That is going to be just as important with the next set of challenges.

Our approach to the Observer will be to bring it back to life with a combination of vibrant uses. Perhaps as a "Common House" for the neighbourhood: a place to work, start a business, make art, hold a party, host visitors, run clubs, and generally share stuff you'd never be able to afford or have room for at home. The job of the trust will be to balance the community and commercial aspects so it can be sustainable.

Community Organiser's report

>>In line with the community organising approach seeking to cultivate relationships, all residents and businesses who engaged were encouraged to give their views on the initiative and their thoughts on their community and as much time was spent with stakeholders as necessary, in order to avoid a "data mugging" approach. Comments received indicate almost unanimous enthusiasm regarding bringing the Observer Building back to life. Everyone spoken to was very excited and invigorated by the Pier development and people very keen to receive info regarding the new White Rock neighbourhood news. Very little, if any, negativity was reported regarding the area. Most residents felt strongly that it is an extremely diverse and unique area and thoroughly enjoyed living there. However, many residents agreed that there were some challenging areas within the neighbourhood that needed attention.

Meanwhile lease on Ground Floor of 5/6 Trinity as a community space

>>A good space for meetings and project work, and a base for the Community Organisers

>>Monthly White Rock Trust meetings attended by between 8 and 30 people. 8 trustees, 3 trustees in induction, 4 lead volunteers, 2 lead volunteers in induction, 2 community organisers, plus 30 volunteers.

Meanwhile lease on basement of Rothermere House (now Rock House) as a community space

>>White Rock Trust, Jericho Road and Meanwhile Space were all fascinated by the Alley and the Observer Building and found the shutters intriguing. Meanwhile Space led the process to achieve a meanwhile lease with lease-holders Diageo/Grand Metropolitan.

July 2013

Buffet lunch in 'the basement space' (i.e. Rothermere House)

WHITE ROCK

The White Rock Trust
invites you to an informal buffet lunch
in the new basement hub

Wed 26th July 2013

Now it's time for the next challenge…!

Hastings Pier & White Rock Trust was the 'midwife' that saved Hastings Pier.

Having successfully handed that project to the Hastings Pier Charity for implementation, we have changed our name and turned our attention to the Observer building and the wider White Rock neighbourhood.

The Observer is the key building in a dense, mixed neighbourhood of shops, bars, public buildings, churches and housing. Yet it is a rotten heart, blighted since 1985 by speculative private ownership deals.

Over 500 people nominated it as an Asset of Community Value. Now the Trust has taken a meanwhile lease in the adjacent alleyway as a hub for community activities as we work towards ownership and redevelopment of the building and a neighbourhood plan.

We can't do any of it without YOU!

August 2013

Meeting with Hastings Borough Council to discuss neighbourhood planning

Viewing of Observer Building with Hastings Trust, Hugh Rolo of Locality and Chris Brown of igloo

September 2013

White Rock Trust completed the balanced scorecard

WHITE ROCK TRUST

WHAT DO WE DO? WHAT ARE WE ABOUT? (ACTIVITY/PURPOSE)

LATER – 2020

Ensure the long-term future of the Observer
Restoration/construction phase
Building ownership and overall management

Improve area

Self-renovating

Best practice, innovative solutions

People's Assembly – direct ownership and control of resources

SOON – 2015/16

Lobbying for quality of neighbourhood, inc 1st class well-used public spaces
Exciting neighbourhood plan for WR area agreed
Research & evaluation unit for HBC
Acquire and refurbish Observer

V SOON – April 2014

Grassroots communicator
Drop-in space & events (Rothermere/Trinity)
Deliberative dialogue on the art of the possible
Begin neighbourhood plan

NOW – Sep 2013

Information & community engagement
Raising awareness of possibility (website)
Identifying need and issues, stimulating action
Begin to build a 'planning army'
Challenge the way people think

Sustainably self-funding, with money rotating locally

Operational and commercial excellence with partner

V SOON – April 2014

Research and build good relationships with funders
Further applications – HLF
HES and small grants

Getting established, seed funding
SIB pre-feasibility £10k
Neighbourhood planning £2.6k (+£4.4k available)

NOW – Sep 2013

Observer - £500k to purchase, £5m to refurbish
Secure end uses that generate income
JV with private sector opportunities

SOON – 2015/16

Eg. International festival of horror – televised from Observer, WRT get royalties

LATER - 2020

WHAT HAVE WE GOT? (ORGANISATIONAL RESOURCES)

LATER – 2020

Lean, successful, focused development organisation offering policy, strategy, training, best practice

SOON – 2015/16

Company limited by guarantee
Project delivery through shared networks and resources
5,000 members, organised community
Philanthropic patron
[STAFFING?]

Trading company

Shared delivery teams (eg with HBC, HVA, HPC, etc)

NOW – Sep 2013

Company limited by guarantee with track record
Passionate group with experience, taking practical action
Community Organiser (trained and networked)
141 members (102 in WR area)
Partnership with Amicus-Horizons
Info portal at Priory Meadow (100k pw)
Website, twitter, FB – all new
Good will, hope and interest. Good relationships

V SOON – April 2014

Cohort of volunteers
Informed working team
Support from stakeholders, inc Observer Newspaper
Link to town centre mgmt.
1,000 members of WRT
2 directors from WR area

Giving hope to local people who want change

Observer safety works started
Immediate neighbours better informed
Begun to challenge negativity

NOW – Sep 2013

V SOON – April 2014

Build cohesion, pride & power. Reduce negativity.
HBC profile for election [?!]

Saving the Observer Building – social/economic/ cultural/environment benefits

Bringing the area back from the brink of decay

Sense of pride in place – change the description of Hastings

Increased footfall and value in local area
Job creation – directly through Observer and indirectly through improving area
SMEs and entrepreneurs – economic growth
Active and useful community hub
Helping other projects to raise resources
Making the area more attractive
Danger of property speculation

SOON – 2015/16

Studio and office spaces for creative industries
Training and employment opportunities
Validated knowledge about communities and neighbourhoods
Virtuous circle: active citizens –> adult ed –> employment -> health

Increased footfall/critical mass
Increased/improved housing

LATER - 2020

HOW WILL IT STACK UP? (FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS)

WHO BENEFITS AND HOW? (SOCIAL IMPACTS)

October 2013

Neighbourhood Planning meeting

>>Brought together White Rock Trust, Castle Ward Forum and White Rock & America Ground business group. Jess Steele who informed attendees about the merits of a local neighbourhood plan and proposed the concept of White Rock as a "self-renovating neighbourhood" with the Observer Building and the Alley at its heart. Presentations were also given HBC planner Stephanie Roots and Locality consultants Clare Wright and Mary-Ann Nossent.

December 2013
White Rock Trust 'Picture the Neighbourhood' event


THE WHITE ROCK TRUST
PICTURE THE NEIGHBOURHOOD

Once Hastings Pier reopens in 2015 it is expected to welcome 325,000 visitors each year

How will the White Rock area benefit? Can it cope?
It's time for some collective planning!

11:00-14:00
Saturday 7th December
@ The White Rock Trust
5 Trinity Street
Hastings TN34 1HG

Drop in and see our new White Rock spaces
Rothermere House - Basement
5 Trinity Street - Shop

Come and find out about the White Rock Trust & our approach to neighbourhood planning.
Take some time out from Christmas shopping to enjoy some mince pies, mulled wine or hot fruit punch!
Help us picture the neighbourhood using photos, crafts, graffiti and your ideas

February - May 2014
Series of three intensive neighbourhood workshops

>>Saturday, weekday daytime, weekday evening. Rewarded participants by buying Hastings Pier shares on behalf of 'People of the White Rock'. Included an example of a Community Organising listening

April 2014
Neighbourhood plan boundary setting

>>A good, mixed neighbourhood, topographically and historically defined, with distinctive different parts that complement each other. Occupies the space between Hastings and St Leonards ('the rock between two great places').

May 2014
Social Salon organised by Jericho Road at the Printworks

>>30 people attended for 'enlightening conversation in mixed company' including arts, food, storytelling, talking games and listening.

May 2014
White Rock Trust AGM

"This is a **great neighbourhood** – complementary areas from the dense, independent area of Trinity Triangle to the wide open spaces of Falaise Triangle, full of assets – bottle alley, WRT baths, the Convent, palace court, churches, great cafes, the WR hotel, the theatre, the station, the college, the uni, and of course in pride of place the pier."

>>Focusing on neighbourhood planning and Our Place (aka community budgeting)
For Our Place we were "thinking of either housing or economic development as the aspects to look at. Or it might be something as specific (and innovative) as focusing on 'flow' – how to get the best approach to moving people around the area, recognising that this is a particular challenge because of the level changes and one-way systems."

PHASE 3 – Purchase of Rothermere House (now Rock House)

While White Rock Trust sustained community engagement and neighbourhood planning from their hubs in Trinity Street and the basement of Rothermere House, Meanwhile Space were approached by the owner of the building and told it was for sale. Determined to seize the opportunity, a partnership came together between Jericho Road Solutions and Meanwhile Space to buy the building and turn it into a test space for the DIY regeneration they had been conceptualising. White Rock Trust continued work with local people to build a shared vision for the neighbourhood.

July 2014

Purchase of Rothermere House

>>By Meanwhile Space CIC and Jericho Road Solutions, granting 10% of the shares in the new company White Rock Neighbourhood Ventures to White Rock Trust.

October 2014

Vacant possession of Rothermere House

>>Renamed Rock House

Nov 2014

White Rock Data Review

>>Led by Liz Richardson, a specialist in 'citizen science', a group of core volunteers gathered to assess the enormous amount of data White Rock Trust had gathered through the neighbourhood workshops, Seafront Strategy event, Walkabouts and doorstep listenings. Liz helped us to work out categories (codes) from the material.

LOVES

1. *Community*
2. *culture and creativity*
    - *a) events*
    - *b) venues*
3. *heritage and history and built environment architecture etc*
4. *landscape, outdoor space, natural environment including sea/beach*
5. *local economy, shops etc*
6. *location of White Rock (ease of access)*
7. *potential*

CONCERNS

1. *Drugs and drink*
2. *personal safety*
3. *economic decline (linked to footfall)*
4. *dog mess, cleaning*
5. *dilapidation*
6. *lack of facilities*
7. *transport*
8. *incomes*
9. *inertia, short-term planning, leadership of change*

VISIONS

1. *cleaner town*
2. *more jobs, more support for businesses*
3. *better transport/pedestrians/flow/parking*
4. *Events and infrastructure for events, more to do*
5. *Council and other players (university)*
6. *public realm, flow, sense of place, signage, vibrant town*
7. *architecture, built environment, renovation, restore eyesores*
8. *tourism including marketing*
9. *safer place*

Five volunteers then took on coding the material (which took a long time) which was then collated into a massive spreadsheet and in October 2015 we produced a summary of Visions for White Rock. The content of this vision can be summarised as:

PUBLIC REALM, SENSE OF PLACE, FLOW, SIGNAGE, VIBRANCY
Community spirit and an identity for the town that locals can feel proud of. Better circulation between key assets, good directions and flow of movement

CLEANER
A cleaner, tidier area that local people take pride in. Regular beach cleans and litter picks and maintenance of the public realm, perhaps by use of a scheme that includes the unemployed.

ARCHITECTURE, BUILT ENVIRONMENT, RENOVATION
Get the Pier up and running! Regeneration of our key historic buildings, more grot-busting – make landlords accountable, and less offices.

TOURISM AND MARKETING
Make use of our rich history, better marketing and advertising for the town and more attractions for visitors.

JOB OPPORTUNITIES & SUPPORT FOR BUSINESS
Better shops, restaurants/cafes and bars. Support for small independent businesses including cheap rates and rents. Higher wages, more jobs and less empty premises.

BETTER TRANSPORT/PARKING/PEDESTRIANS/FLOW
More and cheaper/free parking, less traffic, pedestrianised areas. Better public transport and cycle ways and a better design of the town centre for easier flow of movement.

EVENTS AND INFRASTRUCTURE FOR EVENTS – MORE TO DO
Priority was more things for young people to do but also events and places accessible to all and at all times of day. Easy access to info about what's on.

COUNCIL AND OTHER PLAYERS
A younger more dynamic council who listen to the community and form partnerships with community groups and local businesses. More support and funding for local projects.

SAFER PLACE
Sort out street drinking and drug problems, assistance for drink and drug users and prevention measures for young people, more policing.

February 2015
White Rock model created by John Knowles

May 2015
Series of walkabouts
>>White Rock Gardens, Station to Pier, etc

Summer 2015

>>Informal lease agreement with Hastings Borough Council to take the disused tennis courts in White Rock Gardens as a community space. Activities for children and families throughout the summer.

June - September 2015

Jericho Road Solutions produced a community engagement report for Flint, the new developer for the Observer Building who planned to build 4 floors on top to create a mixed-use space with student halls, residential flats and leisure activities.

Jericho Road set out to engage both widely and deeply in the local neighbourhood, so that the views of local residents, businesses and visitors could be heard and influence the development of the planning application for the building.

The work balanced one-to-one meetings with local neighbours and interest groups with a series of open events and opportunities for the wider community and public to get involved and have their say. These included tours of the building, pop-up drop-ins in four locations, a coffee morning with 18 older residents of the flats opposite, two Neighbours Meetings and a public open forum attended by over 120 people. Throughout Jericho Road gathered opinions in a survey format – face-to-face, on paper and online. These were all added to a SurveyMonkey and the 257 responses analysed for recurring patterns. The team also gathered 'quick comments' from passers-by at events who couldn't stop to talk, and gathered over 500 contact details on their database.

The report made a set of recommendations for the developer covering design, uses, management agreements and harm reduction. Many were addressed or agreed for consideration by Flint during the development process.

October 2015

White Rock Trust awarded £10k by DCLG to be the Coastal Community Team for the White Rock area

> >>The role was to undertake the community outreach for the emerging White Rock Action Plan. WRT was to ensure that local residents and small businesses knew about the Action Plan process, understand how to feed in, and contribute their views, ideas and proposals throughout the process. A draft of the White Rock Action Plan was expected by end Jan 2016.

April-July 2015

Open meetings to explore the impact of gentrification

White Rock Trust held six open meetings at White Rock Hotel asking:

- Is gentrification happening?
- If it is, is it a problem?
- If it's a problem, is there anything we can do about it?

By now they were asking the question: is community freehold an alternative to gentrification displacement? Can it protect affordability and diversity in a neighbourhood?

White Rock Trust began to incubate a new community land trust to tackle the housing and gentrification issues that were being increasingly identified. Initially this was known as America Ground CLT but it became Heart of Hastings CLT. We used CED, COMA and Our Place grants to support the development of the CLT, including a theory of change, a Community Economic Development Plan, business plan, financial modelling, consultation with beneficiaries and investors, a website and FAQs

July 2015

Inspired by the success of the Organisation Workshop approach in Marsh Farm, Luton, Jericho Road Solutions brought Ivan Labra and Marsh Farm Outreach to Hastings to explore the potential for an Organisation Workshop in Hastings. This involved meetings with many stakeholders including Hastings Borough Council councillors and officers.

October 2015

America Ground Pow Wow 1

>>A pizza lunch at a local Italian restaurant with 20 local businesses and residents sharing:

- What we value and want to keep
- What we dislike and want to lose
- Threats and opportunities
- Questions and reflections

The America Ground Pow Wow!

Hastings is changing in lots of positive ways but the long term affordability and diversity of the area could be threatened by rapidly rising rents. See the blog below for some thoughts on this.

The America Ground Community Land Trust is being set up, with support from White Rock Trust, to protect a proportion of decent, affordable housing and workspace in perpetuity.

What do you think?

Come and talk about these issues and hear about the work of the community land trust at the first America Ground Quarterly Pow Wow!

Rustico, Robertson Street

12.30-2.30pm, Tuesday 6th October 2015

Free pizza as long as you RSVP!
(search 'America Ground' on Eventbrite)

November 2015

>>Took on two students from University of Brighton Social Change degree course. Aiming to create a baseline, understand the trajectory, plan interventions, monitor impact, make comparisons and draw out the lessons.

>> Jamie Lawson, University of Manchester politics student undertook a survey of the various affordability mechanisms used by CLTs in the US and the UK.

>>White Rock Trust aimed to recruit "a cohort/sample of local residents who would be willing to keep in touch whether they stay or move" but this did not happen.

The America Ground Community Land Trust continued to draw expertise from outside, including:

- Financial modelling – Matt Smith, Key Fund
- Theory of Change – Rachel Laurence, nef
- Community led housing and advice on legal structure – Anthony Collins Solicitors
- Dave Boyle – Relationship Manager for CED
- Phil Tulba – Relationship Manager for COMA
- Marylynn Fyvie-Gauld, University of Brighton
- Jo Gooding – UK Cohousing Network
- Jon Fitzmaurice – Self Help Housing

PHASE 4 – Rock House open

The transformation of Rock House had begun with the first workspace tenants moving in in March 2015, selected based on their need for affordable space, local connection, enthusiasm for the ethos of the building and willingness to contribute to its evolution. They became part of the development team and worked alongside White Rock Neighbourhood Ventures to test this new approach to DIY regeneration.

March 2016
Rock House launch party

September- November 2016

Community events in the project space

>>included monthly meetings for Transition Town Hastings, a cartoon workshop, storytelling festival filming, citizen journalism and forest garden workshops, food packaging campaign meeting.

Community events in the basement

>>Included a storytelling for start-ups workshop and talks and seminars relating to the HiFest illustration festival.

December 2016

Rock House Christmas Party

May 2016

America Ground Pow Wow 2

>>An evening pizza event focusing on the potential for a Collective Investors club. 20 participants.

America Ground Pow Wow #2

Heart of Hastings Community Land Trust invites you to a special event to discuss the potential for collective investment in local property for the benefit of the local community.

If you'd like to find out more about our Collective Investors Club please come along, meet the team and share some pizza.

6-8pm Tuesday 17th May 2016
downstairs at Rustico in Robertson Street

THE NEIGHBOURHOOD AND YOU...

The White Rock neighbourhood is over 60% private rented. The area has lots of great properties but it is changing rapidly and rising rents threaten to displace local tenants.

Community Land Trusts are all about people working together to make sure there are affordable places to live and work forever.

The Heart of Hastings Community Land Trust aims to buy property, renovate it and cap the rents to make it affordable in perpetuity. The team (currently Jess Steele, Rodney Buse, Suzy Tinker, Tania Charman & Maria Ludkin) are community-driven with relevant expertise and positive track records.

Now the neighbourhood needs you...!

You don't want the hassle of being a landlord but you know that historically property has been a good bet. You have some funds - not enough to buy a property but you'd like to invest it somewhere it can bring you an income.

With the Heart of Hastings Collective Investors Club you can invest between £5,000 and £50,000 and earn interest of 4% per year, while knowing you're doing good.

We are aiming to raise £400,000 from private investors to collectively buy a property together, renovate it and rent it at a 'Living Rent'.

From soulless capital to socially conscious, let's make our money work together for a good community and a reasaonble return.

Affordable spaces, diverse communities, fabulous neighbourhoods through socially driven investment and long term co-ownership.
www.heartofhastings.org.uk

Nov 2016

Flick Chat event at Rock House

>>27 participants

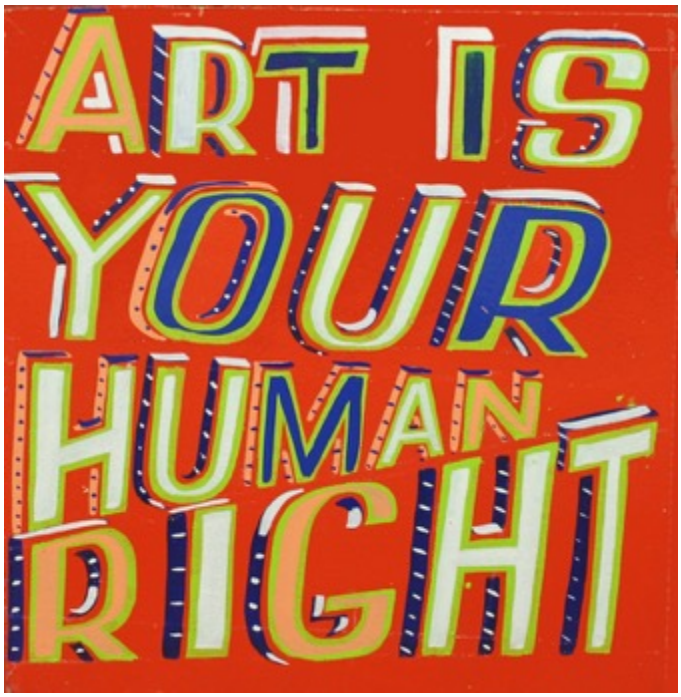
FlickChat @ Rock House
Tuesday 29th Nov 7.30pm

An evening of short and interesting presentations that aim to inform, inspire and perhaps call to action! We will hear from some of our very own tenants and other members of the community doing interesting things.
Donations on the night to cover the cost of refreshments would be gratefully received.

We'll be hearing from:
Jess Steele - Heart of Hastings CLT (http://heartofhastings.org.uk/)
Erica Smith - Wordsmith Design (http://wordsmithdesign.co.uk/)
Karen Simnett - Transition Town Hastings (www.transitiontownhastings.org.uk)
Mandy Curtis - 18 Hours (http://18hours.org.uk/)
Viki Ashby - i-Rock (https://www.eastsussex1space.co.uk/Services/2839/i-Rock)

And
Sean Roy Parker on 'Systems for Sharing' (http://www.seanroyparker.com/)
Kate Rintoul from Make Food (http://make-food.org/)

Book via:
Our website www.rockhouse.org.uk
Our Facebook Page: Rock House



May 2017

Rock The Vote

>>An Alley event with stalls, food and music with a barnstorm at the Printworks that evening and use of the Rock House Project Space for forward planning

Tenants muses – 2015-17

>> Throughout the development of Rock House, White Rock Neighbourhood Ventures hosted 'tenants muses' – a space for thinking about what the building ought to be and planning as a community how to make that happen collaboratively.

Foyer hang-outs – 2016-19

>> A new Tenant Facilitator, Adam, was added to the team whose job it is to bring Rock House tenants and promote collaboration. This happens through a number of social events including breakfast club, foyer drinks, film nights and kids club.

PHASE 5: The Ecosystem Emerges

Rock House became the test bed for a new model of community-minded regeneration where disused buildings are brought back to life through organic, phased and thrifty development as mixed-use spaces where local people live, work and thrive. Capped rents give tenants the security they need to achieve their potential. Tenants are encouraged to get involved in managing the building, shaping their own experience and place. The community was heartened by the success of Rock House, deciding that more work like this could be done to protect the soul of the White Rock neighbourhood. This sparked a whole ecosystem of community businesses, now collaborating to tackle dereliction from the bottom up in one of the poorest neighbourhoods in the UK.

Summer/Autumn 2017
Setting up the Alley Association

>> Alley clear-ups

>> Membership drive with all freeholders and many business tenants and other users

Visual concepts Rowena O'reilly

November 2017

39 Cambridge Road tour and talk

Heart of Hastings CLT begins to grow an 'Investors Collective' – a group of local people interested in contributing to locally-led neighbourhood improvement through the community land trust. The CLT intend to use their investments to purchase their first property, an old insurance office at 39 Cambridge Road, to create four capped rent flats for locals in need just down the road from Rock House.

Sept 2017

Storylines Festival in the Alley

MSL held a one-day cultural event in the alley, where artists, historians and storytellers created and presented a series of events for a promenading audience – a show and tell of the little known history of the place.

December 2017
Rock House Christmas Party

March 2018
Rock House Into the Black party

September 2018

39 Cambridge Road works visit

>> Investors Collective visit 39 Cambridge Road mid renovation with Jason, Project Manager

Observer Building events

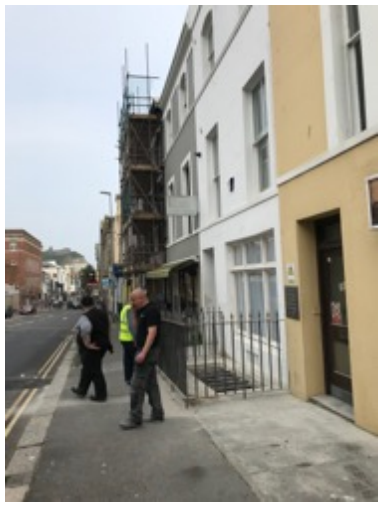
>>Community planning meetings to consider purchase – 24/9/18 and 29/10/18

>> Show Your Love purchase celebration – 14/2/19

>>Neighbours meeting 27/3/19
>>Prospective Tenants meeting 30/5/19

May 2019
39 Cambridge Road completion visit

>> Party on completion of 39 Cambridge Road flats, including sharing a box of artefacts found in the derelict building.



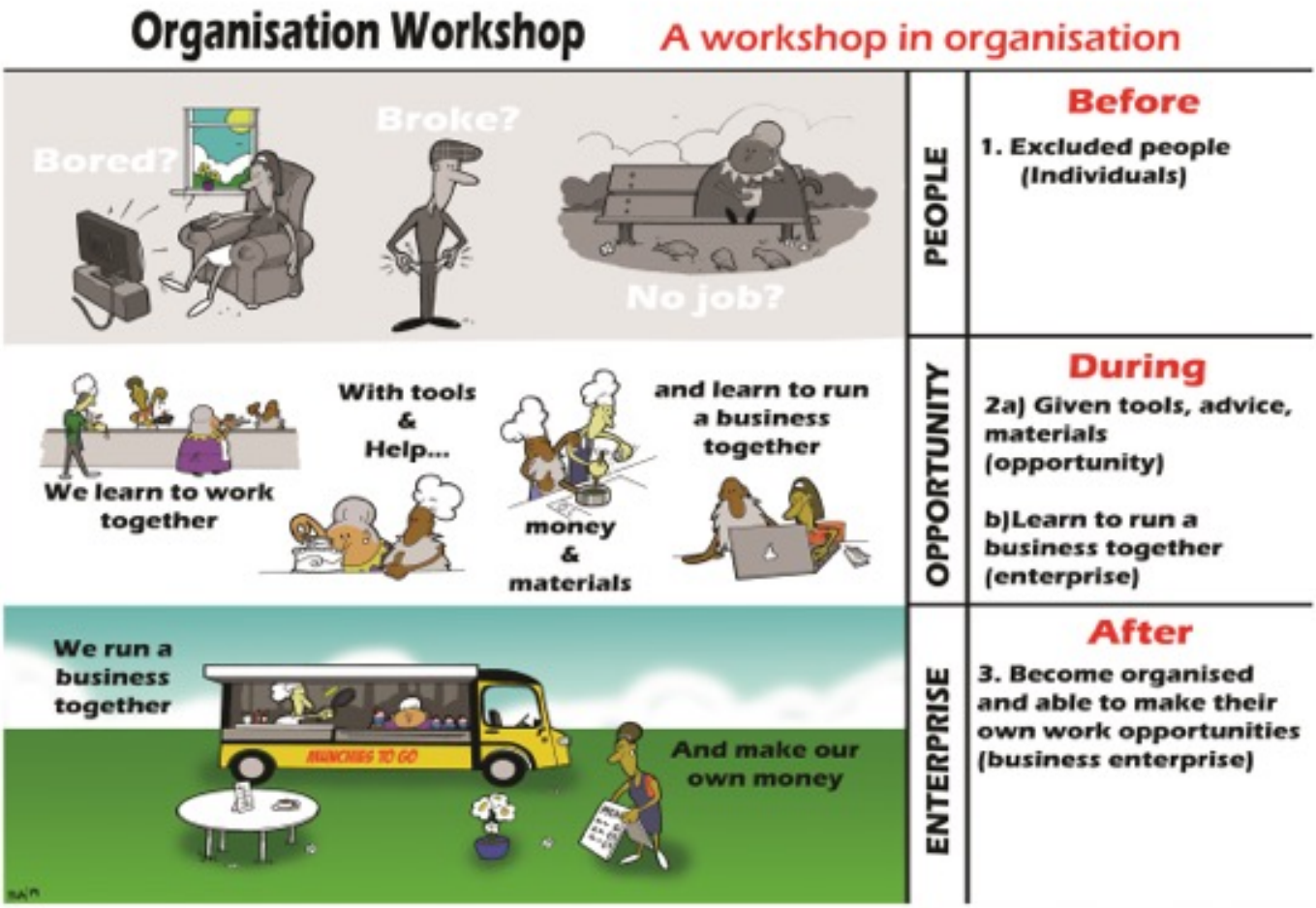
May 2019

Organisation Workshop in the Observer Building

Organisation Workshop (OW) is a radical method of DIY regeneration or "bottom up" development.

In traditional models of regeneration, agencies provide a service to “beneficiaries” based on perceived need. There are amazing projects out there, but traditional regeneration can struggle to provide sustainable solutions that work for communities. Grassroots bottom up development is the opposite of the traditional regeneration model. In an OW, people are not beneficiaries, but active participants.

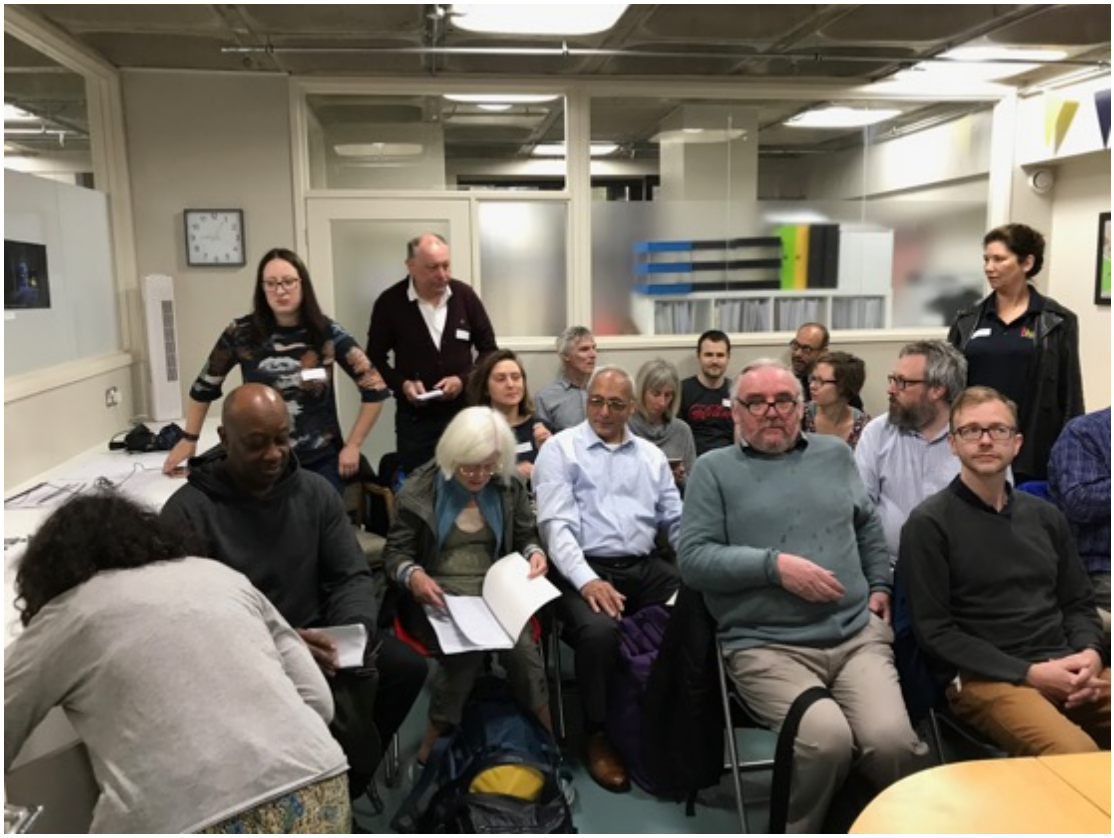
OW is a complex model for a simple idea - that excluded individuals can be the agent of their own development if they have a few tools:



In the Observer Building OW (the second OW to ever take place in the UK) over 30 participants, who were long term unemployed with numerous barriers to work, committed to a full-time month-long workshop. The experience was chaotic, messy, risky and empowering. Traditional power structures were broken down, people learnt the value of working together and have tools to develop where they want to go next. The OW alumni are now setting up their own enterprise – *the OW Pioneers.*


HEAR ORE VALLEY

June 2019
Ecosystem visit by Power to Change board and other investors
Ecosystem tour for practitioner learning journey coordinated by UnLtd



June 2019

Purchase of Rose Cottage completed

>> On right in picture below, set to be developed by Jericho Road into a common room and three artists' studios

June 2019

Rock House complete

>> Neighbourhood kitchen Home Ground opened as social space/canteen for people in the neighbourhood, a training kitchen for teaching cooking and an events and catering space for hire.

Events in the Observer Building from purchase Feb 2019 to lockdown April 2020

Observer Building Hire/Event Register

Date	Name of Hirer / Organiser	Description / Purpose of Hire / Event	Time Duration	Area
17/04/2020	Isolation Station	Isolation Station Hastings - Online TV show via facebook live to present plans for the building and invite comment.	3pm - 6pm	Online
22/02/2020 - 23/02/2020	Margaret Sheehy Limited T/A MSL Projects	StreetSmart Event The event will comprise workshops in painting, stencilling, safety and general advice etc plus opportunities for participants to create their own work	6am - 8pm	Ground Floor
26/02/2020	Historic England	Tour of building with Historic England	2 - 3.30pm	All floors
26/02/2020	WRNV	Pre Application Forum	6pm - 8pm	Council Chambers
01/02/2020	Sweet and Dandy	Photo Shoot	10.30am - 1pm	Ground Floor
20/01/2020	Independent Advisory Group	IAG / Hastings Commons Away Day	10.30am - 2.30pm	All floors
17/01/2020	IF_DO	M&E Briefing Workshop	11.30am - 1.00pm	Ground Floor
30/11/2019	Lella Newman	Vintage Market	9am - 5pm	Ground Floor
29/11/2019	WRNV	Focus Housing Workshop	12.30pm - 1.30pm	Rock House project space
27/11/2019	Jericho Road	Ramsgate HAZ/Histroic England Learning Visit	10.00 - 3.30pm	All floors
23/11/2019 - 24/11/2019	Claudia Kaleta	Film shoot of short sci-fi film titled Venus both in the alleyway space and Observer	6pm - 8am x 2 days	Ground Floor & Vaults
11/11/2019	WRNV	Tour of building with local councillors	10.00am - 11.00am	All floors
02/11/2019	Hastings Community Trust - Kings Church	Filing a short poem performance that will be shown at Christmas time	6am - 5pm	Ground Floor
30/10/2019	Jericho Road	East Brighton Trust Learning Visit	10.00 - 4.00pm	All floors
23/10/2019	WRNV	HBC and ESCC meeting	9.30-11am	Muriel Matters House
12/10/2019	Peach London Ltd	Photoshoot	8am - 8pm	1st, 2nd, 3rd Floor
01/10/2019	Pat Seaman and Sean Cronin	Art Exhibition for Coastal Currents Festival	9am - 5pm	Vaults
01/10/2019	East Sussex College	Drawing Workshop	10.15am - 3.15pm	Ground Floor
16/09/2019	Indpendent Advisory Group	IAG (Independent Advisory Group) meeting	10.30am - 12.30pm	Rock House
07/09/2019	Costal Currents	Coastal Currents events: Pocket Park in The Alley	11am - 3pm	The Alley
07/09/2019	WRNV	OB exhibition on Ground Floor of OB	12pm -5pm	Ground Floor
02/09/2019	WRNV	People and Place Exhibition	5.30pm - 8.00pm	Ground Floor
31/08/2019	Heart of Hastings	Heart of Hastings AGM	11am - 2pm	Ground Floor
31/08/2019	WRNV	Community event in The Alley	1pm - 6pm	The Alley
29/08/2019 - 09/09/2019	Sweet and Dandy	Art Exhibiton for Coastal Current Festival	9am - 5pm	Vaults
19/06/2019	Jericho Road	UnLtd Learning Visit	9am-3pm	All floors
10/06/2019	WRNV	Power To Change Board Visit	10am-5pm	All floors
29/04/2019 - 24/05/2019	Heart of Hastings	Organisation Workshop	9am - 5pm	First Floor
14/02/2019	WRNV	Show Your Love Purchase Celebration	3pm - 6pm	Ground Floor

The Common Treasury of Adaptable Ideas

>> from the summer of 2018 onwards a group of local leaders worked to pull together an innovative programme of activity brining people from elsewhere to join local people in a process of inspiration and adaptation.

This led to two major events in April and October 2019 interspersed with 'Take It Forwards' pot-luck dinners, small grant support and a website of ideas (commontreasury.org.uk)

Nov 2019

>> an event long in the planning to have a town-wide conversation about gentrification and its impacts, was held at the angling club. We expected 50 people, nearly 150 turned up!

Sponsored by
Hastings Independent
Your local non-profit community newspaper

"...I can't afford to live here anymore, but there's nothing I can do about that!"
overheard on St Helen's Park Road

"...everyone's welcome in Hastings, that's why I love it!"
overheard outside Morrisons

*"...I just wish the DFLs would p*ss off!"*
overheard on George Street

"it's great here...property is just so affordable!"
overheard on Trinity Ground

What do YOU think?
Changing HASTINGS
TOWN MEETING - COMING SOON - ALL WELCOME
For more information: changinghastings@gmail.com
www.facebook.com/changinghastings

Rock House Christmas Party, 2019

Feb 2020

>> Observer Building pre-application forum

Engagement in the time of Covid

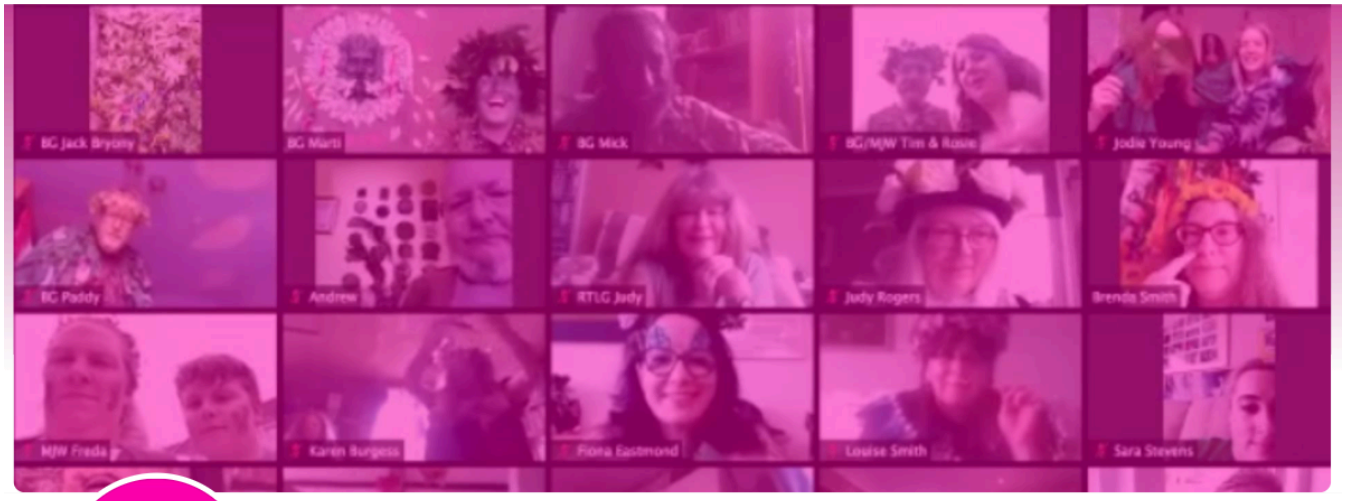
Ongoing throughout

Hastings Hub – weekly from 17th March, then interspersed with future planning sessions
Independent Advisory Group
Rock House tenant zooms
Developing volunteer policies and processes
Involvement in Town Deal board and in ESCC Economic Recovery Plan
Ongoing engagement with tenants and prospective tenants

March 2020

Isolation Station Hastings

>> Supported the start-up of a live Facebook TV channel "streaming the good vibes of Hastings & St Leonards into and from people's living rooms throughout lockdown".



ISOLATION STATION HASTINGS

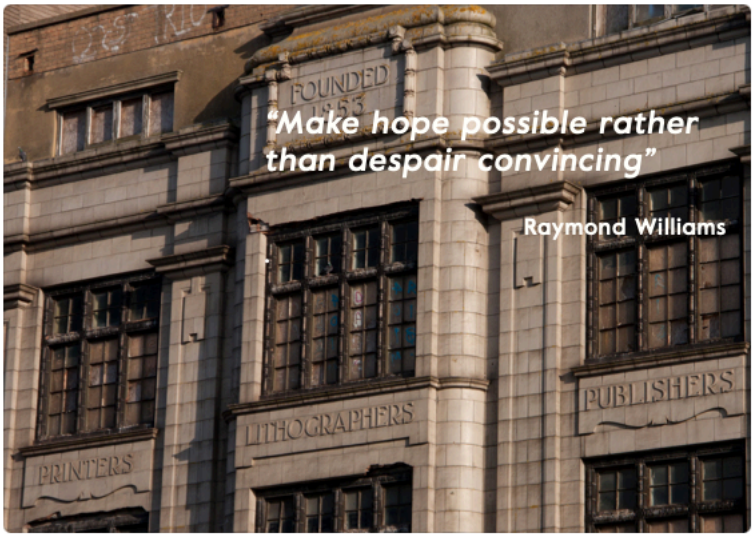
Isolation Station

@isolation.station.hastings · TV channel

Following

April 2020

>> ISH live show with Jess Steele (WRNV) and Sarah Castle IF_DO and re Observer Building proposals



April-Jun 2020

>> Common Treasury revisited on Isolation Station – series of 5 events on Thursday afternoons bringing the Common Treasury speakers back to talk with inspired local people

Sept 20-Mar 21

>> Hastings Emerging Futures – Common Rooms x 6 based on Wheel of Wellbeing, Free Ice Cream mapping, Discovery Walks, Online discussion event series

Free

Thu, 18 Mar 2021 19:00 GMT

Hastings Local Plan: Community Response Meeting

Free

Tue, 23 Feb 2021 19:00 GMT

Sustainable Hastings

Free

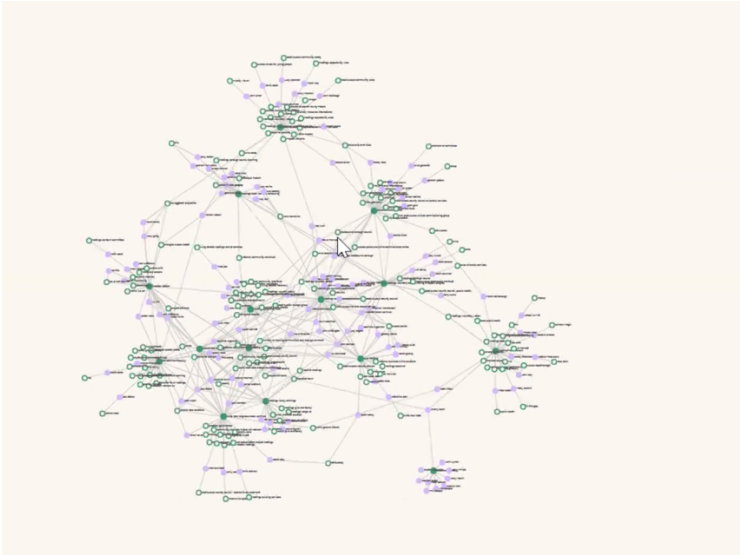
Tue, 26 Jan 2021 19:00 GMT

Changing Hastings...is Back! One Year On

Free

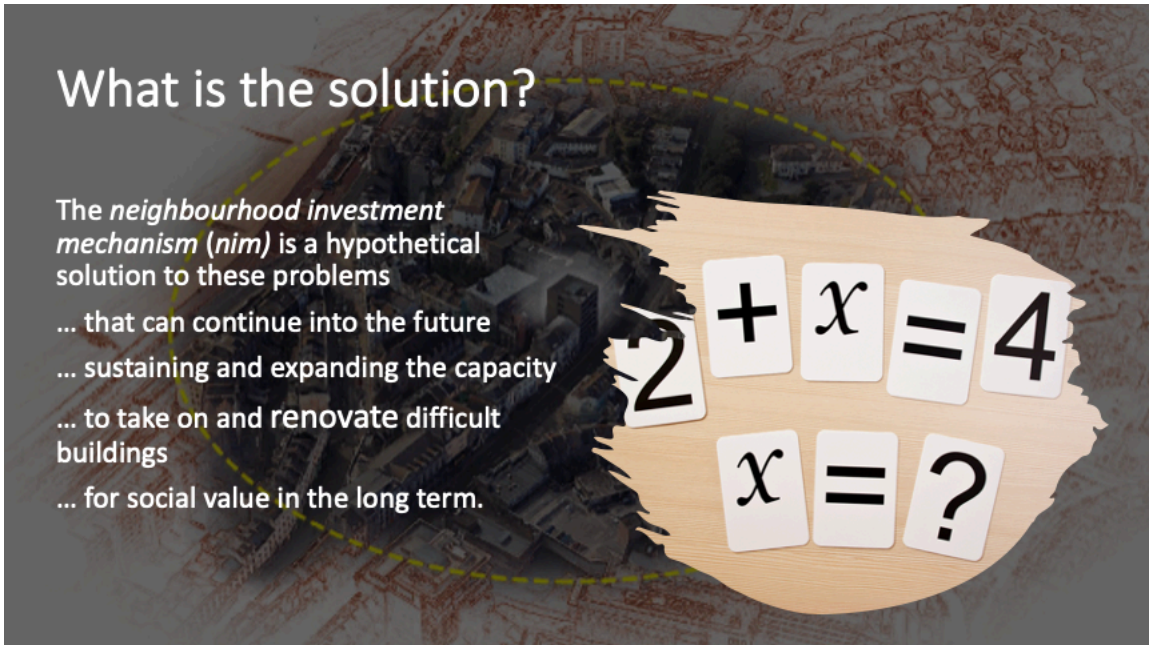
Tue, 19 Jan 2021 19:00 GMT

Hastings Town Centre: Past, Present, Future?



Jan 2021

>> Local discussions about potential 'neighbourhood investment mechanism' (nim)



Feb 2021

>> Reaching out to local building owners to join the Maintenance Club and participate in the Spruce Up programme

Trial of 'gather.com' to use for socials in future

Ongoing development and engagement

>> The Hastings Commons ecosystem of distinct buildings and spaces, people and organisations share common values based on affordability, inclusion and collaboration. They are committed as a consortium to continued and sustained outreach to help them move towards their vision of long-term community ownership of the buildings in their care.

APPENDIX C2:

White Rock Trust and the WRNV Shareholders Agreement

Perhaps all projects have their big stories. Ours was the conflict with White Rock Trust. This is a difficult story to write about but it feels important to try. Of course the version here is from my own experience.

White Rock Trust was 'a good organisation'. Emerging from an astoundingly successful campaign to rescue the pier [EMP: Pier campaign 2014] and making use of the 'engagement data' (ie relationships, listening and contact details) from that long campaign [EMP: 141108 WRT data review], it built up to 400 members, with half of them living or working in White Rock itself and the other half people from elsewhere who cared and were interested (see figure 6.10).

In the period 2013-16 it took on a wide range of projects and roles:

- Drop-in and meeting space at 5 Trinity
- Meanwhile lease on Rothermere House basement
- Lease on the tennis courts in White Rock Gardens
- Campaign about 101 Cambridge Road and the shared garden
- Neighbourhood planning development
- Working with Jericho Road Solutions and Meanwhile Space to progress Rock House
- White Rock 3-D model
- Community Economic Development plan
- Our Place - research into local public sector spend, and into pedestrian flows
- Midwifing the community land trust
- Coastal Communities Team
- Helped with the fundraising for Rock House, particularly as the applicant for Power to Change grant which led to the equalising of shareholdings in WRNV between the three partners.

And then it went wrong. It's hard to say why. The way I tell it usually is: I had been voluntary treasurer since 2013. I provided a full administrative and financial management service, initially for free and eventually paid to Jericho Road at £150 per month. I resigned as trustee in October 2015 under some pressure regarding conflict of interest but mainly because I

knew there were lots of volunteers and I felt the need to 'get out of the way'. I provided a detailed handover [EMP 150801 Handover] which offers an illuminating snapshot right at the beginning of my PhD. It even mentions, among various potential future connections:

> "v) White Rock/America Ground is one of two case studies in my PhD thesis which I am due to start in October 2015. My title is 'Self-Renovating Neighbourhoods as an Alternative to Gentrification'."

The handover was upbeat: "The Trust is in a very good position with a lot of strengths – track record, reputation, respect, over 400 members, around 15 active volunteers, an experienced full time community organiser, a series of projects including the White Rock Gardens, Carriage Court, Walk This Way, Rock House ground floor, the America Ground Community Land Trust, a key role in developing the White Rock Action Plan, and grants in place to support much of this work."

I really hoped and expected that people would step forward. Some did, others didn't. But somehow it got taken over by a few difficult people and all the good people started to leave. This was a slow process. At its worst there were three men in charge. One of them was the owner of a local property management service (HAS) who had been involved in early discussions about a community land trust, then got the contract to manage Rock House (on a % of rents basis), then got himself appointed (not elected) as a director of WRT[1]. There were challenges on every level and at every turn. The rents from tenants of Rock House were being channelled through HAS. They wrote to all tenants to insist that they continue to pay HAS directly and stopped passing over the funds to WRNV. At one point we were told that "WRT would die in a ditch rather than see self-management at Rock House" (and that was long before Boris Johnson mentioned ditches!). This was the most helpful problematic - I sent it round to tenants on a Friday night and by Sunday had a set of testimonials asking us to end the agreement. We could remove HAS from the Rock House equation, but we couldn't change the directors of WRT.

At this time I was serving on the Power to Change (PTC) Community Business Panel. All

[1] The new management declared that WRT didn't actually have any members because the 400 people had not signed a piece of paper to say they had joined the company.

members were offered four days of support from Practical Governance, the new social enterprise established by one of PTC's first directors, Bob Thust. I grabbed the chance - anything that could help us solve these problems. I have a large paper file labelled 'WRNV evidence' that Bob put together - ready for court if necessary - to show the utter unreasonableness of the WRT position.

Power to Change sent a mediator, a QC. Their staff came as well, I think for the day at the seaside. The mediation was very serious but it became crystal clear that WRT were the problem. This was the start of a long process in which Power to Change took the shares back from WRT and gave us their Head of Funds, David Chater, to serve as a director of WRNV. This was a brilliant response. Much later when we were arranging a visit to Hastings by the Power to Change board the chief executive, Vidhya Alakeson, told me one of her priorities was:

> "to change the narrative that they have about Rock House in their mind, that it's been a bit of problem to them… from their point of view it's taken loads of energy, quite a lot of money and a lot of David time, plus a lot of legal time. It's not negative because they're glad they did it, but it isn't positive. Whereas Vidyha says they did the best thing ever, and they should feel incredibly proud of themselves. So we want to get across to them just how proud of us they should feel, that they didn't walk away and they didn't just abandon us or give us some consultancy money. They came in themselves in the form of David Chater. They might have just given us some money for a lawyer, you know. And we would be in court having a horrendous time and the building would be sold. And it would be a disaster" [190430 JL & BW briefing].

Power to Change did not want to be a long-term shareholder so another long process began to allocate the shares locally. This raised the hopes of Rock House tenants that they might be gifted the shares but they were unable to come to agreement on a form of organisation that would satisfy the expectation of wider community benefit. In the end the shares were allocated to Heart of Hastings CLT. The Shareholders' Agreement was updated so that the community land trust will be able to buy out the other partners (Jericho Road and Meanwhile Space) five years after 'steady-state' is reached, that is when the parties agree that "WRNV finances have reached a stable position for the medium term" [EMP: 200728 WRNV Shareholders Agreement].

White Rock Neighbourhood Ventures shareholders agreement – key features

Core principles:

- Ensuring buildings respond to community needs;
- Ensuring all rents remain affordable for local communities in the long term for the avoidance of doubt meaning that after the initial Rent Setting Date, rents will rise by no greater than the rate of inflation as measure by RPI
- Working towards community ownership;
- Maintaining viability and risk management, ensuring that the overall portfolio becomes and remains financially sustainable; and
- Ensure full alignment with the charitable objectives of HOH

Share Transfer:

There will be an **Assessment of Steady State** - either the agreement at a Board meeting where all three shareholders are represented that the finances of WRNV have reached a stable position for the medium term, or the tenth anniversary of signing this agreement.

The **Share Sale Trigger Date** is the fifth anniversary of the Assessment of Steady State, or earlier if agreed by all Shareholders. At that point the 3-year **Share Sale Window** opens. During that time HOH will have the first option to purchase MWS Shares and JRS Shares for a total price (the **Share Sale Window Price**) calculated as follows:

• Value of fixed assets with a Capped Rents covenant in place; ***less***

• Outstanding debt; ***less***

• Any capital grants received by WRNV from the date of signing this agreement, except where agreed unanimously by the shareholders that these are exempted.

If HOH is not able to raise finance equivalent to the Share Sale Window Price then, in the alternative, HOH may elect to purchase anywhere between a minimum of 22 Shares and the maximum of 80 Shares, subject to the written consent of MWS and JRS, such consent not to be unreasonably withheld.

The aim is to ensure that the Share Sale Window Price is achievable by HOH within prudent borrowing ratios. If HOH does not purchase a minimum of 22 Shares, the parties will actively seek an equivalent body that will assure future community representation/ownership, to buy a minimum of 22 Shares.

A MANIFESTO FOR THE OBSERVER BUILDING

VENTURES is leading the charge to bring the long-derelict OBSERVER BUILDING into COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP and PRODUCTIVE USE. This needs to be a COMMUNITY-WIDE effort.

WE WANT 5 THINGS...

1 A LOCALLY-DRIVEN SOLUTION TO THE LONG-ROTTEN BUILDING IN THE HEART OF OUR NEIGHBOURHOOD

... SO THAT THE OPPORTUNITIES & BENEFITS ARE SHARED LOCALLY AND EQUITABLY

... SO THAT THE BUILDING REMAINS FOREVER A COMMUNITY ASSET (NOT LIKE THE PIER...)

OPPORTUNITIES... JOBS, TRAINING, WORKSPACE, ENTERPRISES, HOMES, NEW FRIENDSHIPS, TRANSFORMATIONAL EXPERIENCES

2 TO PROTECT THE SOUL OF THE NEIGHBOURHOOD THROUGH PROVIDING:

- CAPPED RENT WORKSPACE
- LIVING RENTS HOMES
- FOR EVER & EVER!

3 TO CELEBRATE, NURTURE, CHAMPION AND ADVOCATE FOR HASTINGS CREATIVES

TO BE THE BEST, TO BE CONFIDENT,
TO LOOK OUTWARDS, TO COLLABORATE
TO HAVE ACCESS TO QUALITY WORKSPACE,
AFFORDABLE HOMES & ESSENTIAL SERVICES

WHY?

BECAUSE CREATIVES & OTHER PROJECT WORKERS...

- tend to face discrimination in the private rented sector (PRS) because they don't have stable earnings or pay-slips
- they generally scrape a living at around 30-50% of local median earnings (£13-19k) whilst contributing a great deal to the distinctive life of the town

4 TO OFFER A ROUTE FOR PEOPLE SQUEEZED OUT OF HIGH-RENT LONDON WHO HAVE FEW CHOICES BUT LOTS TO CONTRIBUTE...

JOINERS NOT COLONISTS

One of our aims is to PROTECT THE DISTINCTIVE QUIRKINESS of the neighbourhood. One of the ways that has happened is people COMING FROM LONDON TO JOIN IN. If we want that to happen in the future we will have to make available a proportion of CHEAP HOUSING to down-at-heel DFLs.

"How radical can you be when you're living with your mum until you're 30. London will fucking kill you. It has become an economically walled city. I think young people have to get over the London thing and think about new places of creative growth."
DON LETTS, 2018

5 TO PROVE THAT SELF RENOVATING NEIGHBOURHOODS ARE A VIABLE AND DESIRABLE ALTERNATIVE TO GENTRIFICATION OR DECLINE

HOW? = HEART + ORGANISATION WORKSHOP

Adding the Observer Building to the ecosystem under development – Rock House, 39 Cambridge Road, 12 Claremont, and the Power Station site at Ore Valley – would create a suitable scale for our ambitious ORGANISATION WORKSHOP (OW).

100 LOCAL PARTICIPANTS
8 FACILITATORS
1 WORLD-LEADING OW DIRECTOR
EQUIPMENT/TOOLS/MATERIALS
LAND/BUILDINGS
CONTRACTS
ACCESS TO EXPERTISE

TRANSFORMATIONAL CHANGE!

WWW.ROCKHOUSE.ORG.UK/OB

THE OBSERVER BUILDING COULD BE THE FOURTH COMMUNITY-OWNED ASSET IN THE AREA.

THE OBSERVER BUILDING WHEN IT OPENED IN 1924

WHEN THE OBSERVER BUILDING SITE CAME UP FOR SALE AND DEMOLITION IN 2006, THERE WAS A STRONG COMMUNITY CAMPAIGN TO KEEP THE BUILDING

WE ARE WILLING TO WORK HARD

- RAISING £1.5M FOR PURCHASE, THEN GRANTS AND LOANS OF AROUND £3.5M FOR REFURBISHMENT
- DRAWING ON A WIDE NETWORK OF SUPPORTERS & USERS BUILT UP OVER MANY YEARS
- STEERING AND MANAGING THE DEVELOPMENT ON THE GROUND, DAY AFTER DAY AS WE HAVE DONE WITH ROCK HOUSE, LEARNING THE LESSONS FROM ROCK HOUSE, 39 CAMBRIDGE ROAD AND 12 CLAREMEMONT
- CREATING WHITE ROCK RENOVATORS AS A LOCAL BUILD ENTERPRISE

WE BRING:

ROCK HOUSE IS FULL AND THRIVING, DYNAMIC AND RESPONSIVE, BRIMMING WITH SKILLS AND ENERGY

IT IS ALSO VERY WELL CONNECTED

WE HAVE A DEEP AND ENGAGED NETWORK OF PARTNERS AND SUPPORTERS, INCLUDING A FORMAL ALLIANCE BETWEEN WHITE ROCK NEIGHBOURHOOD VENTURES AND HEART OF HASTINGS CLT

THIS CHALLENGE IS NOT LIKE THE PIER – IT'S A BIG BUILDING IN THE TOWN CENTRE WITH POTENTIAL FOR AFFORDABLE HOUSING, BUSINESS AND COMMUNITY USES – BUT IT WILL NEED EVERYONE TO GET BEHIND IT

WE NEED YOUR SUPPORT

HELP US DO THE SAME WITH THE OBSERVER BUILDING

HASTINGS COMMONS THEORY OF CHANGE

PURPOSE: To create environments in which people can enhance their lives, shape their neighbourhoods and look out for each other.

INPUTS The resources we provide	**ACTIVITIES** The ways we add value	**OUTPUTS** The direct results of our investment	**OUTCOMES** The intended and unintended effects of our outputs	**IMPACT** The long-term impact we enable
Skilled and passionate team with excellent track record across an ecosystem of organisations with strong local roots and networks, and significant capital funding.	Tackling dereliction. Bringing difficult buildings into productive use	New buildings and spaces (nearly 8,000 sq.m).	Improved appearance, new spaces, uses and activities drive up footfall, dwell time, loyalty and spend per head	High quality, inclusive, sustainable spaces in the town centre
	Creating new projects, tools, training opportunities and facilities to support learning, collective community action, and business improvement	New social infrastructure including learning and wellbeing programmes. Businesses benefiting from support.	Improved local skills, employment opportunities, business support. Savings to acute services from increased wellbeing and community-based support	Stronger communities Greater wellbeing More inclusive economy, more successful businesses
	Sustained, inclusive and varied community engagement both with the Commons and on wider issues	Numbers and diversity of people engaged and using spaces	Widespread participation in local activities enhances community wellbeing, shared identity and self-reliance	People's lives enhanced Strong local pride Increased sense of agency and self-esteem
Support for community self-management, tenant liaison, pastoral care, place-shaping opportunities	Capped rents to sustain affordability in the long term	Community members enabled to stay and to contribute	Increased social capital, social cohesion and wellbeing	Diversity and vibrancy of the neighbourhood protected
Creativity and flexibility in the face of challenge	Continual innovation, particularly of social infrastructure	Social innovations to meet identified needs	Organic phased development which maximises community benefit at every stage.	A beacon of 'doing development differently' to inspire others in Hastings and beyond

Our vision: The place has been shaped by local people and businesses who work collaboratively and are confident in their ongoing management of the historic neighbourhood. Dereliction is a thing of the past, but the place retains its character and diversity. This unique part of Hastings is recognised and valued, affordable and inclusive, hugely successful with widespread profits reinvested locally to benefit the area.

Our mission: To grow and sustain the Hastings Commons as an asset to the local community now and for future generations.

APPENDIX D:

The 'accidental transformations' of Crossfield and Upper Brockley, South East London

Upper Brockley[1]

By the 1940s, most of the fine mid-Victorian houses of Upper Brockley had been sub-divided into multiple occupation which in the 1950s and 1960s provided accommodation for the recently arrived African-Caribbean population. An easy Wikipedia[2] narrative would have it that, from the mid-1960s, artists associated with nearby Goldsmiths College started to move into the large and at the time neglected houses on Manor Avenue, beginning the process of 'gentrification' which continues today.

But a different story is glimpsed in the oral histories gathered for *Longest journey: A History of Black Lewisham* (1995) which describes how the West Indian presence in Brockley grew from 1948 (when five of the *Empire Windrush* passengers gave Wickham Road as their address), through the 1950s and early 1960s, when social clubs for Black youngsters began to spring up in the basements, and Madam Hector opened her salon displaying hairdos popular with Black women of the time.

Initially, there were mainly single men and only a few families. Even as women and children arrived, the houses were largely bare, and there was a strong feeling of temporary accommodation with a cooker on the landing, a cold-water sink and shared bathrooms.
As in many poor communities, systems of saving had developed in each of the Caribbean territories. In Jamaica, this was called 'pardner'; in Grenada it was 'sou sou'. A group of people agreed to save together, and each member would 'throw a hand' by putting in the agreed weekly sum. It was decided how many weeks the saving would run for and when each member would get 'the draw'. This enabled members of the Caribbean community to make large purchases at a time when the banks would not accept them as creditworthy.
Basil Morgan's family came to the UK in 1954, his father a carpenter, his mother a

[1] *Longest Journey: A History of Black Lewisham* Joan Anim-Addo, Deptford Forum Publishing, 1995 (p99-102) http://www.dfpbooks.co.uk/
[2] See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brockley

dressmaker. The Morgans and four or five other local families came to know each other well, bonding through similar experiences back home, coming from the same extended family or having lived in the same district. When Basil was old enough, it was his job to collect the money from the families. New arrivals to the area from the West Indies sought out established families like the Morgans, who became a kind of unofficial reception committee.

Given the limited choice and poor quality of housing available to Black people at that time, it is no surprise that some determined newcomers set their sights on purchasing homes. They faced difficulties with sitting tenants and were often exploited by lenders charging 25-30 per cent interest rates but, despite relatively low income and sending money back home, a number of new settlers were able to buy houses, often making use of the old pardner system to raise the deposit.

As the Black population began to grow, many families took this mutuality further, working together on each house to bring it back from the brink of dereliction. Weekend parties with beer and barbecues sustain the collective work and shared resources that rescued that little neighbourhood. Those that stayed into the 1990s and beyond saw some of the highest property price rises in London. They included the indomitable Sybil Phoenix who founded and achieved custodian ownership for the Marsha Phoenix Memorial Trust. Some were squatters, including friends of mine in Halesworth Road, who took their own collective route to looking after the building but where sadly ownership ended up back in the market. The squat at 89 Halesworth Road eventually became privately owned after 12 years (squatters' rights) and was then sold into the market by the individual who had lived there throughout[3].

Crossfield Estate, Deptford[4]

The brick blocks of Crossfield Estate in Deptford Creekside were built by the London County Council in the late 1930s and remained under GLC management until 1971, when they were handed over to Lewisham Council. The GLC Housing Department was famous for its grand schemes, but notorious on matters of day-to-day housing management, and conditions in

[3] He divided up some of the sale proceeds on the basis of length of residence, but only to those who were still living there at the time of sale, and instead of passing the building into long-term community ownership.
[4] *Turning the Tide: The History of Everyday Deptford* Jess Steele, Deptford Forum Publishing, 1993

the blocks were appalling. One woman said, “I have lived on this estate for 22 years, I have spent 21 of them trying to get out”. Crossfield referrals to Social Services for material poverty were four times the local average.

Lewisham Council were planning to turn the nearby Church Street into a major dual carriageway. Crossfield tenants, some living within feet of the proposed road had not been consulted or even told about the plans. When local community worker Ann Gallagher called a tenants’ meeting in January 1973, the reaction was instant. Of about 200 people who participated in the campaign, around 170 were women. Their long-brewed anger at conditions was expressed in mobilising support for the demolition of the whole estate. They produced a brochure describing the effects of the road and their everyday experience of blocked drains, rats, damp and fungus on the walls. They took direct disruptive action, with a demonstration closing Church Street to traffic during Friday evening rush hour in the middle of a rail strike.

While other councillors had walked out of early meetings, the group found weighty support in Ron Pepper, Chair of the Planning Committee, and two young councillors. Despite concern that demolition was a waste of housing stock, these councillors supported tenants in their campaign, as well as visiting many in their homes to take up individual cases. Within two months of the first meeting the Housing Committee agreed to rehouse all the tenants on the estate: a triumph of local activism, but the story does not end there.

A group called Student Co-operative Dwellings (SCD) had negotiated with the council for sites in the area and eventually built the Sanford Street Co-op. They approached Cllr Ron Pepper with a proposal to give Crossfield over to SCD. This fell by the wayside, but it gave Pepper the idea of using Crossfield to house single professional people. Places on the estate were offered to the Inner London Education Authority, Goldsmiths College and Thames Polytechnic. The plan scraped through the Housing Committee, and a new community grew up in the blocks: a constantly shifting population of students, artists, musicians, teachers and social workers.

Here public and voluntary sector workers lived with the same facilities and often worse conditions than their pupils or clients. Students had the opportunity to integrate far more

than they do in most areas. The estate brought a new middle-class segment to Deptford, with none of the gentrification or widespread displacement of working class communities that was to feature in the rest of docklands. It also gave unprecedented momentum to the development of a radical community arts and music scene. Dire Straits, Squeeze and the Flying Pickets made it beyond Deptford, but there was also ”a proliferation of tiny groups, growing and splitting like amoeba, producing discs from garage studios sounding like they’ve been cut in a biscuit tin” (Time Out, 1978).

With only minimum improvements, the blocks were far from normal standards of accommodation. This new population had generally low wages, but they tended to be creative, resourceful and, importantly, to believe in collective action. A typical Crossfield social event would involve sorting out mould, knocking through walls, laying lino and tacking up curtains. They were building a community while they tidied up, and both Deptford and the estate benefited hugely from the social capital as well as the environmental improvements. In contrast with other local estates, when Crossfields was awarded an Estate Action programme, tenants voted against installing security doors and entryphone systems, preferring the open balconies and prioritising improvements to the shared facilities.

* * *

What can these stories teach us? How might they inspire a new regeneration approach? First, they confirm that all interventions are unpredictable, so we can only go forward with strong values — courage, integrity and openness. Secondly, they highlight the importance of collective self-interest and sociability as a motivator. Valuing the place is the glue that binds strangers and keeps the network porous to newcomers. They also remind us that we need to find ways to lock in affordability for the long term, as with development trusts that use assets and enterprise to cross-subsidise their social impact, community land trusts where the freehold remains in community ownership, or housing rules that protect and promote stable diversity.

APPENDIX E: Propositions arising from SRN

Prop 1	**Power/agency**	Power in numbers, power from action, power out of survivability, authenticity. It's not enough to be right you have to be powerful. People are systematically dis-agenced. Strong self-efficacy and performance success feed off each other; the opposite is also true. Agency is the most important factor in whether a community has 'capacity'. Prop: **Along with environmental and equalities impact, make all policy subject to 'the agency question' – does it build or destroy people's agency?**
Prop 2	**Care/emotion**	The production/consumption of neighbourhoods is relational. People are driven by self-interest (passion). The work is sometimes joyful but often exhausting emotional labour. An ethics of care can support collective resilience. Prop: **Acknowledge the key role of emotion in local regeneration by connecting care, community wellbeing and neighbourhood improvement.**
Prop 3	**Property**	The property resource – real and unreal – stores power. Productive material spaces conjured from dereliction. Serious lack of understanding (among funders, politicians, civil servants, communities, citizens) of how land and buildings get developed. Prop: **Commit to broadening participation in property development and provide training/insights in property development for practitioners, policy makers and capital project funders.**
Prop 4	**Capacitation**	The people resource – team skills, wider community engagement, learning. Horizontal synaptic connectivity both local and to the wider world. Prop: **Invest in local capacitation as a long-term process**
Prop 5	**N'hood as single structure**	Multiplicity not totality (Mol and Law), world-forming vs globalisation (Nancy 2007) Granby – piecemeal, mistress plan White Rock – responsible for it all, blurring the lines. Prop: **understand built fabric as dynamic and world-forming. It is <u>both</u> entropically fractional <u>and</u> coherently complex – the body multiple is not fragmented' (Mol)**
Prop 6	**N'hood as enterprise**	Venturesome, risk-taking, multiple roles (ecosystem), active contributors not passive beneficiaries Prop: **View the neighbourhood as a joint venture, a shared endeavour. Encourage ecosystemic thinking and approaches.**

APPENDIX F: Empirical materials cited in the thesis

100608	Richard Walker	SRN	EMP
121107	DTA Convention plenary speech	SRN	EMP
130624	WRT minutes	WR	EMP
131010	NP meeting JS presentation	WR	EMP
140407	WRT minutes	WR	EMP
140509	Eleanor	Granby	Int
140525	Tracey Gore	Granby	EMP
140609	Chris Brown email	CB	EMP
141108	WR Data Review	WR	EMP
150331	HBC meeting	WR	EMP
150414	HBC letter	WR	EMP
150531	PTC EOI	WR	EMP
150725	WRT minutes	WR	EMP
150801	WRT handover	WR	EMP
151109	Eleanor	Granby	Int
151126	Hazel	Granby	Int
151126	Erika	Granby	Int
151126	Ronnie	Granby	Int
151201	Hazel	HT Granby	Int
160206	report on CLT development work	WR	EMP
160506	Ronnie	Granby	Int
160531	LCC officer to Martina Gross	Granby	EMP
160609	Hazel	HT Granby	Int
160610	Hazel	HT Granby	Int
160610	Darren Guy	Granby	Int
160610	Winter Garden meeting	Granby	EMP
160628	Joe & Anthony, Assemble	Granby	Int
160810	Kate Adams	WR	EMP
160919	12C proposal	WR	EMP
161001	Reflection	Reflect	EMP
161111	WRT emails	WR	EMP
170125	Hazel	HT Granby	Int
170126	Hazel	HT Granby	Int
170208	Adam Clements	WR	EMP
170225	Steve Wyler	WR	EMP
170804	Hazel	HT Granby	Int
170806	Hazel	HT Granby	Int
170915	Hazel	HT Granby	Int
171024	Hazel and Eleanor	HT Granby	Int
171101	Dan O'Connor at Big Local NE Hastings	Fieldnote	EMP
171127	Hazel	HT Granby	Int

171205	RU emails	WR	EMP
171214	OB speech notes	WR	EMP
180610	Eleanor	Granby	Int
180612	Dec of Alliance HoH-PAW	WR	EMP
180824	PTC proposal	WR	EMP
180901	OV project summary	OV	EMP
180919	Ecosystem notes and diagram	WR	EMP
181212	Eleanor	Granby	Int
181212	Hazel	HT Granby	Int
181213	Hazel	HT Granby	Int
181219	Joint working team	WR	EMP
190203	Ecosystem identity	WR	EMP
190301	Ore Valley project summary	OV	EMP
190301	OW flier	WR	EMP
190314	Fieldnote	Fieldnote	EMP
190425	Hazel	HT Granby	Int
190430	JB and BW briefing	WR	EMP
190607	HBC councillor Leah Levane	WR	EMP
190729	The Ecosystem and the Hastings Commons	WR	EMP
191127	OV meeting	OV	EMP
191202	Fieldnote	Fieldnote	EMP
191211	Reflection	Reflect	EMP
200120	Ecosystem Awayday post-its	WR	EMP
200124	Town Deal Terms of Reference	WR	EMP
200126	Reflection	Reflect	EMP
200210	JB email	WR	EMP
200420	Reflection	Reflect	EMP
200827	Reflection	Reflect	EMP
201010	Fieldnote	Fieldnote	EMP
201010	Reflection	Reflect	EMP
201130	nim discussion document	WR	EMP
201211	Attachment Economics zoom	Fieldnote	EMP
201219	TTHAZ programme	WR	EMP
210114	Hazel	HT Granby	Int
210202	A conversation about time (RL/JS)	WR	EMP
210315	Ronan	WR	Int
210318	Local Plan event on Isolation Station Hastings	WR	EMP
210401	Chris Dodwell	WR	Int
210505	John Brunton	WR	Int
210514	Fieldnote	Fieldnote	EMP
210520	11C lease	WR	EMP
210531	Maintenance Club	WR	EMP
210609	MC email	WR	EMP

210614	HEF report	WR	EMP
210615	Loomio	WR	EMP
210624	nim position paper	WR	EMP
210628	Wendy Hart personal conversation	Fieldnote	EMP
210630	Fieldnote	Fieldnote	EMP
210701	Fieldnote	Fieldnote	EMP
210706	Hazel Tilley	HT Granby	Int
210713	Emily	WR	Int
210714	Richard Wistreich, trustee in White Rock	WR	Int
210715	Eddie	WR	Int
210720	Fieldnote	Fieldnote	EMP
210722	John Brunton	WR	Int
210724	Darren French	WR	Int
210808	Reflection	Reflect	EMP
210813	OB WP2 mtg	WR	EMP
210823	Chris Brown	CB	Int
210831	HVA presentation 2021	WR	EMP
210905	PLR catch-up notes	WR	EMP
211105	Fieldnote	Fieldnote	EMP
211122	Vidhya Alakeson, CEO of Power to Change	Fieldnote	EMP
211216	Reflection	Reflect	EMP
220210	Ecosystem Awayday	Recording	EMP
220218	Hazel	HT Granby	Int
2009	HMRC personal conversation, 2009	Fieldnote	EMP
2014	Pier Campaign PPT 2006-14	WR	EMP
2015	Our Place Operational Plan 2015	WR	EMP
2015	HoH PPT 2015	WR	EMP
2016	HoH Investors Collective prospectus 2016	WR	EMP
2016	ALT Strategy 2016	WR	EMP
2018	OB Feasibility Study, Oct 18	WR	EMP
2018	OB manifesto 2018	WR	EMP
2018	Friends of Hastings Pier 2018	WR	EMP
2019	HAZ Expression of Interest July 2019	WR	EMP
2019	OS (troll) emails 2019	WR	EMP
2019	OB planning history 1985-2019	WR	EMP
2020	Hastings Commons vision & values 2020	WR	EMP
2020	CHART review 2020	WR	EMP
2021	WR Housing Costs Dec 2021	WR	EMP
2021	Hastings Rental Health Group 2021	WR	EMP
2021	Community Renewal Fund Technical Note 2021	WR	EMP
2021	WR 2006-21 community engagement report	WR	EMP
2021	Hastings Commons postcard, Sep 21	WR	EMP
2021	Town Deal 2020-21	WR	EMP

APPENDIX G: Dangers & Dilemmas of SRN – a Risk Assessment

	RISK	IMPLICATIONS	LIKELIHOOD	IMPACT	MITIGATION
1	Improving the neighbourhood itself triggers gentrification	Hype, price rises, rent rises, hot market, displacement, eventually sterilisation of the quirky neighbourhood	HIGH (almost inevitable in the end)	MEDIUM (undermines the work but doesn't destroy its positive benefits, indeed vindicates the need for protected affordable space)	Bring property into community freehold, create homes, workspaces and other uses of community value, with rents set at affordable rates and capped in perpetuity.
2	Improvements for community use displace people who were surviving among the dereliction	Change can be painful even it is objectively an improvement	LOW-MEDIUM	LOW (usually very small numbers)	Seek to engage with existing residents and businesses, especially those who will experience the change most acutely.
3	Renovation is noisy, disruptive and uncertain. Some people will seek compensation	Neighbour-flak which is demoralising and time-consuming	MEDIUM	LOW (doesn't last forever)	Neighbour engagement with clear points of contact and a robust CRM (Customer Relationship Management) system. Procedures for dealing with those who will never be satisfied.
4	Co-option by the dominant models of ownership/regen/ place management	Fall back into conventional landlord-tenant behaviours Excessive gearing (borrowing) Treating local people as 'beneficiaries' Avoiding responsibility	MEDIUM	MEDIUM	Consciousness and continual reflection Compromises have to be made – be critically aware of them
5	Capture and manipulation of our language	Contamination of key concepts eg *"principles such as self-management, self-realization and all kinds of unconventional and insurgent creativity… have lost the radical edge they used to entail… in today's neoliberal urbanism they have been usurped as essential ingredients of sub-local regeneration programmes"* (Mayer 2013: 12)	HIGH	MEDIUM	Invent new language and ways of sharing our values
6	Use of community-led work as cover for state cuts	'Roll-with-it' neo-liberalisation uses self-reliance, entrepreneurialism and flexibility to further its own goals" (Tonkiss 2013: 315) and "supports urban practices that are self-managed, low- or no-cost and picturesquely counter-cultural" (p323)	HIGH	MEDIUM	Accept that politicians and others will use and exploit our work but that is not a reason not to do it. Be loud and clear about what's different

APPENDIX G: Dangers & Dilemmas of SRN – a Risk Assessment

	RISK	IMPLICATIONS	LIKELIHOOD	IMPACT	MITIGATION
7	Pulling up the drawbridge? Excluding Marcuse's 4th displacee – the one who won't be able to come.	In places that have always had newcomers and if part of what we're protecting is 'quirkiness', 'hybridity', multiplicity, does it really make sense to focus only on existing local people? In any case that constituency is changing very fast.	HIGH	LOW	I tried with the OB Manifesto (2018) to introduce the idea of a quota of OB homes for displaced Londoners – it didn't go down well! Yet the dilemma remains and will need ongoing discussion and innovation.
8	Balancing 'ethic of care' with the challenging demands of SRN in the world as it is	People burn out and sometimes blame the Commons, the ecosystem, each other	HIGH	HIGH	Encourage ethic and praxis of self-care *(put your own life-jacket on first)*. Participant surveys Wherever possible, improve terms & conditions for everyone (including trustees and other volunteers)
9	The 'coding' of leisure spaces and public realm	a) You look at a café or bar and immediately know, before you see the prices, whether it's your kind of place, whether you belong there. b) The radical DIY of squatting, boaters, has been captured, enclosed and reworked into an ultra-commodified gentrification aesthetic – whether it's exposed industrial décor or authentic artisanal craft production	HIGH	MEDIUM	a) We want to appeal as widely as possible. How should we code? b) Making choices about design, uses, is challenging. The best mitigation is: get started quickly, experiment and learn, do lots of listening, stick to the mission, be willing to change your mind.
10	Supping with the devil. From manipulative estate agents to canny operators to audit cultures based on hated metrics (land value uplift, services 'delivered' to 'beneficiaries', etc).	Is it catching? Will it corrupt? Can you keep a straight face? Can you play the game while staying 'clean'?	MEDIUM	LOW-MEDIUM	"Jump in, do the deal, climb out, wash off!" Use humour to draw attention to the differences. Understand power in context. Build community power including a common resource base that can be leveraged to expand the commons.
11	Uneven commoning. People will contribute differently and some hardly at all.	Would undermine a model which required equal contributions. Is likely to cause resentment and doubt for those working very hard.	HIGH	MEDIUM	I am convinced by Noterman's (2016) positive arguments for 'differential commoning' as enabling of diversity. It is necessary, though, to be continually offering appropriate opportunities for contribution.
12	Human fallibility. People argue, fall out, let each other down. They are fragile, wounded, difficult. They gang up. They mess up. They cause trouble	Conflict is endemic. Each time it's different, sometimes they all come at once and it feels like a tidal wave.	HIGH	HIGH	Luckily... People also make friends, build strong bonds, look out for each other, care about the future. They hang out, listen, help out and share. They collaborate, inspire and entertain. They dream up ideas, take action together, have each other's backs and get stuff done.

APPENDIX H: Further Research & Development

I have identified numerous opportunities for further research and deeper thinking beyond the scope of this thesis including:

- A full praxiographic study of the Hastings Commons, foregrounding the human and nonhuman actors and the networks that enable and constrain their agency
- Analysis of how the discourses of SRN leaders contrast with hegemonic 'regimes of truth' (Foucault 1977) and the extent of successful penetration of these disruptive narratives including the impact of commoning on formal local governance structures, discourse and praxis
- Empirical evaluation of the impact of SRN, considering social return on investment, population change and detailed empirical work on the relative movements of social, 'affordable;, market, and living rents.
- Exploration of the 'space syntax' (Hillier and Hanson 1984) of the Hastings Commons in terms of 'internal' community and 'external' detachment, social and spatial logics, and the interconnectivity of the component spaces
- Consider in depth the pedagogy within SRN and the commons
- A satirical ethnography of our funding processes (perhaps similar to Bernard Cohn's *An Anthropologist Among the Historians* 1987)
- Further thinking about the impact of time lenses on policy and practice, applying the IMMEDIATE+LONG+LONGER time lens in other fields or at different scales. Landscapes of time are political questions - what if we built our models of development around human/attached timeframes rather than in spite of them?

Both Granby and White Rock are exceptional in many ways. It is interesting to consider whether places where SRN happens need to be exceptional because it's so difficult, or that because it's so difficult it hardly ever happens so those places are inevitably exceptions. Neither quite fits because Granby and White Rock were already exceptional places before SRN began, so maybe instead it is that those are the places that attract exceptional solutions? In any case, these neighbourhoods illustrate the pervasive nature of the dominant ownership model but also how alternative/subaltern understandings can break through, especially when localised grassroots movements connect with non-local finance

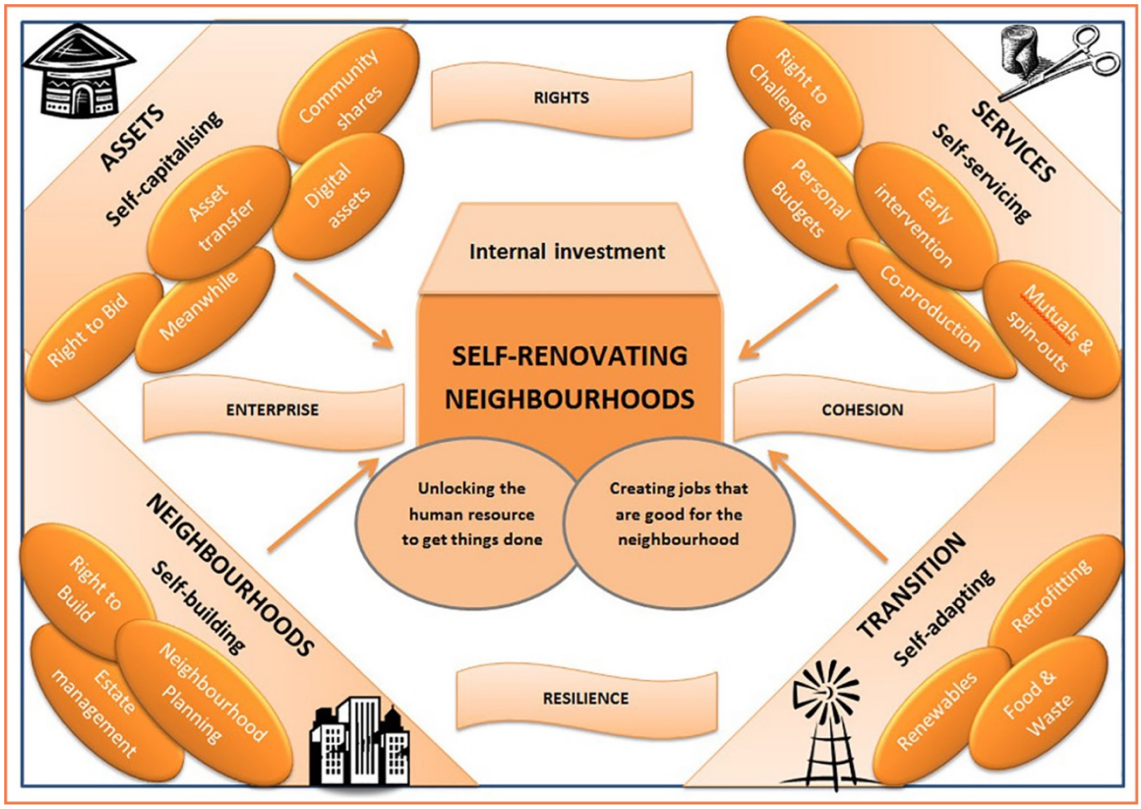
that allows them to intervene in the property market. These processes create new constellations at neighbourhood level and work to convert them to 'permanences' through the social use of freehold power.

Most interesting in my view would be a consideration of the differences and similarities between Hastings Commons, Granby 4 Streets, Nudge Community Builders, Onion Collective, Marsh Farm Outreach, Coalville CAN, and other proleptic grassroots neighbourhood-focused projects, including any contrast between 'coastal entrepreneurship in adversity' and the inland branch-plant radicals. These neighbourhood-selves are "already embedded in multiple elsewheres" (Mbembe and Nuttall 2004: 348) and in "constantly shifting conversations with each other" (Robinson 2011: 2). Such work could support the deepening of mutually-supportive relationships between these types of organisation, which is already leading to collaborative work like the Protector of Community Assets (Thust 2019) and the 'neighbourhood investment mechanism' (see Chapter 8).

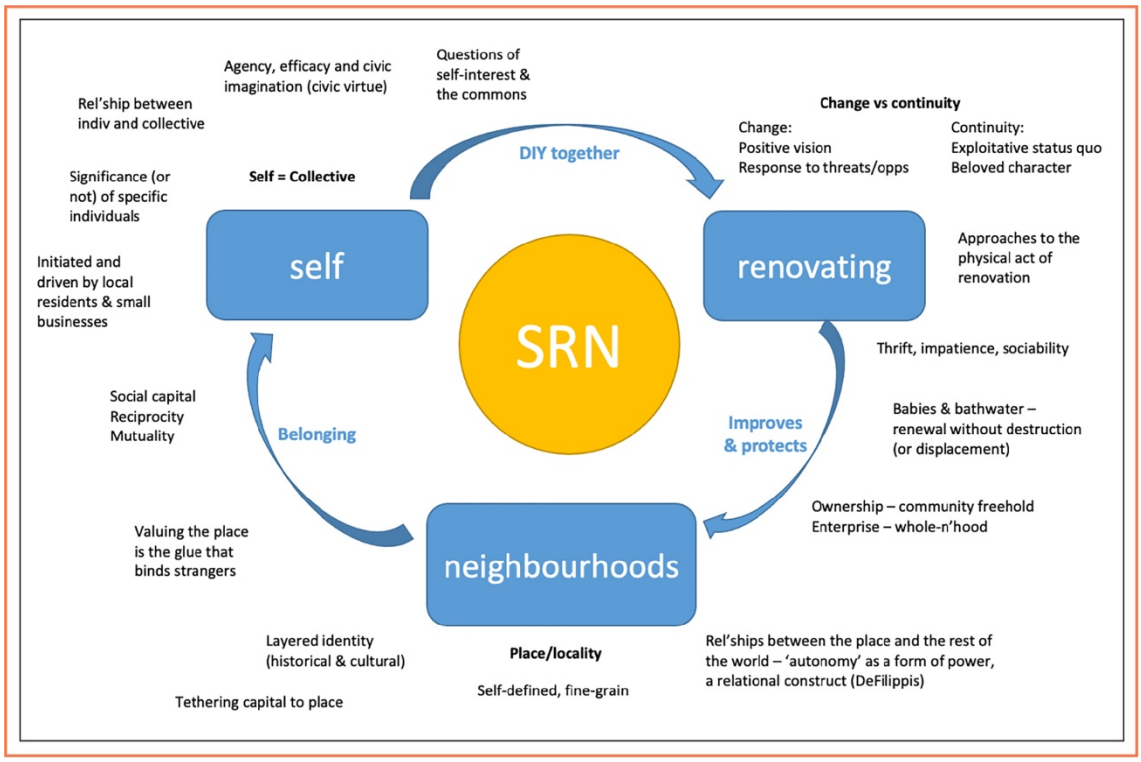
Beyond these conceptual and practice interests, it may be helpful and interesting if other researchers choose to use more distanced and/or quantitative research methods to provide insight into the changes that have happened and continue underway in the Hastings White Rock neighbourhood, and the town more generally.

APPENDIX I: SRN Diagrams

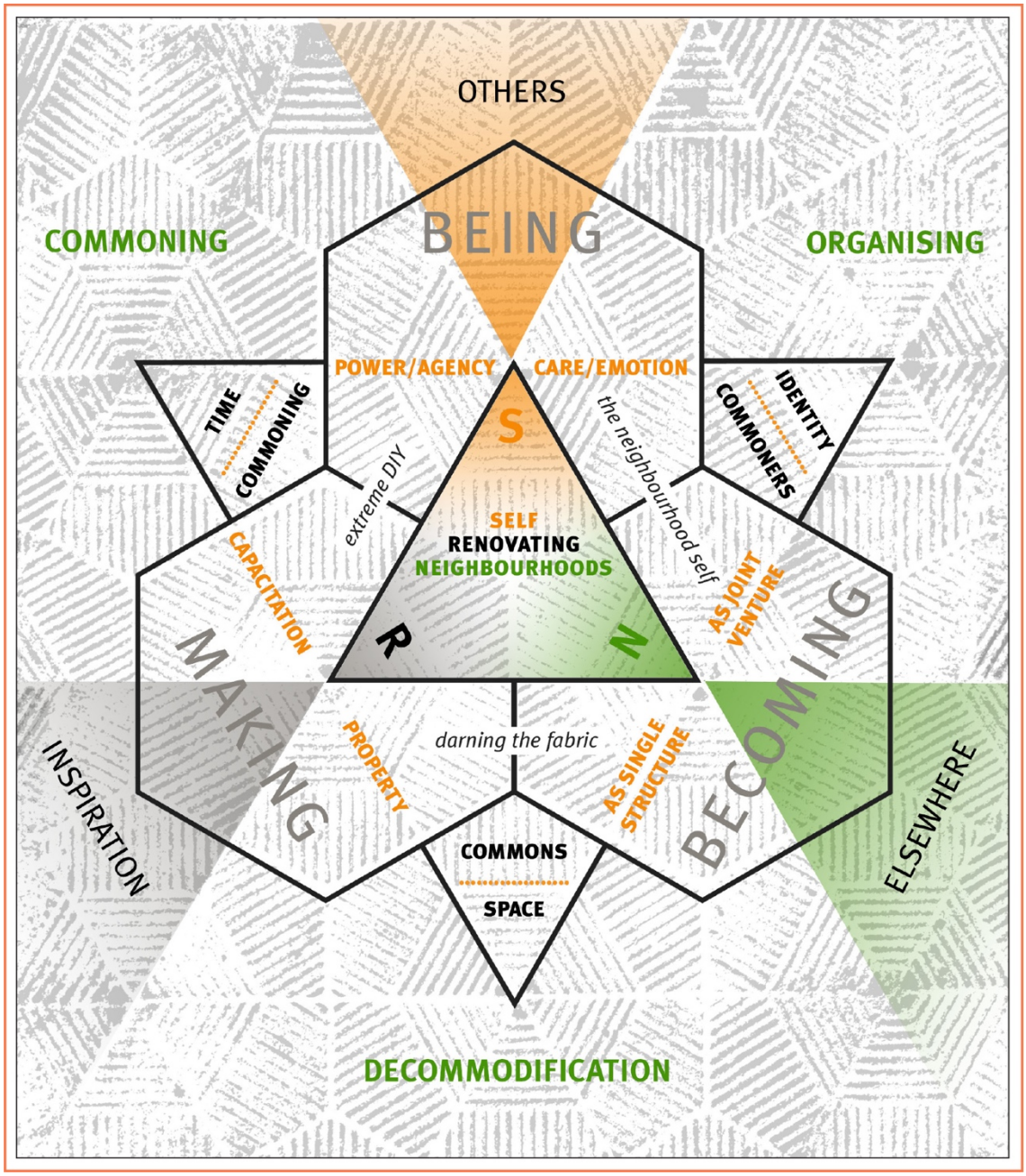
2012



2016



2021: The SRN Nexus



Produced from my sketches by Sue Lawes of FiveToNine Design, using her own rubbings and reimaginings of the surviving floor in the Observer Building vaults

APPENDIX J: List of Figures

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