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Institute for Collaborative
Research on Ageing



COMMUNITY INTERVENTIONS TO PROMOTE 'AGEING IN PLACE'

Developing the 'Village' model in Manchester



By Mhorag Goff, Patty Doran, Chris Phillipson & Daniela D'Andreta.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

THE PROJECT



This report describes a programme of work developing neighbourhood-based interventions, with a particular focus on supporting people to age well within their communities. The research, funded by Manchester City Council, Manchester Health and Social Care Commissioning, and the University of Manchester, tested the potential of adapting an approach known in the USA as the Village model. Villages are defined as: 'self-governing grassroots, community-based organizations developed with the sole purpose of enabling people to remain in their own homes as they age'.

In the USA, where this model has been most extensively developed, older residents have worked together to form membership-based groups to address a variety of age-related needs. The Manchester Urban Villages project explored the potential of the Village model, using participatory approaches working with groups of older people in two inner-city communities: the Brunswick Estate (in Ardwick) and in Levenshulme. Residents have been supported in developing seven community-based projects aimed at reducing isolation and extending social participation.

The research team developed the following definition of what a Village might represent:

'A collaborative movement led by residents to provide a better quality of life for people over 50 living in their home and neighbourhood. As part of this, residents come together to identify the services that they need and how these could be better managed and delivered in their community. Older residents might consider new types of support or new approaches to accessing and organising existing services'.

THE AREAS

The neighbourhoods selected for the research represented contrasting challenges in which to work: The Brunswick Estate, whilst retaining a strong network of community organisations, had experienced considerable disruption in respect of access to formal and informal space. Levenshulme had retained important neighbourhood facilities, including a recently-built combined library and leisure centre, and Levenshulme Inspire Community Centre, which housed a café and supported a range of activities within the neighbourhood.

THE RESEARCH METHODS

The project developed a participatory research design, underpinned by an ethnographic approach which involved the research team working with residents, together with a range of neighbourhood and city stakeholders. The pilot phase of the project involved an intensive period of fieldwork, including time with individuals and organisations living on the Brunswick Estate and Levenshulme. To help develop contacts and relationships, the project rented desk space in buildings within the localities: in Brunswick Church which is located at the centre of the Estate;

and in Levenshulme Inspire, a multi-purpose church and community centre located on Stockport Road in the main shopping area of Levenshulme.

The project organised focus groups with older people and community workers in both neighbourhoods, using a video describing the Village model, based on interviews with two of the project researchers and material drawing on examples from the USA. The focus groups also used short-stories about situations which older people needing support might face. These were used as a means of encouraging discussion about possible options and solutions that might be developed within the neighbourhoods.

THE GROUPS

- **Women's Footprints** an intergenerational and multi-ethnic community group based on the Brunswick Estate, established with the aim of promoting support for women both on the Estate and adjacent areas.
- **Brunswick Collective.** Led by a Brunswick resident, a group of over-50s living on the Brunswick Estate developed a number of health-related and social activities.
- **The Neighbourly Gardening Project,** led by a Brunswick resident, whose activities have included: campaigning for environmental improvements on the Estate, improving the gardens of older people, and developing a series of workshops to fund gardening activity in Brunswick.
- **Travelling Story-Book.** This project, based at Brunswick Church, involved the production of a video capturing residents on the Estate talking about their childhood memories, overlaid

with illustration/animation designed for a primary school audience.

- **Men's Arts Project.** This project, led by a Brunswick resident, worked with older men living alone on the Brunswick Estate. The project uses cultural engagement (e.g. visits to galleries, cinemas, theatres, poetry readings) as a means of developing new ways to extend social networks.
- **Meal Buddies.** This project, based at Levenshulme Inspire, provides nutritionally-balanced pre-prepared 'takeaway' meals, collected by volunteers who take them to housebound older residents where they eat together at a lunch or dinner time.
- **Inspire the Choir.** The choir provides a forum for people to enjoy singing and to be able to express themselves creatively. The choir has the aim of helping people to feel a sense of belonging, extending to being part of a larger choir community.

ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE URBAN VILLAGES PROJECT

- **Work with diverse groups of older residents:** The majority of Urban Villages projects recruited from groups under-represented in age-friendly work, notably women from different ethnic and migrant backgrounds (e.g. Women's Footprints, Brunswick Collective), or people with mental health difficulties (e.g. Men's Arts Group), or those experiencing isolation through illness and disability (e.g. Meal Buddies).
- **Focus on health and well-being:** Projects developed a variety of interventions around health-related issues, including: exercise and mobility (Brunswick Collective); healthy eating (Meal Buddies and Inspire);

personal development and life course transitions (Women's Footprints); mental health concerns (Men's Arts Group and Women's Footprints); and health benefits attached to improving the environment (the Neighbourly Garden Project).

- **Development of new skills amongst older people and project participants:** Urban Villages funded individuals to attend project management and financial budgeting courses, to assist their work in managing and developing programmes. A condition of receiving financial support for any project was preparing a costed proposal and submitting regular written reports of progress if successful. These requirements assisted the development of skills which could be translated into successful funding applications to other organisations, as has been the case with four of the groups supported by the project. Work with Urban Villages also encouraged one group to move from dependence on University support for funding and administration of funds, to having a separate bank account and business address.
- **Strengthening of social networks:** This was a key objective for Urban Villages, and there is some evidence of progress having been achieved with a number of groups. This was especially the case with Levenshulme Inspire, with the work matching volunteers to people largely restricted – through physical disabilities – to their own homes; and the establishment of Inspire the Choir. Early indications from the Men's Art group also suggest that it has been successful in bringing together previously isolated older men with a limited number of local contacts. There is also evidence from the work of Women's Footprints of successful engagement with

women from a range of ethnic and migrant backgrounds, some of whom were facing difficult transitions association with divorce, bereavement, and/or poor mental health.

BARRIERS ENCOUNTERED BY THE URBAN VILLAGES PROJECT

- **Limited access to formal and informal spaces:** This was a particular issue on the Brunswick Estate with restricted access to the type of informal spaces essential to supporting social ties. The Estate has a high proportion of single men and women reliant on facilities which were demolished during the re-development of the Estate.
- **Problems recruiting volunteers:** There was limited capacity to recruit and manage volunteers for some projects. There was some discussion around the expectation to reward volunteers with incentives but this proved difficult to implement. It was also challenging to recruit volunteers to projects where a 'critical mass' of people had yet to be engaged.
- **Problems recruiting participants:** On the Brunswick Estate, delays were experienced in distributing information. The groups also found it difficult to target particular individuals – notably those housebound or isolated – given the absence of information about where they might be found.
- **Lack of trust in local anchor institutions:** On the Brunswick Estate, there are a range of organisations influencing the community e.g. Solutions 4 Brunswick (S4B), the City Council, and the University. The project highlighted the need for greater transparency around decisions on issues affecting those living on the Estate. In the case of Levenshulme, there is the danger of older and poorer

residents being excluded from a vision for neighbourhood development dominated by gentrification and services designed around young professionals and related groups. This confirms the importance of the Inspire centre as the base for community activities, a source of stability given the substantial demographic and social change affecting the neighbourhood.

- **Insecurities over funding of projects:** Although highly regarded for its work, long term funding for Levenshulme Inspire has still to be secured. Inspire’s services are provided by a small number of highly committed part-time paid staff and regular volunteers whose contracts, in the case of paid staff, are fixed-term. There is, therefore, the risk of losing local knowledge and commitment to the age-friendliness of services provided. In the case of the various groups on the Brunswick Estate, all are dependent upon applications for funding sources of different kinds, with these reliant upon the initiative of committed individuals with limited access to administrative or organisational support.

RECOMMENDATIONS ARISING FROM THE WORK OF URBAN VILLAGES

The following recommendations are designed to support strategies and policies laid out in documents such as Our Manchester, and A Healthier Manchester, and equivalent documents for the City Region. The work of Urban Villages highlights the need to strengthen work in the following areas:

- **Building social infrastructure**
- **Improving mental and physical health in low income communities**

- **Harnessing housing improvements and redevelopment with tackling health inequalities**
- **Strengthening community work skills**
- **Developing the role of anchor institutions**
- **Strengthening organisations led by older people within the community**



- 1 **On the Brunswick Estate: there is a need to expand the range of community spaces to complement those provided by existing organisations such as Brunswick Church and the Salvation Army.** The construction of the Extra-Care facility on the Estate has the potential to offer a significant resource. The best examples of this kind of facility are run as ‘community hubs’ developing relationships with different groups across the local community. Levenshulme Inspire serves as a base for organising a wide range of activities; it is essential to secure long-term financial support for the staff and for running the building.

- 2 The majority of the projects developed in the Urban Villages project explored a range of issues relating to physical and mental health, with implications for finding new ways of developing age-friendly activity.** Given the complex health inequalities facing many communities, tackling health concerns – mental as well as physical health – must be at the heart of developing age-friendly communities. The Meal Buddies work in Levenshulme was illustrative of the potential for developing projects with positive social and health outcomes. This programme presented an opportunity to pursue additional dimensions related to sustainable food and nutrition, food consciousness, and community-building around food and eating. We also recommend the Meal Buddies concept to work highlighted in Our Manchester, and to the aims of the Age Well: Nutrition & Hydration programme laid out in Transforming the Health of Our Population in Greater Manchester, linking the project within wider Greater Manchester healthy ageing and nutrition-related work.
- 3 There are also broader interventions that could be considered in respect of aligning health and age-friendly issues.** The regeneration of the Brunswick Estate should examine how to link housing improvements and redevelopment with the challenge of tackling health inequalities. Health-related interventions may be especially helpful in addressing the social dislocations which are an inevitable accompaniment to urban regeneration. Lessons from the NHS Healthy New Towns programme are also relevant to consider, for community health interventions in general, and urban regeneration in particular.
- 4 The work of Urban Villages underlines the need for strengthening community work skills as a pre-condition for developing age-friendly communities.** We think that community work is widespread in many neighbourhoods but often goes unrecognised and unsupported. On both the Brunswick Estate and in Levenshulme, a range of groups and individuals were actively attempting to promote change and improve the lives of residents. It is recommended that more attention is given to providing resources to those involved, increasing their influence within the community, and extending their range of skills. Manchester City Council might work with a local university or further education college to develop an accredited community work programme, focusing on a broad range of skills, as well as specific modules on activities and interventions with particular groups. Programmes might be targeted at particular groups currently under-represented in age-friendly and similar work – notably those from minority ethnic groups, and the LGBTQI community. The effectiveness of such programmes could be increased if developed in co-operation with bodies such as GMCVO, housing providers, and other relevant groups.
- 5 The importance of anchor institutions within Manchester is highlighted in this report.** The University of Manchester is an important 'anchor' within the context of the Brunswick Estate. The development of the Extra Care facility on the Brunswick Estate offers substantial scope for University involvement. At the time of writing this report, the plans for the building include: a Bistro, Community Centre, Day Care facility, together with Care and Support services. There is considerable

potential for University departments and institutes to provide support, student placements, as well as to develop research projects in collaboration with the partners involved in the scheme. The School of Nursing, Midwifery and Social Work, along with the Manchester Institute for Collaborative Research on Ageing (MICRA), might be of particular relevance here. We see an exciting prospect for developing links with their courses and research programmes. There might also be a potential role for the University in expanding facilities within the Community Centre, for example in supporting the provision of a library, IT equipment, and other information services.

6 Our work also suggests that the University might develop a longer-term presence in Levenshulme, especially through the work of two of its research institutes: MICRA and the Manchester Urban Institute. We think that MICRA could play a supportive role assisting with the evaluation of work undertaken at Inspire, for example through support from students undertaking dissertations for master's degrees. There is also scope for involving Inspire as a partner in research programmes looking at pressures facing older people 'ageing in place' in communities undergoing substantial social and economic change (of which Levenshulme is certainly one). There is also the potential for researchers linked with the Urban Institute to propose more general studies, notably around the effects of gentrification (developing in some parts of the locality), the social impact of changes in the housing market, and the role of the retail sector within the local economy. The University might consider the merit of becoming an

Age-Friendly University, joining the global network of universities working to adapt higher education to the range of challenges associated with demographic change. Such a move might be an effective way of bringing together initiatives promoted internally as well as externally by the University of Manchester in supporting research and policy development around age-related concerns.

7 We think there is now a need for a new age-friendly model, one which has a more organisational dimension, where the focus is on community change in a broad sense but where groups of older people run associations which have sufficient power and resources to negotiate with local services, housing providers, anchor institutions, and related bodies. This is especially necessary given the trend towards increasing complexity in the range of agencies providing services, set against the continuing vulnerability (growth of single person households, lifelong poverty, pressures on family carers) of the individuals and communities they are designed to serve. The result is an imbalance of power requiring the development of new age-friendly models if the focusing of services around 'people and communities' is to be achieved.

8 Developing a Village-type model with appropriate physical and social resources, would seem fully aligned with a devolution agenda focused on giving greater powers to local communities. We suggest taking a number of pilot neighbourhoods across Manchester, where 50 – 100 people, say from 50 years upwards, are brought together to develop new approaches to building age-friendly activities within their communities. The range and type of activities might vary according to the type of neighbourhood: One might have a particular need for a food co-operative or handyman service; another might focus on health and well-being; another might develop an educational and social dimension. Some might bring together groups under-represented in age-friendly work (e.g. Muslim women; LGBTQI groups; older people from newly arrived migrant communities). Some might draw upon all of these different elements and/or develop others.

9 The key issue is that the plans to integrate services at a neighbourhood level, as part of strategies outlined in Our Manchester, and the Greater Manchester Model, need to be matched by strengthening neighbourhood groups representing older people. Without this, groups will continue to be marginalised in gaining access to, and influencing, amenities and services being developed on their behalf.



COMMUNITY INTERVENTIONS TO PROMOTE 'AGEING IN PLACE': DEVELOPING THE 'VILLAGE' MODEL IN MANCHESTER



SECTION ONE: BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH

INTRODUCTION

This report describes a programme of work developing neighbourhood-based interventions, with a particular focus on supporting people to age well within their communities. The research, funded by Manchester City Council, Manchester Health and Social Care Commissioning, and the University of Manchester, tested the potential of adapting an approach known in the USA as the Village model. Villages are defined as: 'self-governing grassroots, community-based organizations developed with the sole purpose of enabling people to remain in their own homes as they age'¹

In the USA, where this model has been most extensively developed, older residents have worked together to form membership-based groups to address a variety of age-related needs. The Manchester Urban Villages project explored the potential of the Village model, using participatory approaches working

with groups of older people in two inner-city communities: the Brunswick Estate (in Ardwick) and in Levenshulme. Residents have been supported in developing seven community-based projects aimed at reducing isolation and extending social participation.

DEVELOPING AGE-FRIENDLY COMMUNITIES

The project was developed alongside the growing interest in what has been termed by the World Health Organization (WHO) as 'age-friendly cities and communities'², and in policies aimed at helping those wanting to remain in their homes and neighbourhoods as they grow old or to 'age in place'. Manchester City Council has played a leadership role in promoting such policies, being the first UK city to join the WHO Global Network of Age-Friendly Cities and Communities (GNAFCC) in 2010³. Support for the testing of a Village-type approach was outlined in the 2018-2019 Delivery Plan for Age-Friendly Manchester.

Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) has produced an Age-Friendly Strategy which aims to make GM: 'the UK's first age-friendly city region, with a focus on improving the quality of later life of... residents and co-designing with older people'. A key element of this work is recognising age-friendly places as a 'crucial resource for improving the lives of older people'. More specifically, age-friendly places are viewed as 'neighbourhoods which treat everyone with respect, enable older people to participate in community activities, help people stay healthy and active, and making it easier for older people to stay connected'⁴.

AGEING IN PLACE

Greater Manchester's (GM) plans for health and social care give particular emphasis to community-based provision, highlighting the goal of ensuring that: 'More people will be supported to stay well and live at home for as long as possible'⁴.

This is underpinned by a 'place-based' approach, with a focus on 'integrating services around people, places and their needs, focusing on prevention [and] new forms of support. The objective is to bring: 'services together at the neighbourhood level, designed around the person and their needs rather than themes, policy areas or organisations'⁵. This point is reinforced in documents such as Our Manchester which highlight the need to: 'radically transform public services so they are focused around people and communities rather than organisational silos'⁶.

The argument for a neighbourhood-based model is reinforced by economic and social inequalities experienced by many communities, as well as major changes affecting populations across the region. Of

particular importance is the projected growth of single-person households, with a projected 66% increase in the numbers of people of 75 and over in GM living alone: from 97,000 in 2011 to 161,000 in 2036. For men, one in three over-75 are likely to be living alone by 2036. This group may be especially vulnerable to social isolation, with the impact of divorce in mid-life together with health and financial problems acting as contributory factors⁷.

A range of initiatives to support 'ageing in place' have been led in GM by Ambition for Ageing (AfA), a £10.2 million GM level programme aimed at creating more age-friendly places, working with 25 neighbourhoods across eight local authorities. The programme has a particular focus on tackling problems associated with social isolation in later life, viewed in relation to different types of inequalities running through later life.

AGEING AND AUSTERITY

The Urban Villages project was developed during a period of significant financial pressures facing the City Council. The Centre for Cities, in their Cities Outlook 2019⁸, have highlighted the extent to which cuts to local government spending have hit cities much harder in the North of England than those elsewhere in Britain. Manchester experienced a drop of nearly 17% in total spending over the period 2009/10 to 2017/18. Our Manchester confirms the extent to which cuts to public services has disproportionately impacted on cities and more deprived areas, concluding that: 'Public services, the voluntary sector and communities need to adapt to find new ways of working, although there will inevitably be an impact on the types and levels of services on offer...A new relationship between the state and the citizen needs to be forged to manage

these issues in a way that reduces the risk of inequality and allows people to reach their potential⁹. This report examines the potential of the Village model in this context, with particular emphasis on its ability to strengthen the capacity of people to access to resources at a neighbourhood-level and beyond.

UNIVERSITY SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

The Urban Villages project has drawn upon work within the University of Manchester, coming under the heading of 'University social responsibility'. Buffel, Skyrme and Phillipson highlight the extent to which this activity: 'reflects the aspirations of universities to transform the communities of which they are a central part'¹⁰.

A key element is engaging with: 'local communities disadvantaged in some way or hav[ing] limited access to university resources'. Research is viewed as playing an important role in developing the social responsibility agenda: 'by producing knowledge and findings which can improve the quality of life of groups such as older people; and by empowering local communities directly in the research process'¹⁰.

Such activity has been given added impetus by the report of the UPP Foundation Civic University Commission, which examined the role of universities as 'anchor institutions', urging them to share resources with local communities and organisations, especially those experiencing economic and social pressures. The UPP highlights the importance for universities of a 'locally-focused strategy to underpin their collective research efforts', as well as their wider impact influencing the 'culture and wellbeing' of communities.¹¹

NEIGHBOURHOODS AND NETWORKS

Policies directed at support given for older people have, over the past decade, give increased emphasis to the idea of 'ageing in place'. This approach draws upon the advantages which are seen to come from relationships and connections within neighbourhoods. Neighbourhoods may be especially important where support beyond the immediate locality is absent, where people have limited incomes, problems with physical mobility, and/or poor mental health. Despite this, the mechanisms for strengthening communities remain unclear, with questions to be asked such as:

- **What are the most important neighbourhood connections to develop?**
- **How can groups experiencing poverty and/or poor health best be involved in strengthening communities?**
- **What is the role of public, private, and not-for-profit organisations in supporting ageing in place?**

Ensuring opportunities for social interaction becomes especially significant for those dependent on ties within their neighbourhood. Of relevance here is that almost two-thirds (60%) of older people identify their most important relationships to be in the neighbourhoods in which they live.¹² Gardner coined the term 'natural neighbourhood networks' to refer to the 'web of informal relationships and interactions' running through daily life within communities¹³.

Building on this point, Blokland and Noordhoff's research suggests that whilst 'strong' ties (e.g. associated with family) are important, 'weaker' or 'looser' ties may also play a significant role in providing support.¹⁴

These findings highlight the extent to which fleeting, or chance, contacts may be critical for creating a sense of trust and improving co-operation within neighbourhoods.

SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE AND 'THIRD PLACES'

Neighbourhoods affect daily life in a variety of ways, influencing the range and type of resources (social as well as material) available to individuals. To illustrate the importance of neighbourhoods, two concepts are especially helpful: 'social infrastructure' and 'third spaces'. The former refers to: 'the range of activities, organisations and facilities supporting the formation, development and maintenance of social relationships in a community'¹⁵.



Social infrastructure can include community spaces such as village halls, public services such as libraries, as well as commercial spaces such as cafés and shopping malls. Third spaces focus on the physical locations outside the home (first space) or second place (workplace) that facilitate social interaction and support. The importance of these 'ordinary spaces' – pubs, cafés, barber shops, grocery stores – tends to be overlooked. Increasingly, though, research emphasises the extent to which they are a vital component in making neighbourhoods work. Finlay and her colleagues point to the extent to which having a choice of third spaces can promote good health and well-being. They write:

'A local bar, for example, operates as more than a physical establishment for patrons to purchase food and beverages. As a third space, people gather here for formal and informal socialization and entertainment...In examining these spaces...we can observe how third spaces foster a sense of community and belonging, thereby building perceptions of security, confidence and comfort. They encourage people to be physically active and socially connected to others, which have clear health implications'¹⁶.

A report by Jopling and Jones on volunteering highlighted a significant barrier to participation where neighbourhoods lacked social infrastructure. The authors concluded that:

'In our community research the importance of places to meet and the challenges presented by poor transport came through very strongly as barriers to informal as well as formal contributions. In many communities we saw that contributions centred around available spaces was often bounded by the limitations of those spaces. For example, in communities where the only meeting spaces were based in faith institutions, there were reduced opportunities for cross-cultural activity and some people felt excluded because they did not see the space as being for "them"¹⁷.

We think access to social infrastructure, along with access for formal and informal meeting spaces, is vital for building age-friendly communities. This issue is examined in different parts of this report and is taken-up in the recommendations in Section Four. We now move to Section Two with a review of the development of the Village movement and its relationship to ageing in place.



SECTION TWO: THE VILLAGE MODEL AND AGEING IN PLACE: DEVELOPING A COMMUNITY-BASED RESEARCH PROJECT

INTRODUCTION

This section describes the background to the development of the Village model in the USA, reviewing its origins and main attributes. It then considers the Manchester Urban Villages study, summarising the methodology developed for the research, the characteristics of the neighbourhoods studied, and findings from the preparatory work undertaken for the research. This section also explores some of the challenges faced by the communities selected for the study, together with the implications for work in developing the Village model.

THE ORIGINS OF THE VILLAGE MODEL

In the USA, a number of approaches have developed to support ageing in place, the

most important being Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities (NORCS), and the Village model. The first has been defined as:

‘Community-level initiatives that bring together older adults and diverse stakeholder within a residential area with a significantly large number of older adults to facilitate and co-ordinate a range of activities, relationships and services to promote ageing in place’.¹

The second as:

‘Self-governing, grassroots community-based organizations, developed with the sole purpose of enabling people to remain in their communities as they age’¹

To date, these approaches have had limited take-up in Europe, despite the widespread adoption of community care policies which support ageing in place. However, the importance of the Village/NORC-type approach concerns its potential for creating resources (or social infrastructure) which may be in short supply within neighbourhoods

The Village model was first developed in the Beacon Hill neighbourhood of Boston by older residents who wanted to remain within their community for as long as possible. Lehning and her colleagues summarise the work of the Boston Village as follows: '[it] aims to address the multiple needs of older adults, encourage mutual assistance and honor individual choice. [The Village] offers access to vetted discounted providers, volunteer-provided services and support, and social and cultural activities. Members provide financial resources through their dues, donations, and human resources through their leadership of [the Village]'¹².

By 2019 over 200 Villages had been established in the USA, with around 150 under development. The majority are resident-led, initiated, and have ongoing input from older people. The movement joins together older residents living in a neighbourhood, drawing on the benefits of collective organisation to arrange support, services and activities. Graham and colleagues note that to achieve this:

'Village staff and volunteers provide services such as transportation, companionship, handyman support, technology assistance, and health care advocacy...Villages promote social engagement by organising social events, parties, group activities, and educational

classes. They also offer opportunities for civic engagement through member-to-member volunteering'¹².

ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF THE VILLAGE MODEL



What are the benefits of the Village model for promoting the goal of 'ageing in place'? A significant dimension concerns the value of bringing people together in a neighbourhood, and drawing on their experiences and resources to improve the lives both of the individuals involved and the community as a whole. Scharlach and colleagues highlight from their research the extent to which Villages can assist with promoting age-friendliness in the wider community. They found that: 'More than one-third of Villages are engaged in direct or indirect efforts to improve physical or social infrastructures or improve community attitudes or policies toward older persons'¹³.

Bringing people together can result in important practical benefits, such as increasing the purchasing power of older people: 'Nearly 40% of Villages had negotiated with external service providers to serve their members at a discount...[it seems likely that this] purchasing power might enable them to negotiate for better quality services at a lower cost, with potential secondary impacts on the quality of goods and services available to other older people living in the area'¹³.

Graham and colleagues carried out an evaluation of the impact of the Village model and its contribution to ageing in place. They considered the impact of membership of a Village on issues relating to social engagement, well-being, independence, and access to services. Nine Villages were studied, mostly in urban areas, which had been in operation for between two to five years at the time of the survey. The number of older people in each Village ranged from 52 to 195. The research found that nearly 79% of respondents agreed that they knew more people because of Village membership; 59% felt more socially connected; respondents reported feeling more confident in accessing health and social care services; and around one-half of the respondents felt that membership of the Village had improved their quality of life².

Davitt and colleagues report from their study that:

'Almost all Villages report that older adults were very or extremely involved in founding the Village and often serve on governing bodies. Villages leverage existing community volunteers to support members, with a majority of their services provided either by older adults or community volunteers as opposed to paid staff'⁴.

But there may be some limitations to the Village model relevant to the Manchester context. Graham et al. reflecting on findings from their research, suggest that: 'Though self-reported impacts are promising overall, especially in the areas of social engagement and service access, there is uncertainty about the Village model's ability to address the needs of the most vulnerable seniors. Nationally, Villages tend to attract senior

members who are white, economically secure, and with relatively low levels of disability... Results from this research suggest that Villages tend to have the most positive impacts for members who are the healthiest and therefore have the lowest risk of institutionalization'².

This suggests that a different type of Village model may need to be developed in communities under pressure from inequalities of different kinds. This much is acknowledged by Lehning et al. who indicate from their survey that different Village models are beginning to emerge, reflecting contrasting membership, community, and organizational characteristics. They note that to date, the dominant form has been the consumer-driven kind, with extensive involvement of members in Village operations and funding. However, they suggest that: '[this type of Village] may place greater physical, social and economic demands on those who develop and join the organisation, and therefore discourage (whether intentionally or unintentionally) the participation of older adults with more health needs or fewer financial resources'⁵.

The authors draw out some important questions from their analysis relevant to the work in Manchester:

'...is the consumer-driven Village best suited for advantaged communities with few assistance needs? Is there a Village type that is best able to serve communities with fewer financial or social resources, or with less cultural preference for elder social engagement and individual choice?... Does one [type of Village] work best in one context, and another type work best in a different context?'⁵.

The Manchester-based research project described in this report sets out to explore the potential of the Village model, using participatory approaches working with groups of older people in two inner-city neighbourhoods. The Village model has typically, as described, been developed in areas with medium to high levels of resources, drawing heavily upon formal volunteering.



In contrast, the Manchester work was carried out in low income communities and where the extent of formal (as opposed to informal) volunteering may be restricted⁶. Hence, the objective of the study was to see what type of activities or Village-type models might emerge, working with groups with contrasting resources to those of their counterparts in the USA.

To support our understanding of the Village concept, the research team developed the following definition of what a Village might represent:

‘A collaborative movement led by residents to provide a better quality of life for people over 50 living in their home and neighbourhood. As part of this, residents come together to identify the services that they need and how these could be better managed and delivered in their community. Older residents might consider new types of support or new approaches to accessing and organising existing services’.

We applied this concept during the scoping phase of the project carried out during June - September 2017. The main phase of the work was carried out between January 2018 and June 2019.

METHODOLOGY OF THE VILLAGE STUDY

The project developed a participatory research design, underpinned by an ethnographic approach which involved the research team working with residents, together with a range of neighbourhood and city stakeholders. Lewis and Symons define the work of ethnographers as follows:

‘[They] observe and participate in the daily lives of people, working alongside them, asking questions and watching as they go about their daily lives. Misunderstandings, fallings-out and friction provide particularly fruitful moments for analysis, as they reveal underlying ambiguities in social understandings. Where “classic” anthropology primarily focused on rural locations, urban ethnographers now construct a field by living and working alongside a group in urban locations’⁷.

The pilot phase of the project involved an intensive period of fieldwork, including time with individuals and organisations living on the Brunswick Estate and Levenshulme, the two sites selected for the Urban Villages project (see Annex A for a list of the organisations and individuals contacted). To help develop contacts and relationships, the project rented desk space in buildings within the localities: in Brunswick Church which is located at the centre of the Estate; and in Levenshulme Inspire, a multi-purpose church and community centre located on Stockport Road

in the main shopping area of Levenshulme. The project organised focus groups with older people and community workers in both neighbourhoods, using a video describing the Village model, based on interviews with two of the project researchers and material drawing on examples from the USA. The focus groups also used short-stories (or vignettes) about situations which older people needing support might face. These were used as a means of encouraging discussion about possible options and solutions that might be developed within the neighbourhoods.

A range of methods was adopted to spread the word about the idea of Urban Villages, including: leafleting around the neighbourhoods; participation in community events; and discussions with relevant professionals and third sector organisations involved in health and social care. More specifically, the research sought to involve individuals and groups in the co-design, leadership and implementation of projects to assist the goal of ageing in place. The overall aim of the project was:

- To stimulate new collaborations and social networks;
- To unlock additional resources through joint activities; and
- To develop new community amenities that might benefit groups who may feel marginalised by existing types of support.

THE NEIGHBOURHOOD CONTEXT

The project selected two inner-city neighbourhoods, the Brunswick Estate and Levenshulme, as the focus for the project. The neighbourhoods represented

contrasting challenges in which to work: the first undergoing a substantial (Private Finance Investment-led) programme of regeneration; the second, an inner-city community with high levels of poverty but mixed with early signs of gentrification.

The areas provided significant contrasts for supporting ageing in place: The Brunswick Estate, whilst retaining a strong network of community organisations, had experienced considerable disruption in respect of access to formal and informal space; Levenshulme, by way of contrast, had retained important neighbourhood facilities, including a recently-built combined library and leisure centre, and Levenshulme Inspire Community Centre, which housed a café and supported a range of activities within the neighbourhood. The following section provides a description of the demographic and social characteristics of the two areas.

THE BRUNSWICK ESTATE

The Brunswick Estate is part of the Ardwick ward, adjacent to the University of Manchester.

The neighbourhood is bordered by major roads on three sides of the Estate. The Northern boundary, which separates the Estate from the city centre, is the elevated 'Mancunian Way' urban expressway. The East and West boundaries of the Estate are both major arterial routes, which radiate from the city centre to the south (A34) and south east (A6) of the city. Brunswick is a former social housing estate (built in the 1960s and 1970s), previously managed by Manchester City Council, undergoing urban regeneration funded by a Private Finance Initiative (PFI) led by a consortium called Solutions 4 Brunswick (S4B)⁸.

The University of Manchester's Social Responsibility team begun developing relationships in Brunswick 18 months prior to the start of this research⁹, and another research project was active on the estate at the same time as the Village project¹⁰. The Brunswick Regeneration PFI combines government funding with private investment. Improvements include home refurbishments, new homes for sale, and changes to the design and layout of the neighbourhood. Housing on the estate comprises a mix of 1 and 2 bedroom flats, and (mainly) 2 and 3 bedroom houses; there are four multi-storey blocks. The regeneration has included the refurbishment of over 650 homes; 140 new homes built for rent (2015-2019); 320 new houses for sale; demolition of 296 'unsatisfactory homes'; a new extra-care facility (with 60 apartments); a new housing office and retail space.

The Brunswick Estate is located in the Ardwick ward of Manchester. The population of the Estate is 4,405 (2015 estimate), with 250 people who are 65 and over. The Ardwick ward research has a number of characteristics which make it distinctive compared to other wards in Manchester. It is the one of youngest areas in the City: with 13.5% of its population 50 and over against an England and Wales average of 34.6%. Ardwick is home to a high proportion of minority ethnic groups, with 34% Asian, 15.3% black, and 6.9% other ethnic groups (2011 Census).



The characteristics of households in Ardwick suggest challenges for an ageing in place policy: over two-thirds of households 50-plus (67.3%) are headed by someone single, widowed, divorced or separated (38.7% for England and Wales); and 42% of those 50 plus live alone (24.2% for England and Wales). A majority (57.6%) of those 50-plus in Ardwick report a long-term limiting condition of some kind (either 'a little' or a lot'); this compares with a figure of 36.8% for England and Wales; 59% of the population 50 plus has no access to a car or van compared with 20.7% for England and Wales.

According to the 2015 Indices of Deprivation published by Communities and Local Government (Manchester City Council, 2015), 26.3% of residents in Ardwick are classified as income deprived (ranked 15 out of 32 wards in Manchester), with 50% of the ward's Lower Super Output Areas in the most deprived 10% of England. According to the 2019 Indices of Deprivation published by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, the Brunswick Estate is ranked in the most deprived 20% nationally, although this is broadly in line with the Manchester average. For income deprivation affecting older people, however, Brunswick is in the worst 2% nationally, suggesting significant differences between a poorer, older population and a more advantaged younger cohort.

LEVENSHULME

Levenshulme is a neighbourhood in South East Manchester that is bisected by the A6, an important route into the city from the south. Because of its size, Levenshulme does not align neatly with the existing political boundaries within Manchester. Although there is an electoral ward called 'Levenshulme', the city council recognise a broader definition

of Levenshulme in their neighbourhood planning strategy, which includes parts of neighbouring Longsight and Gorton wards. The neighbourhood on either side of the A6 is slightly different in character, with the area bordering Gorton on the east side being more deprived and more densely populated than the area bordering Burnage on the West side.

Levenshulme has a substantial amount of back to back terraced housing, as well as larger Victorian and Edwardian houses. Historically, the ward has been home to substantial Irish and Pakistani communities (17.8% of the population were Asian/Asian British in the 2011 Census). The area is now a destination for many different immigrant communities, including in more recent years the Roma community; it also has a large population of students and young professionals.

A large number of properties are landlord-owned (10.6% of people 50 plus are privately renting compared with 7.1 % for England and Wales), however the area has recently attracted more homeowners as it is one of the more affordable areas to buy a house in South Manchester. This is reflected by gentrification in some parts of the ward, with commensurate increases in house prices. Levenshulme still has relatively high levels of deprivation, with 18.1% of residents classified as income deprived; 30.8% of those 50 plus in Levenshulme have no access to a car or van compared with 20.7% for England and Wales: there are differences between the West (29.7% no access) and East Levenshulme (41.5%).

Levenshulme has a population of around 16,500 people (2016 Mid-Year Population Estimate by ward – original source ONS), with 18.9% of its population 50 and over

compared with 34.6% for England and Wales. In Levenshulme the proportion of people 65 and over decreased by 7% between 2004 and 2014. There are high levels of health care need amongst the older population within the neighbourhood: the 2011 Census indicated that 43.4% of those 50 and over were limited 'a lot' or 'a little' in respect of their daily activities (compared with 38.7% England and Wales). In respect of marital status, nearly one in two households in Levenshulme (47.1%) 50 plus was headed by someone single, widowed, divorced or separated, compared with 38.7% for England and Wales. 31% of those 50 and over live alone, compared with a figure of 24.2% for England and Wales.

BRUNSWICK AND LEVENSHULME COMPARED

The two areas contained a mixture of similarities and contrasts for the Urban Villages project to explore. Both have experienced declines in their population of older people but with various challenges for those living in the community, given health and income inequalities, limited access to independent transport, and the potential for social isolation given the high proportion of single households. However, there were also important differences between the neighbourhoods.

Brunswick was undergoing housing regeneration with significant alterations to the physical and social infrastructure of the estate. The first reflected in changes associated with both new and re-furnished housing; the second highlighted by a significant loss of social space. Brunswick Church provided an important communal space on the Estate, and was home to a range of groups and activities. However, the regeneration programme, and the associated pressures on residents during

an extensive programme of rebuilding and refurbishment, was an important backdrop throughout the research programme.

Levenshulme was experiencing pressures of its own, with a changing population in respect of new, incoming groups, challenges for older homeowners maintaining their homes, or renting from private landlords, and high levels of pollution and related problems. On the other hand, the area could be said to have significant amenities of benefit to older people, including a varied shopping centre with a mix of supermarkets and low-cost retail outlets (300 shops and businesses were identified along the main shopping area in 2015), a thriving community centre (Inspire), and the re-development of the old library as an arts centre.

These contrasts across the two areas form important variations affecting the everyday lives of older people and in respect of the type of networks available, and the likely response to an initiative such as Urban Villages. The next section of this report reviews the preparatory field work to develop community organisations in the two neighbourhoods.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE PILOT WORK

AWARENESS OF THE 'AGE-FRIENDLY' AGENDA AND 'AGEING-IN-PLACE'

Following engagement with residents in the two neighbourhoods, the research team initiated discussions about views relating to 'age-friendliness' and 'ageing-in-place', as a means of opening up discussions about the idea of the Village model. The age-friendly agenda was recognised in and around the Inspire Centre in Levenshulme where there was an active group of older volunteers acting

as a campaigning task force (this group were also aware of the Manchester age-friendly strategy). There was much less awareness in other parts of Levenshulme, for example, when members of the project team visited and talked to older people at locations such as the mosque, library, churches, and a sheltered housing scheme.

In Brunswick, the researchers had to introduce these terms and alert residents to age-friendly issues as the idea had yet to be discussed in detail within the community.

The focus groups and informal discussions suggested that the label 'older people' could present difficulties. Those who were of pre-retirement age, including those in their fifties, sometimes found it difficult to locate themselves within the age-friendly agenda because it was seen to have limited relevance to their lives. During discussions, however, they did acknowledge that it was something important to begin to consider for their future well-being.

The researchers were also pointed to the negative connotations associated with being or becoming 'old' and the accompanying stereotypes. This was found to be the case across many settings in both localities. The project subsequently adjusted its language from 'older people' to 'over-50s' to register feedback about the variations and stages of ageing, with a spectrum of lifestyles and experiences associated with 'growing older'. For clarity, this was emphasised each time the Village concept was discussed in meetings within both neighbourhoods. Reflecting on this also led the team to revise the broad aim of the work as:

Supporting inter-generational collaboration as part of resident-led projects to combat the separation and potential isolation of people 50 and over from their wider communities.

GAPS IN EXISTING SERVICES FOR OLDER PEOPLE

As a basis for identifying potential projects, the researchers explored:

- **The everyday lives of older people in the two localities**
- **How their care needs were or were not met**
- **Views from carers and other stakeholders**
- **How informal, voluntary care and services were organised, and potential gaps in neighbourhood support.**

The team consulted with stakeholders and residents about the issues older people might face (or thought they would face) growing old in their homes and neighbourhoods. In addition to engaging community activists, existing community groups and service providers, special efforts were made to involve more marginalised individuals and groups in the development of the project. Although experiences differed between individuals and localities, common themes identified included:

- **Issues centred around the availability of social space**
- **Social isolation experienced by particular groups**
- **The impact of food poverty**
- **Problems with transport and mobility.**

Drawing upon our research (interviews, observations, meetings and focus groups)

from September 2017 – June 2018, these themes served to guide the development of projects, as discussed in Section Three. Some of the observations from this phase of the work are summarised below.

SOCIAL SPACE, SOCIAL ISOLATION AND COMMUNITY COHESION

In both localities, social isolation was perceived to be a key issue for older people, as was a lack of connectivity between younger/older residents and long-term/newer residents. In both Levenshulme and Brunswick, there was a sense that homes and communities were being developed in ways to attract and suit younger people in contrast to older residents. Comments from older people on the Brunswick Estate were as follows:

With all the new people coming in, you wonder, will there be opportunities to meet them? I still don't know anybody who lives in a new house round here.

I think if you're growing old in an area, you want some sort of familiarity, don't you, and this regeneration that's going on, in a few years' time people are going to walk round here and they're just not going to have any memories, and it's how do you capture those memories.

Brunswick over-50s residents identified a lack of public spaces to provide opportunities for socialisation (shops, pubs, cafes, street benches, community rooms/centre). This was seen to compound issues of isolation and division across the estate:

There's nowhere for them to go to socialise apart from the church. There's lots of guys in here, the majority of our

tenants are fellas, and they like to go out, not for alcohol, for a game of cards, darts.

In Levenshulme, an area with more place-based assets and social space, the research identified a group of Black and Asian Minority women wanting to become more integrated and connected to their community beyond their homes and mosque. When we asked in focus group settings, 'what do you think about the Village idea as a response to this issue?', suggestions included:

- **A paid community organiser with dedicated time to build personal trusting relationships with people over-50**
- **Developing intergenerational groups and activities**
- **A community hub/social centre; more green space**
- **Safe, maintained and accessible gardens for those isolated and/or housebound**
- **Street furniture, particularly benches in order for residents to rest, talk and meet.**

FOOD POVERTY

The majority of older residents we encountered were experiencing various forms of financial hardship, with concerns regarding access to good quality, healthy meals. The theme of food poverty had two dimensions: affordability and access. Over-50s residents in both localities often struggled to make ends meet and some reported limited choice over the quality and quantity of food purchased. Brunswick residents, in contrast with those in Levenshulme, had restricted food choice in respect of choice over food outlets, with the nearest supermarket often too far for many to reach and/or to carry shopping from on foot:

We know that there's a lack of places to buy food cheaply, so you're maybe spending more than other people. You could fight for a community shop at a lower rent that's actually run by the community for the community. In other areas that happens. We were told [by social housing provider] that's not going to happen, because whoever pays the most money's going to get the units, but I think if there was enough people on the Estate that said no to that, and actually fought for it [it could happen].

Food poverty was itself often connected to wider issues around social isolation. The researchers were informed about and witnessed (in both Levenshulme and Brunswick) residents offering favours to each other such as bringing meals to and feeding/walking pets of local housebound older people who would otherwise have no form of social contact.

Yeah, with the lack of shops, places to go and buy...it becomes isolating, so you...I won't name names, there's people who live within this building that very, very rarely go out that front door, because once you've done that for so long it becomes habit, and then that isolation is part of your life.

Well, isolation they say is a big issue here. I used to go in the elderly people's homes....communicate with them, how they're doing ...socialising with them, have they got other people they talk to?

When we asked in focus groups: 'What do you think about the Village idea as a response to this issue?', suggestions to support affordable food provision and communal eating included:

- **Community-based shops or delivery services**
- **Opportunities for people to cook and eat together**
- **Mobile shops**
- **Supermarket-sponsored mini-buses.**

TRANSPORT AND MOBILITY

Evidence collected during the initial phase of the research indicated gaps in transport provision for particular groups of older people, notably those who would benefit from improved links within and between local communities, rather than from suburb to city. This was an important issue given the high proportion of people in both neighbourhoods lacking independent access to transport.



During our research, it was noted that older people who were able to attend age-friendly events were often those living within walking distance, or were accompanied by a carer/ spouse, or were able to pay for and use taxis. As a result, many of the older people encountered felt that these events were not accessible to them:

Age friendly events are going on, but they're too far for some of the residents to go to, so it's costly, it's taxis, and you can't always get 'ring and ride', they can't

come on the time that you want, they can't drop you off when you're coming back.

Many residents had concerns over their physical safety due to uneven paving, and building works blocking pedestrian access. These were significant problems on the Brunswick Estate, where even walking to the nearest shop could be a problem because of the absence of benches to allow for a rest en route. Importantly, these issues were mentioned across a range of age groups within the older population, reflecting a lack of confidence walking around the neighbourhood:

A lot of my tenants can't get through the estate, they can't physically walk from here to the shops, and the ones that can, albeit it maybe on a zimmer frame, are struggling.

You sit on a bench, somebody sits at the side of you and has a chat with you, but no, you're just walking, no-one's going to stop and talk to you.

The research conducted during phase one suggested a number of important issues to explore further. As these discussions continued, the project team began to explore further what types of activities might be developed in response to these issues and the people who might lead them, as reviewed in the next section of this report.

DEVELOPING COLLABORATIVE PROJECTS

The original research brief had planned for developing a wholly participatory approach, but over time it became clear that although older people were willing to take part in

consultations, conversations and discussions about projects, there was insufficient appetite among residents to lead projects. This was reported at project meetings and both the research team and the Age-Friendly team at Manchester City Council re-affirmed the importance of ideas and delivery of activities coming from residents, with the research team acting to support, connect and facilitate projects.



A key issue was exploring who might be willing to be involved in designing and taking forward a Village project. At the start of the work, the intention was to bring together a group of 6-8 people, in each of the two areas, to develop and implement projects. This was a challenge because of the very different views and opinions within neighbourhoods, as well as in some instances conflict between groups.

The researchers needed, as a result, to understand not only the issues faced by older people living in these neighbourhoods but also the social history of the communities. A significant challenge was in designing projects and allocating funding in ways that would keep multiple stakeholders on board – especially where there were differences of opinion within groups in the same neighbourhoods.

In response to these challenges, the project moved towards a 'co-produced model' with researchers occupying advisory roles and suggesting areas which might be developed¹¹. In some instances, this approach was essential in ensuring transparency, especially in relation to budgets and project reporting.

When discussing how an Urban Village might work, residents and stakeholders were keen to widen participation beyond the 'usual suspects', to build intergenerational relationships, share workloads, develop community confidence that change could happen, and that projects could be supported and become sustainable. We worked with local residents to scope and define age-friendly projects and to work out what type of organisational models would work in the Manchester context.

CONCLUSION

The view from the initial phase of our work was that a contrasting approach would need to be adopted in the two neighbourhoods. In Brunswick, the decision was made, following contacts with various individuals, to fund a small number of projects, with the hope that these might eventually merge to form a variant of an Urban Village.

In the case of Levenshulme, it was clear that Inspire offered a significant base from which to work and to develop projects reaching out into the community. The next section of this report reviews the type of proposals which emerged following these discussions. From our summary of these, the report then reviews progress over the period of twelve months in which the projects were developed.



SECTION THREE: THE DEVELOPMENT OF URBAN VILLAGES IN BRUNSWICK AND LEVENSHULME

INTRODUCTION

This section of the report reviews the development of the Urban Villages projects, some of the obstacles encountered, and their potential contribution to support 'ageing in place'. The discussion includes 'vignettes', illustrating case studies from the work. Information is also provided about the logistics of supporting the different groups, their progress over time, and the range of organisations and individuals involved.

By the end of phase one of the research, a number of projects had been identified in Brunswick and Levenshulme, these drawing upon the views of a variety of groups and individuals within the neighbourhoods. Focus groups and one-to-one interviews were conducted, exploring ideas around specific projects. Following the ethnographic approach adopted for the research, this activity was

supplemented by observations and reflections about the ongoing work in each area.

Telephone conversations with individuals in each of the localities were a feature of the work throughout, extensive note taking, and the organisation of a 'WhatsApp' group in the case of the groups involved on the Brunswick Estate.

In both neighbourhoods, a number of principles emerged which influenced the development of Urban Villages, of which the following were of particular importance:

Inclusivity: activities were reframed as being for 'over-50s' rather than 'older people', to acknowledge the limited enthusiasm for being labelled as 'groups of older people'. There was also a view that activities to support 'ageing in place' should operate across generational and cultural boundaries.

Informal relationships: The projects in Brunswick emerged from personal bonds and friendships, and participation in activities was flexible given the uncertainty and challenges faced by some residents. This contrasts with the formal membership associations characteristic of the Village model in the USA. The work in both neighbourhoods confirms that the Village model is likely to reflect the specific characteristics of the communities in which they are based.

The terminology used in the work was also important: for example, the Brunswick older people's group rejected the term 'age-friendly' (adopting 'collective' instead), and the notion of a 'Village' was not straightforward for some inner-city residents. Village projects in some cases developed from, and often reflected, on-going community tensions. Some individuals participating in the projects had to reconcile their new roles with past experiences (sometimes difficult) of working with institutions such as the University. In response to these challenges, the project tried to incorporate mechanisms that would support cohesive relationships (for example, in Brunswick, through joint meetings between residents, the housing provider, the University and neighbourhood officers).

Slow and iterative: setting up a 'Village' from scratch without a toolkit and where there had been no previous age-friendly activity (as in the case of Brunswick but in contrast with Levenshulme) raised difficult issues. As residents and researchers, the project team had to work on a trial and error basis and build capacity (for example, providing training, in some cases for residents leading projects). In line with the participatory

approach adopted, ideas and delivery had to come from residents or groups within the respective community, with the research team acting to support, connect and facilitate projects.

Each group put forward costed projects, with the final budgets negotiated with the project team. Costs for individual projects varied from a lower limit of around £1500 to an upper limit of £6,000, with most groups coming back with additional proposals for funding. The range of work developed is listed below:

THE BRUNSWICK ESTATE

- Project One: Women's Footprints
- Project Two: The Brunswick Collective
- Project Three: The Neighbourly Garden Project
- Project Four: Travelling Story-Book
- Project Five: Men's Arts Project

LEVENSHULME

- Project Six: Meal Buddies
- Project Seven: Inspire the Choir

Development of Urban Villages on the Brunswick Estate

In June 2018, the project team were approached with some ideas for Village projects on the Brunswick Estate. The section below provides a review of the projects which were proposed and their development over the period August 2018 to September 2019.

PROJECT 1: WOMEN'S FOOTPRINTS (BRUNSWICK PARISH CHURCH)

Project leads: Mo Blue, Community Resource Manager at Brunswick Parish Church, facilitator of the Women's Group and over-50s group; Sandra Cotterell, founder of a women's support group (Women's Footprints) based at Brunswick parish church. Sandra is currently working on a project to develop a community café in Hulme, Manchester.

SUMMARY

Women's Footprints (WF) is an intergenerational community group based in Brunswick, established with the aim of promoting support for women both on the Estate and adjacent areas. Twenty to thirty women attend Women's Footprints on a weekly basis. All are from minority groups, were unemployed when they joined the group, and in some cases were experiencing isolation in the neighbourhood. The age of the group ranged from the early-20s to the late-80s, with two-thirds 50 and over.

Two of the women are single mothers; others are older singles who live alone. Muslim women make up the largest proportion, with countries of origin: Algeria, Turkey, Morocco, Bangladesh, Jamaica, and the UK. Women's Footprints meets in Brunswick Church which also has a hall, meeting spaces and a large kitchen. The church has a 'Positive Steps' community hub, of which WF is a part.

The church provides a welcoming, open, friendly atmosphere for the group.

The Urban Villages project provided support for the early development of Women's Footprints as well as financial assistance for

an exchange visit with a Women's Institute (WI) based in the Peak District. The group is seen to provide a 'safe space' for those experiencing personal and domestic pressures. In the latest phase of its work, Urban Villages funded a 'personal development programme' aimed at women undergoing transitions associated with divorce, bereavement and other life changes.

DEVELOPMENT OF WOMEN'S FOOTPRINTS



The WF group was launched in March 2018 with around 20 women coming to weekly sessions. Tackling isolation was a key aim behind the development of WF, reflecting the experiences of many of those who joined the group. The launch of WF was supported by Urban Villages funding for refreshments, banners and t-shirts with logos. The t-shirts for those helping on the day were especially appreciated and group members felt proud to wear them. They have continued to be worn at different events organised by WF.

From the outset, observations of how WF developed supported the views of the research team about how the Village model might work in an inner-city neighbourhood. The women reported that they attended because the group provided a space in which they could develop relationships and express their views. This was seen as especially

helpful for those isolated and in some cases experiencing domestic abuse. Some of the women reported that they participated in WF on a confidential basis, and their anonymity has been protected in respect of this report. The WF project leads, being aware of the sensitive nature of the personal issues faced by group members, were careful about how activities were publicised and the use made of social media.

Women's Footprints developed as an intergenerational network, providing a mixture of social and emotional support to its members. One woman commented that it was:

'A place where women would come and... engage and talk about all their challenges, and all the joy and share their fears and, you know tribulations, and aspirations. I mean, that for me was a welcome development... when it happened in Brunswick.'

(Female, 51-60, Black British/African).

Another woman mentions:

'And you could come and talk about things that bother you, and people were there to actually support you'

(Female, 51-60, Black British/African).

Being involved was seen as providing benefits both to individuals and the wider group. One woman commented:

'So... we all individually have our own issues, I've got my own issues, other people might have other issues. We all get together and we get together and talk to each other, we support each other'

(Female, 31-40, British Asian/Pakistani).

Ethnographic observations, made over the course of the research, supported self-reported statements that participation in the group was important in boosting confidence. Many of the women said that their mental wellbeing had improved as a result of attending WF and being involved in decision-making and shared responsibility for running the group's activities. It was recognised by the project leaders that capturing these changes could provide evidence to support the WF group in future grant applications and provide sustainability for the project.

WF was important in helping individuals in the group overcome some of the challenges associated with living on the Brunswick Estate. Elements of the physical area were considered challenging, with streets described as often untidy, dark and unsafe. Resources that the area was seen to be lacking included: shops, a supermarket, and benches to encourage residents to walk and leave their homes. It was also thought that more could be done in the area regarding social provision, particularly by the housing provider, to support residents. The University was also mentioned as a neighbour which could improve its work with residents in the area. Comments here included:

'Because I had a community where I came from but when I came here... I thought there is no community...nobody is doing anything. Why do they allow the streets to be so untidy?'

(Female, 61-70, Black Caribbean)

'Resources? Even like a supermarket, this comes through my mind all the time because I don't really like travelling, on my good days, I don't mind going to Longsight to do a shop and then come

home but then most of the days, that's a mission and after I come here [Brunswick Church], I don't really like going out anywhere, which is then very difficult and hard for me.'

(Female, 31-40, British, Asian Pakistani)

'You know, you go to some cities and you see benches all around. You know, you walk a bit... They're encouraging us to walk but then, you know, you like to sit down also and have a chat. There are no benches.'

(Female, 61-70, Black British)

'There should be a lot going because there are some people want to go back to work, but there is nothing. The housing office is supposed to be encourage the tenants to go back to work or encouraging them to do voluntary work in their offices or the University. You know, the University has the same problem. There's nothing for them to say, okay, we've got volunteering for residents in Brunswick. There's nothing like that.'

(Female, 61-70, Black British).

ACHIEVEMENTS: SUPPORTING AGEING IN PLACE

Diversity: Social and ethnic diversity was a notable feature of Women's Footprints, both in respect of different generations and backgrounds. The women supported each other and showed curiosity and interest in each other's lives. One member commented:

'It's quite a diverse range of ladies from different backgrounds and different nationalities and cultures and with the religious groups as well, yes. So, we're able to just...share ideas and experiences and be able to be open and talk to each

other and listen and just respect what people have got to say really...'

(Female, 51-60, Black Caribbean)



Support: Some of the women had health problems of various kinds and felt able to discuss these and gain support from the group. Much of the positive effects of the group were driven by the strong and respected leaders responsible for developing WF.

Evaluation: A strength of the group was regular self-evaluation and use of varied ways to capture feedback (informal check-ins, self-reflection in weekly sessions, encouraging written comments at events). This helped to sustain the group by ensuring that members had a voice and could play a role in its development.

Motivation: The women talked about their motivation to attend the group. Some mentioned the need to get out of the house and reduce boredom. Others viewed it as a way of being involved in the community and in volunteering. Crucially, however, there were the specific benefits of belonging to a women's group and the companionship which developed from meeting other women.

Inclusive: The welcoming atmosphere of the group and the diversity of the members was a key theme. The women described learning from each other's experiences as well as

differences between them. Women of different faiths attended and although meetings were held in an Anglican Church, this was not perceived as a barrier for those of other faiths:

'And the doors are open for everyone to come in. You know? And just irrespective of your religion, you know, your culture, your language, and all...there's always a door. People are here to support you.'

(Female, 51-60, Black African)

Extending social networks and cross-cultural experiences: Urban Villages funded the group to develop a relationship with a Women's Institute (WI) in the Peak district, bringing together a range of individuals from different backgrounds and life experiences. This included exchange visits, with Women's Footprints hosting an event to support intergenerational networking (Bollywood dancing, African dancing, black art, steel pan music, suffragette memorabilia). There were around 60 total attendees at the event, 11 of whom were from Youlgreave, the rest from the WF group and family and friends, many local to Brunswick, and most from different minority groups. The meetings were viewed as important in consolidating the work of WF and fostering contact across different generations and social groups.

Practical skill development: Following a meeting between WF, Solutions 4 Brunswick (S4B), and some of the contractors on the Estate, a DIY workshop was organised, attended by 15 women. The session explored the skills the women already had and what they wanted to learn. There was also a discussion around obtaining a CSCS (Construction Skills Certification Skills) card which would allow the women to consider various employment within the construction industry such as

administration, sales, site manager, project manager or surveyor. Some of the women already had experience in this area and agreed that they could support each other. One woman had worked doing painting and decorating and agreed to swap some of her time in exchange for someone to help her with her garden. Further workshops are being arranged.

DEVELOPMENT OF WOMEN'S FOOTPRINTS

Over the course of the Village project, the WF group continued to attract a diverse range of women in respect of age, ethnicity and educational background. The project leaders felt that the informal nature of the group was an important factor in its success. There were some concerns that creating a formal structure would jeopardise the atmosphere created within WF.

A significant development of the work with WF was the proposal to fund a Personal Development Programme. This was designed: 'to enable women from diverse backgrounds, ages and stages of their lives to engage and participate in order to increase their confidence and self-esteem'. The focus was on empowering women experiencing major life transitions associated with bereavement, divorce, ageing and related issues. The course was designed as a 12-16 week programme, with content including:

- **Essence of being a woman**
- **Building confidence**
- **Setting personal goals**
- **Presenting a positive image**
- **Building networks**
- **Improving health and well-being**



Outcomes from the programme were defined as: 'improving confidence in handling transitions; developing a small social network of local women able to support each other; increased well-being of individual women participating in the programme; and facilitating a better understanding of career development options'. Ten women attended the course, with the age range 35-67.

The women came from a variety of ethnic backgrounds: Algerian, Caribbean, British, Somalian, Turkish, and Pakistan. The group met once a week with a focus on supporting women who wished to update skills, return to work or education, take on volunteering roles, and/or help with parenting skills. The budget for the course (from the UV project) included appropriate training for the group leaders. The following are anonymised pen portraits of three course members:

Janice is age 57 and was born in the UK of Jamaican heritage. She has worked most of her life in education. Her children have left home so she now feels she would like to focus on herself. She has been supported by Women's Footprints to update her CV. She has registered with agencies who are now offering her work. Janice is keen to work self-employed as a play leader and has been supported to identify potential buildings for this to happen. She is now taking steps

to return to university to complete her BA degree in Early Years and Play.

Chandra is age 67 and was born in Grenada, arriving in the UK at 14. She is a mother of two children. Chandra has various health issues including fibromyalgia and diabetes. She is assertive, confident and resilient in many areas of her life. The Personal Development programme was an outlet to discuss personal issues that were affecting her wellbeing. One of the sessions was attended by a representative from the buzz Mental Health and Well-being Service. Chandra shared with the group some reflection on supporting her daughter who suffered from depression. Information was provided about how she could access self-help groups. Chandra attends regular NHS exercise and yoga classes for her health and wellbeing. She has also completed a three-day St. John's Ambulance First Aid course. She enjoys knitting and although this is a hobby, the course has encouraged her to look at ways of selling her work.

Aylin is age 45 and was born in Turkey. She has recently been divorced. She has three children and no other family in Manchester. The impact of the break-up has affected her self-esteem and mood. A GP referral was made and depression was diagnosed. Aylin has been referred to a counsellor. The Personal Development Programme has supported and raised her confidence during a difficult transition. Her overall confidence has greatly developed through meeting new friends and building new relationships. As a single parent she has been supported in applying for welfare benefits. In addition, she has been accompanied to jobcentre appointments and has made contact with various agencies related to her current

situation. She has also been encouraged to attend exercise and relaxation classes with other women from the group.

SUMMARY OF WORK FROM WOMEN'S FOOTPRINTS FOR SUPPORTING AGEING IN PLACE

Women's Footprints has recorded a number of achievements, in particular:

developing an intergenerational and multi-ethnic group; providing a 'safe space' for women experiencing various degrees of stress in their lives; helping women to extend social networks and build long-term relationships; addressing isolation by providing people with an opportunity to assess the services on offer; and developing regular evaluation of the courses and activities which it runs.

Obstacles encountered by the group included:

limited channels on the Estate for sharing information about community events; reliance on 'word of mouth' to advertise events which may reinforce limited access to isolated individuals; and concern about the sustainability of its activities.

The Women's Footprints group is an example of the importance of building social networks in the community and how interventions can be developed to provide support of different kinds. The group leads have been investigating organising similar groups in other local areas so that many more residents could benefit. In order to maintain inclusivity, the maximum capacity for a single group is thought to be around twenty. There are also plans for the more confident women to

assume leadership roles so that the project leads can spend time establishing new groups.

PROJECT 2: BRUNSWICK COLLECTIVE

Project lead: Lesceine Alishia Johnson, born and raised in Manchester, Founder, Hope is the Key, Community Interest Company, promoting opportunities for individuals within their communities, Brunswick resident.

SUMMARY

The proposal for this group came from the founder of a Community Interest Company (CIC), Hope is the Key, who was also a resident on the Estate. The initial ambition for the project was to establish a supper club in response to a demand for a communal eating space and improved food provision for older residents. However, various problems were encountered in attempting to implement this idea, in particular, the lack of an available kitchen with appropriate health and safety certification.

A food delivery service was also planned, alongside the community eating idea, but this also proved difficult to implement, frustrated by the lack of appropriate community space. The proposal eventually put forward drew upon the Levenshulme Inspire model, bringing together a group of over-50s local residents who it was hoped would become involved in organising projects that would assist them in ageing better on the Brunswick Estate.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE BRUNSWICK COLLECTIVE

The idea developed was for a group of older residents who would meet on a weekly basis to develop a programme of activities. The initial focus was on planning and taking part in

a series of social events around Manchester, designed to boost the confidence of individuals to travel beyond the Estate. The group acquired an interest in activities linked to improving health and well-being, with a member of the group designing an exercise class and helping individuals set their own health/weight goals. Members met at different locations each week to support their personal goal of getting out and about as a group.

Members of the Brunswick Collective have mixed ethnic backgrounds, including the Caribbean, Scotland, England, Ireland, and Afghanistan. All were over the age of 50, with the oldest 80 years of age. Although the emphasis was not initially on growing numbers, the core group discussed events and activities that would encourage other residents to join. The main aims have been defined in terms of:

- **Increasing confidence and independence**
- **Easing social isolation**
- **Increasing the voice and presence of over-50s in the community.**

The Collective was co-ordinated by a project lead – her role was crucial as a central contact for the group and also to contact residents to remind them where each meeting was taking place. This was necessary because the group found that due to a lack of social spaces within Brunswick, and consequently also the absence of a 'base', they had to find new meeting places – such as pubs and cafés – many of which were unfamiliar to the group.

Over time, members of the group started to feed in ideas for small projects and activities, provided help with posters and putting on events, with the group facilitator encouraging them to put their ideas into action. It was

agreed that the scope of activities would not be overly ambitious in the initial development of the group, with the focus on enjoyment and involvement. The ambition was for the group to eventually lead their own programme of activities. Some members were able to play a more active role than others (depending on circumstances, skills and motivation). The facilitator aimed to understand how different people could/might wish to be involved.

The project faced a number of issues/barriers which were to affect all of the projects on the Estate to a greater or lesser extent, including: problems in recruiting new members; lack of local public meeting space; and limited support from local stakeholders in publicising activities. As the group developed, so did its ambition and potential reach but the Collective had difficulties communicating about the project to other residents on the Estate or getting support from the housing provider to target potentially isolated people. The group facilitator commented here:

'How can we promote what we are doing, and get it across to the residents? Visiting other groups [outside of Brunswick] has made the members aware of what can be done, and it is inspiring them to be more active and get others on board. Promoting the group to the wider community has become very difficult...how do we identify the residents that are at risk of loneliness or isolation?'

The absence of a regular local venue made it difficult to attract new members to the Collective. Another issue identified by the project was lack of certainty about support from local stakeholders and community groups:

'The lack of communication within the area between stakeholders, and lack of information sharing [this is a problem]. The history of residents getting things for free. How can we compete with this when we are trying to re-educate residents that we all need to give a little so that project can become sustainable?'

(Group facilitator)

Towards the end of the project, the group decided to hold a meeting to consider how further activities might be developed. Interest was expressed in developing a programme of activities relating to health and wellbeing. By Spring 2019 the Brunswick group felt ready to extend their work to the wider community by setting up an activity that would focus around these issues. The group proposed a 14-week course drawing in a range of external speakers on themes relating to exercise and health promotion.

KEY MILESTONES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE BRUNSWICK COLLECTIVE

September 2018: The first meeting of the Collective took place in a pub on the outskirts of the city centre. None of the group had been there before and were not sure where to go. As a result, the project facilitator and one of the researchers met the group in Brunswick and walked to the venue together. It was a reasonably short walk but it took the group 20 minutes and there were some complaints along the way. Some members became breathless during the walk and had to stop. The experience demonstrated the concerns some in the group had about moving outside their immediate area. Over lunch the group talked about what it was like to be an older person living in an inner city area; they discussed families (some near, some distant); and they discussed their past lives (some

growing up in Manchester; others in Jamaica, Afghanistan, Ireland and Scotland).



November 2018: Increased willingness was reported about walking to different venues and, with the support of the group, there was less stopping and mention of pain or shortness of breath. The group moved from being reluctant to walking to wanting to take at least ten minutes' walk during each meeting. Interest was expressed in looking at ways of increasing levels of physical activity. The facilitator has recruited a volunteer who is a qualified personal trainer as well as being a Brunswick local. He co-designed an exercise class and individuals set their own health/weight goals with the Collective.

The group purchased a set of weighing scales and began to conduct regular 'weigh-ins'. The group is meeting at different locations each week, in support of their goal of getting out and about as a collective and being more active. Members of the Collective pay for their activities, with the project funding the facilitator and refreshments. The group still require the facilitator's presence – some members are less mobile than others and one member experienced a fall. The group is meeting with other over-50 groups and learning about the age friendly agenda in other areas. The group shares its experiences of tackling barriers to mobility, health and wellbeing.

April 2019 : The Collective have had the opportunity of having 1-2-1 sessions with a personal trainer, helping them improve their physical health. There is a realisation of the importance of staying active and the difference 30 minutes of exercise can make to their daily lives. The group decided to develop an activity programme for other over-50s living on the Estate.

The proposed sessions, called the 'Get Active' programme, would be spread over 10 weeks, to include 45 minutes of exercise, and then 30 minutes of supporting residents mentally to develop their exercise goals, and to allow time for them to voice concerns or share information. The classes would be suitable for people with different health problems and accessible to those with disabilities. There will be a welcome letter and a factsheet demonstrating simple exercises for residents that have health restrictions, and who are unable to attend the session.



The Collective thinks that the programme would be a valuable way to connect with people that are becoming isolated or housebound. To engage other residents, the group plan to link with NHS community workers and Manchester City Council neighbourhood officers, as well as spreading the word to other local community groups. Participants would be charged £1 per session.

DEVELOPMENTS FROM THE ACTIVITIES OF BRUNSWICK COLLECTIVE

The proposal for the 'Get Active' programme was made nine months after the establishment of the group. The idea was important in the context of the health problems affecting older people in the local area, and the drive to promote 'person and community-centred approaches' such as social prescribing programmes¹. The programme led to positive outcomes, notably:

- **The emphasis placed on the importance of physical activity**
- **The establishment of links with local NHS community workers**
- **The development of friendships amongst course participants**
- **And the production of packs giving health advice and exercises to do at home.**

However, a number of difficulties were experienced in putting on the course. In particular, the Collective found it:

- **Difficulties engaging with more isolated residents on the Estate**
- **Problems distributing information about the course**
- **Limited support from local stakeholders**
- **Difficulties gaining access to specialist speakers.**

A significant development arising from the course was the contact made with the local NHS Health Development Co-Ordinator (who was highly supportive) and the establishment of links with the neighbourhood health centre. There are plans to re-launch the course in the Autumn of 2019 or early 2020, drawing on their support.

SUMMARY OF WORK OF THE BRUNSWICK COLLECTIVE FOR SUPPORTING AGEING IN PLACE

The Brunswick Collective established itself as a small group of residents living on the Estate, who were successful in developing a programme of activities over a period of 12 months. The group was ethnically diverse, recruiting people who had not previously been involved in age-friendly activities. After meeting for nine months, the group took the initiative of developing a course focused on health and well-being which was run in the neighbourhood for a period of 10 weeks.

Over the period of its existence, the group, comprising 10 regular participants, has developed greater awareness of age-friendly issues, established links with other groups working on behalf of older people (e.g. Levenshulme Inspire), and secured a sense of belonging and links within the community. Against this, the group has been frustrated by:

- **The lack of support from local stakeholders**
- **Problems with accessing space within the community to support its work**
- **Time pressures facing the group facilitator**
- **Limited engagement with others at risk of isolation on the Estate**

PROJECT 3: THE NEIGHBOURLY GARDEN PROJECT

Project Leader: Choel Cartwright, community activist and Brunswick resident, engaged with the local community in various capacities for over 20 years. Her recent work has focused on improving and re-greening areas on the Estate following the loss of gardens and green spaces.

SUMMARY

This project began with the aim of 'reconstructing' and conserving gardens on the Estate. The intention was to ask Brunswick residents in the 50-plus age group to volunteer their time to tidy and improve the gardens of older and housebound neighbours. The project became branded as the Neighbourly Gardening Project (NGP). The main activities of the NGP project were: improving older people's gardens, and developing a series of paid for workshops to fund gardening activity in Brunswick.

As the project developed, it became clear that progress was hindered by the state of many gardens on the Estate, many of which were without turf, and had poor soil for planting. A major challenge was therefore remedying problems on some of the gardens affected, this taking a significant amount from the original budget. Recruiting local volunteers proved a challenge for the development of NGP.

The project aimed to recruit Brunswick residents in the over-50s age-group to volunteer their time to tidy up and improve the gardens of older people, especially those who were housebound. The project lead was aware that health issues and low incomes would likely affect the extent of engagement with NGP. It was eventually accepted that there would be an occasional support rather than a fixed arrangement. The project lead commented:

'I feel working with volunteers is a great resource, however it is best if more informal and used on planned days (i.e. have a community tidy day) not for more regular commitments as they can't always be relied on. If there was a scope,

it would be beneficial to have a partner or worker alongside me and would be worth considering if the project was to be expanded'.

To support recruitment and promotion, the project lead developed a clear brand with a logo and communications across multiple social media channels. Difficulties were experienced communicating to local residents about the project. In the absence of a community newsletter/website or public noticeboard, the project lead posted fliers through letterboxes but with limited success.



The project also required storage space for gardening equipment and was eventually offered a small lock-up by the housing provider. There was some limited communal greenspace in Brunswick but this was not available to the project. NGP also used as a base a room hired for the Urban Villages project in St. Peter's House.

ACHIEVEMENTS: SUPPORTING AGEING IN PLACE

Intergenerational work: NGP trialled a community gardening and conservation project with 'younger' and active over-50s residents volunteering to help tidy and put plants in the gardens of their older neighbours. Tools were donated by residents and UoM staff. Planting and improving gardens were viewed as ways of encouraging residents to spend time outdoors as well as strengthen social networks.

Promoting access: An important theme concerned accessibility issues on the Estate, especially for those with mobility problems. NGP highlighted several sections of the Brunswick Estate where cars were parked on pavements blocking on-foot accessibility. NGP took up discussions with the housing provider and local authority and campaigned for planters to be positioned to block parking and improve accessibility and walkability.

Volunteer recruitment: One session was held at the allotment in St Peter's House, to provide a taster session on running an allotment, to which Estate residents were invited to join as volunteers. Further sessions were held near two residential flats, and the community was invited to improve three areas of green space. As NGP evolved, activities were run for people without gardens. NGP organised twelve hanging baskets to be planted by local residents (50+); these displayed in different places on the estate. Hanging baskets and plants were donated by Manchester City Council. NGP ran workshops making Christmas wreaths, the aim of which was to provide additional funds for plants and tools. The project organized orders from University departments with total funds of £570 raised.

Extending gardening work: Since the start of 2019, NGP has continued the work of garden maintenance and workshops run for and by the over-50s, and has expanded into community planting and enabling gardening through tool hire. This includes full planting in two new gardens, watering plants while residents are away as well as ongoing general maintenance in two gardens and lawn mowing in three gardens.

Through additional funding and project expansion, NGP has also acquired tools and

consumables to aid those who can do their own maintenance but may not have the right tools. NGP can now lend out gloves, spades, forks, waste bags and compost and has found that having access to the right tools encourages activity in the garden and reduces isolation and inactivity.

DEVELOPMENTS FROM THE NEIGHBOURLY GARDEN PROJECT

NGP has been successful in a number of funding applications through the period of its existence, these include support from the University of Manchester Social Responsibility Construction Fund; a spirit of Manchester award; and One Manchester. NGP has a formal constitution and has opened its own bank account – both of these developments the project leader views as resulting from support from the Urban Villages project. NGP, along with Hope is the Key, is also renting office space in St. Peter’s House, giving access to a hot desk and mailing address.

NGP has a strong presence on social media. It also organizes regular drop-in allotment sessions at St. Peter’s House. NGP has funding for a 16-week programme of work beginning over the Summer of 2019 engaging with older residents from the Estate as volunteers; supporting people in the maintenance of their gardens; and encouraging people on the Estate and beyond to participate in community gardening activities.



SUMMARY OF WORK FROM THE NEIGHBOURHOOD GARDENING PROJECT FOR SUPPORTING AGEING IN PLACE

The NGP has recorded a number of achievements in the 12 months of its existence, including:

- **Developing community-wide activities to promote green issues on the Brunswick Estate**
- **Developing new social networks**
- **Intervening to improve the quality of the environment on the Estate**
- **Securing additional funding**
- **Establishing a bank account and constitution for the group**
- **Securing a positive relationship with the University and St. Peter’s House.**

Against this, NGP encountered the following problems:

- **Difficulty in recruiting older volunteers to work on gardens**
- **Limited storage space for equipment**
- **Difficulties in promoting its work through the local housing provider.**

NGP has funds to continue its work and there is the potential to strengthen relationships with different groups within and beyond the Estate.

ADDITIONAL SUPPORT

The Urban Villages project funded the two workers involved with the Brunswick Collective and the Neighbourly Gardening Project to attend a short course on professional development. The project also rented office

space on Oxford Road which has provided accommodation for the development of age-friendly projects. Funding for this came from the University of Manchester Office for Social Responsibility (value of £5,000). The projects have subsequently (2019-2020) rented their own space in St. Peter's.

PROJECT 4: TRAVELLING STORY-BOOK

Project lead: Mo Blue, Community Resource Manager at Brunswick Parish Church, facilitator of the Women's Group and over-50s group

SUMMARY

This project involved the production of a video capturing over-50s residents talking about their childhood memories, overlaid with illustration/animation designed for a younger primary school audience. Some of the problems being addressed are isolation, mental health, recognition and a sense of worth. In partnership with Manchester Libraries, the project comprised the creation of a short film of local over-50s residents recounting stories from their childhood memories, with the film played to local primary school children. The film is designed as an intervention to support older people to develop a sense of purpose and a voice in the community and to prompt intergenerational conversations.

Male and female Brunswick residents were filmed at various locations in the community discussing personal experiences that resonated across generations. These included games, favourite foods, going to school, families, playing in parks, describing the housing estate and shops. Ten Brunswick residents, aged between 50 and 85 took part

in the film: 5 white British, 2 Jamaican British, 1 African British, 1 Black British and 1 White European. Stories captured included: what games they played, what they watched on TV, significant events such as riots, family events, memories of nice food and wearing best clothes, going on holiday, and community events.

The main budget for this project was spent on professional editing and public viewings. All footage was caught on an iPad, intended as a low-cost and easily replicable method. A series of animation workshops were set up and these were added to the video; 25 local residents assisted in the creation of the film. The film has been shown at a range of venues including primary schools and the Whitworth Art Gallery.

PROJECT 5: URBAN VILLAGES MEN'S ARTS PROJECT

Project leader: Gareth Smith works for Streetwise Opera, With One Voice and Theatre in Prison Project, charities that use arts workshops and access to culture as tools for improving wellbeing for people experiencing homelessness or within prison settings. He is a resident on the Brunswick Estate.

SUMMARY

This project was developed by a local artist (a resident on the Estate), with the aim of using creative activity to build resilience and support in a vulnerable group of men in the 50-plus age group. A three stage process was developed for the project: first, identifying the individuals that would form the group; second, discussions around how and what types of art forms the group would like to develop; and, third, delivery of creative workshops leading

to the production of new work. The project began by identifying a number of routes into finding members, with conversations held with local social housing providers, community groups and local councillors. Churches and health centres were also contacted to promote the project to potential group members.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE MEN'S ARTS PROJECT

This project was the last of the Urban Villages projects to be launched, beginning its work in February 2019. The initial step to create the group was to use the housing provider, Solutions 4 Brunswick (S4B), to send a text mailout to all residents informing them of the start of a new 'Men's Get Together', with a link to contact details. The first 'Get Together' took place in an unused space, a potential future community room on the ground floor of one of the Tower Blocks on the Estate. The second gathering took place at the S4B office in their meeting room.



During these meet-ups, the project worker explained to those attending what the project was about and began to discuss what people would like to do. Cultural trips were deemed desirable plus creative workshops. The project lead had prepared a selection of visual art and short films as ideas of what creative things could be pursued, but the conversations were driven by the interests of the group, with the possibility of weekly creative workshops.

During this period, a number of individuals and organisations were contacted about the project, to help raise awareness about its existence, including the manager of the local health Centre, Brunswick Church and local councillors. Over the next phase of development, a group started to form with a core of five members, giving the organiser the opportunity to book tickets for various cultural events. HOME (a cultural hub in Manchester) runs a ticket scheme when they can provide £1 tickets for community groups. They have been highly supportive, as have the Bridgewater Hall and the Art Galleries (older working-class men are underrepresented in these and similar settings).

As the core group was established it made sense to give the group a name and suggestions for names were canvassed. Responses included: Brunswick Culture Vultures Club, Brunswick's Men about Town, Inner City Culture Club, Boys Outing Association and Brunswick Men and Culture. In the end, flyers were printed for both Brunswick Old Boys Club and Brunswick Community Men's Group, with the view that whichever seemed the most popular would be the name going forward. These leaflets have been widely distributed across the Estate.

ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE MEN'S ARTS GROUP FOR SUPPORTING AGEING IN PLACE

A deliberate aim of this project was to attract older men, especially those living alone on the Brunswick Estate (of which there a significant number). Research had pointed to the potential isolation experienced by a group of this kind, and the need to develop new ways to encourage social engagement and develop social networks².

The characteristics of the core group involved with this project reflect some of the challenges associated with building Urban Village type projects which can reach out to vulnerable groups. Existing health problems are varied amongst the regular attendees of the group. Disclosures about health have happened as friendships and confidence has grown.

Depression is a factor for three members of the group and this presents through social anxiety for two and alcohol addiction for another. One member has recently been homeless; another is at risk of losing his home; he also has alcohol addiction issues. Another individual is in recovery from cancer. All regular attendees of the group are currently unemployed and have financial problems. Four use the 'pay what you can' community meal at the Brunswick Church on a weekly basis.

Over a period of six months the group has consolidated a core of six members, with three or four other individuals attending on an occasional basis. Recruitment has been challenging, with the project worker encouraging people to attend casual chats in the blocks where individuals live. The group has been to a range of events at the HOME (centre of art, theatre and film), the Royal Exchange theatre, the Bridgewater Hall, and the Royal Northern College of Music. Members have attended exhibitions at Manchester Art Gallery, Whitworth Art Gallery, and Manchester Library.

They have been to a variety of events in the Lamport Court Community Room including film screenings, chess afternoons, poetry workshops, live performers, quizzes and general get togethers.

SUMMARY OF WORK FROM THE MEN'S ARTS GROUP FOR SUPPORTING AGEING IN PLACE

The Men's Arts Group has been an important development for the Urban Villages project, attracting a group of men who are often excluded (or feel excluded) from age-friendly work. However, the group has faced challenges and obstacles to its progress. In particular, problems in communicating with potential members of the group, difficulties in arranging formal meetings to discuss the project, and problems in gaining access to community rooms in the tower blocks. The last is a priority: ensuring access to rooms which are informal spaces where people can meet and talk about their interests, is an urgent priority if the group is to develop. The facilitator of this groups argues that if informal spaces were accessible in all the blocks, managed by the residents, this would enable the group to expand from the present core group.

Other plans for building engagement and building the group in general include:

- **New flyer to be produced reflecting the change in the group; weekly meet up rather than specific times each week**
- **Fliers to be distributed around the estate and not just the tower blocks**
- **Twitter account. Not necessarily just for potential or current members of the group, but to link in with other organisations**
- **Regular archive film screening via North West film archive hub.**
- **More detailed analysis mapping the places that are used by people living in the tower blocks to distribute fliers about the group**

- **Greater range of meet-up spaces for the group**
- **A more varied set of activities that are not only culture- based**
- **Stronger links with community resources at the church**
- **Genuine links with health providers/ social prescribing. The NHS Community Development Worker has attended a Men's Group event and will be the essential link with the GPs at the neighbourhood health centre**
- **Increasing visibility. Posters for shops, the church, the school and the community noticeboards around Brunswick**
- **Continued funding to build an annual plan**

SUMMARY OF THE WORK OF THE MEN'S ARTS GROUP FOR SUPPORTING AGEING IN THE COMMUNITY

This group is still at a relatively early stage and has set itself the challenging task of reaching out to older men who hitherto have been relatively marginal to activities on the Estate. The use of cultural activities is a promising medium, one which reflects various activities in Manchester drawing on this approach³. However, a key issue if the work is to progress concerns the need for more informal spaces to be developed within and around the Estate. There are some men who rarely leave their homes and for whom the project has particular relevance.

The project leader has put a costed proposal to S4B to re-furbish a ground floor room in one of the blocks, for use by the group. This has met with a positive response and there are plans to complete the work by the Spring of 2020. The project facilitator has also identified

the potential of making links with social prescribing programmes and discussions are underway with the local health centre on this issue.

DEVELOPING THE VILLAGE MODEL IN LEVENSHULME

Project leader: Kate Williams has worked at Inspire as Project Manager for the Inspired People's Project, which includes the Taskforce (a campaigning over-50s group based at Inspire) for the past two years. Her role is part-time and she also volunteers at an animal sanctuary.

Project leader: Lou Armer works at Inspire as a coordinator for the Taskforce. She works part-time and through her experience in setting up a community radio station in North Manchester and being a practising musician, has incorporated music into activities at Inspire. Lou is a Levenshulme resident.

The development of Urban Villages work in Levenshulme has been carried out in partnership with Inspire, a community-led organisation which brings together people from diverse backgrounds with the aim of transforming the local area 'through community activity, creativity, enterprise and fun'.

The work is based around the Inspire Centre, a community and business hub in the centre of Levenshulme, available as a base for meetings, activities and events. The projects developed in partnership with Levenshulme Inspire comprise the following:

MEAL BUDDIES

This project started in late-October 2018 and provides nutritionally-balanced pre-prepared 'takeaway' meals, collected from Inspire by volunteers who take them to housebound older residents where they eat together at a lunch or dinner time for once a week. The project stems from an interest in providing opportunities for older adults for social eating, in support of better health and well-being. However, a gap in provision exists for older adults who for various reasons, including poor mobility and mental health issues, are housebound and who are unable to take up such opportunities.

Many older residents have identified poor physical mobility and lack of appropriate local services and places to go as factors which can exacerbate social isolation. They, and other residents who do not leave their homes, constitute a cohort that 'falls between the cracks' in terms of both preventative and responsive health and wellbeing related services. Many may be vulnerable to malnutrition: a condition thought to affect over 60,000 people in Greater Manchester⁴. Discussions with community groups identified this as a prominent and community-wide issue affecting multiple sections of the community, particularly those who do not have family living locally. This project uses low-cost fresh food to prepare meals in the Inspire café, and partners with local befriending organisations Levenshulme Good Neighbours (LGN) and Manchester Cares.

The target of recruitment for this project was relatively small, with the aim to identify up to 20 housebound older residents and to run the project over a 12 month period. This would constitute a proof of concept pilot that might be extended and scaled-up, and form the basis

for a future funding application. A significant challenge with this project has been matching and recruiting volunteers to the meal buddies programme.

INSPIRE THE CHOIR

The proposal to support the development of a choir at the Inspire centre emerged towards the end of phase one of the Urban Villages project. There is a significant need among older residents for engaging group activities that give people an opportunity to do something that is both enjoyable and social. Choirs have been shown to be valuable for promoting positive mental and emotional health⁵, and in particular can have powerful benefits for older people in terms of generating and strengthening social bonds⁶.



Anecdotal evidence from the experiences of older people of previous one-off singing sessions at Inspire, for example with Manchester Camerata, demonstrated an appetite for community singing in particular. The project leader put forward a proposal to fund a choir leader for a session per week for a year, and to coordinate a choir programme for older residents over this period, allowing the group to build skill, confidence and social bonds.

Participants are older residents of Levenshulme, some of whom are members of the Inspired People Project and several additional members who do not regularly participate in other activities.

An initial challenge was experienced with drawing people into the choir when many older adults believe they are poor at singing and feel self-conscious about joining a choir where they expect their perceived lack of skill will be exposed. Self-consciousness particularly relates to men who it has been harder to persuade to join. Those who have been persuaded to join usually stay and return, and it is the champions within the group who are able to persuade others to join.

PROJECT 6: THE DEVELOPMENT OF MEAL BUDDIES

Meal Buddies provides social eating through regular meals for isolated or housebound older people, eaten with a volunteer befriender. The project aims to combat isolation and address problems of poor nutrition affecting the health of older people, especially those housebound or with limited mobility. The idea for the project came from volunteers and those with experience of working in the community with older people, and in particular more vulnerable older residents. There is some evidence to suggest that eating alone may lead to poor eating, and subsequent nutrition problems⁷. Regular social interaction has been found to correlate with individuals having a better quality of diet, and therefore social eating has the potential to improve eating habits and nutritional intake among isolated older people.

The project is delivered by resident-volunteers of Levenshulme Good Neighbours (LGN) working with the Inspire café. Local residents

and service providers play an important role in referring older residents who are considered in need. The project is highly attuned to the needs of the local area as both the befriender and the older person live in Levenshulme. It is also inter-generational, with volunteers tending to be younger, often students or working professionals. The opinions and feedback of all those participating in Meal Buddies, in addition to those of project leads/coordinators, have been important in shaping the development of the project.

The key people and organisations leading the project have been: Kate Williams – Project Manager Inspire People Project, Inspire; Kris Lowndes – café Manager, Inspire café; Lindsay Stewart – administrator / café volunteer, Inspire; Ray Olaniyan – Service Coordinator, Levenshulme Good Neighbours (LGN).

The Meal Buddies project has drawn on Levenshulme Good Neighbours' existing infrastructure and access to volunteers. However, a small number of volunteers were recruited among regular volunteers known to Inspire. The Service Coordinator for LGN has integrated communications about Meal Buddies into his existing role in managing volunteers and relationships with the older people involved. More specifically, he has been involved with checking the feasibility of Meal Buddies with volunteers and service users to enquire about the level of interest and need.

This has included spreading the word about Meal Buddies and setting expectations among volunteers and service users about what is involved. The existence of Meal Buddies is now incorporated into the interview stage for new volunteers to make it a routine part of the services that LGN provide.

Eleven older people have participated in the Meal Buddies programme, with an equivalent number of volunteers – the majority were recruited from LGN. The older people involved had a range of complex needs and the anonymised case studies provide an indication of the challenges associated with running this type of project. These vignettes were collected through fieldnotes of observations and conversations in situ at Inspire with Meal Buddies who had come to eat in the café, in addition to interviews with key participants including project leads who were tracking and monitoring various aspects of the project.

CASE STUDY NO: 1: EDIE: AGE 82

Edie came to the attention of Kate Williams through her role as a lead for Inspire's strand of work with older people in the neighbourhood. She is unable to recognise or advocate for her own needs and therefore her needs had to be identified by others. She had lost considerable weight in the previous twelve months, making her malnourished and putting her overall health at risk. She only has one living relative who is a niece by marriage (also in her 70s) who lives some distance from Levenshulme. As a result, Edie's care is provided by a contracted care agency that visits twice a day.

Edie tends automatically to refuse food when asked. She only eats if someone encourages her, which takes time and patience. Her carers are on 20-minute calls and do not have time to do this and are instructed to follow the cared-for person's wishes. Therefore, if she says she doesn't want anything they will leave without giving her any food. In addition, the carers change frequently and often do not have time to get to know Edie's

particular care needs in detail. A volunteer does Edie's shopping once a week as she is unable to walk to the shops herself.

She can afford to buy food but has a very narrow and specific preferences that have to be worked around, such as only eating tomato sandwiches. This represents a challenge in terms of adequate nutrition.

Often, her befriender and other visitors will prepare something for her to eat, which she says she will eat later but carers end up throwing food away. Sometimes, prepared meals are left for her in the fridge with notes/ instructions to carers that are not followed resulting in the food going to waste.

Edie has only left her house in the last two years when a volunteer was available to bring her to Inspire for the monthly Sunday lunch or annual Christmas Dinner, which gives some indication of her level of isolation. At these events, and in the company of others, she will eat a full roast dinner and pudding.

Comment:

The issue of poor eating reflects not only poor eating habits of people eating alone but often their inability to shop for or cook food, particularly nutritious meals. Edie's needs are beyond that which a volunteer can reasonably be expected to provide. Therefore, a referral was made to Social Services who increased her care package to four visits a day. Nonetheless, more frequent visits may not necessarily result in Edie eating more. Carers are often unable to override Edie's automatic refusal of food and to encourage her to eat or to leave some prepared food for her.

The befriender's main focus in working with Edie is to tempt her to eat by suggesting, buying or cooking foods she likes and by eating with her while encouraging her to eat too. In this way befrienders can be reassured that Edie has eaten something that day. They also sometimes accompany her on shopping trips to encourage her to buy more food, as she otherwise tends not to buy enough to feed herself adequately.

CASE STUDY NO. 2. ARTHUR (AGE 85)

Arthur was referred to Levenshulme Good Neighbours as being in need of support beyond that which his carers can provide. He uses a wheelchair most of the time and would be largely housebound without help to get out. Kevin, his befriender, is sensitive to Arthur's frustration and sadness about having such restricted mobility. Arthur comes from a military family and tends to get on better with men. There have been numerous complaints by Arthur and his visitors about the poor care he receives from carers who are often experienced as uncaring and negligent, for example, failing to ensure he takes his medication, and on occasions missing scheduled visits.

Arthur enjoys food so Meal Buddies is an opportunity to combine befriending with having a good meal, which tends to alternate between going to Arthur's house and bringing him out (with or without the wheelchair) to the Inspire café. Arthur is quite strong-willed and wants to be able to exercise his autonomy. He does not want to be told what to do, so it is particularly important to talk to him about his wishes, including whether he wants to be at home to eat in or out. Arthur is evidently, from Kevin's account, not an easy

man and is sometimes is unpleasant in his relationships with those trying to help him. Nonetheless, Kevin has managed to get to know Arthur and his better qualities, and he sees Arthur very much as a friend.

Comment:

It is important not to try to plug gaps by allowing volunteering for Meal Buddies to take up caring duties. Kevin's relationship with Arthur is unique and each befriender/befriended relationship has a different set of qualities. Having male as well as female befrienders is important within a context where female volunteers tend to dominate, particularly in allowing men to open up and bond with a befriender. There is a tension between the befriending role and the role of carer or service provider, of which befrienders need to be aware, to avoid providing care they are neither qualified nor insured for, and which allows statutory services to be undermined further.

A befriender such as Kevin may become a de facto family member for an older person, however because they are not recognised as such, they are unable to access information that would enable them to better support the older person. For some older people, their isolation is exacerbated because they are difficult to work with in practical and/or interpersonal terms, due to their needs or demands. Some are extremely difficult people who nonetheless have needs to be met.

CASE STUDY NO 3: CHERYL (AGE 82)

Cheryl has had a stroke and has impaired speech and mobility. She was referred to Manchester Cares through the Stroke Association in Levenshulme. Nicky, who works for Manchester Cares and who

lives in Levenshulme, had been looking for a befriending match for Cheryl when she discovered that they had a lot of small things in common and might be a good fit. They have developed a strong friendship, which Nicky values not least because she has no family in Manchester.

They tried out Meal Buddies around Christmas time 2018. Cheryl had had a meal which did not reheat well and she found it tough and chewy. Because of her stroke she found the meal hard to cut up. There was a hiatus in their visits and they tried Meal Buddies when they started again.

This time Cheryl had a pasta dish, which she enjoyed. Although making a meal can take her all day, involving the shopping and cooking, Cheryl appreciates being able to do it. This gives her a sense of purpose, a reason to get out of the house, to go for a walk and get some exercise, and a sense of something to keep her going.

Comment:

There is mutual value to the befriending relationship, which means it can support and enrich the life of both befriender and befriender. Reflecting on Cheryl's needs around food, Nicky felt it was important to give people a choice of dishes to support their autonomy as much as possible.

CASE STUDY NO: 4. LEANNE (AGE 63)

Leanne is a resident of Rose Court, a sheltered housing scheme close to Inspire. Leanne uses an electric wheelchair to get around the neighbourhood. She has multiple physical health needs, regularly experiences acute health crises, and has seen an overall deterioration in her health.

Leanne also experiences chronic poor mental health, and has suffered a great deal of personal tragedy, having had twin girls with disabilities who died in childhood and an estranged son with a drug addiction.

There are many practical considerations around Leanne's health which shape her day-to-day activities, including eating. She demonstrates a high level of ingenuity in terms of practical coping mechanisms for her health-related and mobility needs. Leanne is a member of the Inspire Taskforce group of older residents as well as Inspire the Choir, which brings her into contact with a stable social group and people at Inspire.

However, her deteriorating health has exacerbated her poor mobility, which means she has been going out less and has lost her appetite. Leanne has very specific dietary requirements meaning she cannot eat many foods, and this has to be taken into account in meal choices. The café sets aside a meal for her to store/freeze when they have something on the menu that she likes and is able to eat, or that is picked up by her befriender.

Leanne's comment about a Meal Buddies meal was that it was too much for her to eat so she saved some and used leftovers to make soup, giving her 3 meals in all. Beth is Leanne's befriender and Meal Buddy through Levenshulme Good Neighbours. Beth is 5 months pregnant and is a good match because Leanne likes babies and has enjoyed the vicarious involvement in Beth's pregnancy, crocheting a shawl for Beth's baby. This indicates enrichment and potential strengthening of their relationship with benefits that go beyond casual volunteering.

Comment:

Befrienders may develop genuine friendships with the older people they support. But the personalised element to Meal Buddies may be difficult to replicate if developed on a larger scale. This would require both expansion in the number of befrienders (which may be difficult to achieve) and appointment of administrators to manage the service.

POTENTIAL AND POSSIBILITIES OF THE MEAL BUDDIES PROJECT

The importance of the Meal Buddies project needs to be related to the projected increase in the number of older people living alone, and the vulnerability of a significant group to malnutrition and related problems⁸. Providing this kind of support, as an additional strand of community-based care, offers a form of innovation which may warrant replication in other neighbourhood settings. However, a number of lessons may be drawn from the scheme as it developed in Levenshulme. These may be summarised as follows:

- **Some of the most vulnerable individuals may need encouragement and time to eat and try different foods.** The project manager for Inspire regularly encourages attenders to the café to try new foods but this may involve getting one or two people to have a taste before they encourage others in their group to have a go.
- **Those who most need Meal Buddies, and who are struggling to eat well, may have limited food preferences, often due to a narrowing of their appetites over a long period of time.** Elsie, who will often only eat tomato sandwiches, is one such example. Pat is another, who decided not to take part in the scheme,

saying she was too fussy about food, would make it harder to cater for her, and which would in turn make her feel awkward about continually turning meals down. However, regardless of the difficulties with the degree of personalisation required with meals, the befriending component of social eating remains invaluable.

- **Developing Meal Buddies raised a number of practical challenges, especially in relation to work with volunteers.** The project itself was heavily reliant – and indeed could not have been developed – without the infrastructure provided by Inspire and the network of volunteers associated with Levenshulme Good Neighbours. Against this, LGN (with just two part-time staff) currently have limited capacity to recruit volunteers, and managing volunteer befrienders and the older people involved is labour intensive, with the requirement for very personalised support for pairs, and individual knowledge of volunteers' and older service users' circumstances. This reflects a wider issue with interventions that seek to address some of the gaps in statutory services in terms of their lack of responsiveness to older peoples' needs. Personalised support requires greater knowledge about the individual and may make take more time to develop as a result. They can of course be scaled-up with added resource or by harnessing more volunteers to help manage services.
- **Meal Buddies raised particular challenges in respect of the organisation of volunteers.** Volunteers do not necessarily live close to the person they are supporting. Many depend upon public transport or walk, especially student volunteers. Meal Buddies therefore entails

an additional journey to pick up the meal before going to a home visit. This can be challenging if public transport is used. It is important volunteers do not bear the expense of taxis, or arduous travel for their befriending visits. Volunteers could be left out of pocket from extra trips and Levenshulme Good Neighbours has a responsibility to reimburse volunteers, which involves an additional financial cost.

- **There is a need for the café to get input about numbers of Meal Buddies meals needed on any particular day, and any specific requirements around them.** This information needs to be provided in advance for them to plan provision. There can be a challenge to align ad hoc meal requests for Meal Buddies with the café's regime, which is based on a menu set on a day to day basis. This requires further consideration. A suggestion is to use a pre-questionnaire about food preferences or needs to be shared with the chefs so they can put aside certain meals for individual older people on particular days. Not all Meal Buddies participants request a meal every week. Administrative support has been important in collecting not only evaluative data but what is needed for logistical management of the scheme, including effective liaison with the café. However, the administrators role is temporary and for sustainability some of the work would need to be taken up by another volunteer or member of staff.

Developments arising from the Meal Buddies project

Meal Buddies continues to evolve as recognition develops around the joint needs of good nutrition and social contact. Three initiatives may be highlighted:

First, the launch, following an initiative from the Inspire project manager, of a peer support lunch club, through which more isolated people can meet and eat with a group of others. This is a parallel mode of social eating, and provides an opportunity to test out different formats that may work more or less well under different circumstances and which may benefit different groups of older people. A group of older people are invited to have a free shared meal together at the Inspire café. The café are able to plan for the regular meal and to ensure they have enough food to cater for a specific group. Many participants are people who know each other and are regular visitors to Inspire, while others are attending for the first time and acquiring a new social network.

Second, the programme manager, Kate Williams, has initiated an expansion of the social eating work by linking with the Levenshulme Youth Project to run 'cook and taste' sessions. These provide an inter-generational cooking skills session and bring young and older people together for practical cooking demonstrations. The sessions break down recipes into ingredients and methods, encouraging participants to learn a new vocabulary and understand the science of how cooking textures and flavours are produced, as well as talking generally about food and cooking. They then go into the kitchen and make the planned recipe, and then take home the final product. The older participants are valued for their contribution in sharing their knowledge and practical cooking skills, and this generates friendships across generations.

Third, an event was organised to better understand the level of need among older residents for social eating. Invitations targeted the Inspire Taskforce, Exercise and

Eat group, Meal Buddies and older people who use Inspire with the aim to get people together for a social meal and to try new foods. The session comprised: a communal meal with support from volunteers, casual staff and chefs; a talk and interactive Q&A from an expert on nutrition and health. Forty people attended as guests in addition to volunteers. A questionnaire was distributed to gather data on eating habits. The event revealed that:

- **Most people tried a new food on the day**
- **Almost 50% of those attending had diabetes or weight-management related issues around the need to eat better**
- **Nearly one in ten had trouble getting the food they needed each week**

As a result of the Meal Buddies project, the social eating programme has been further developed and there are plans to trial a 'Sunday Communal Tea'. This will build on both Meal Buddies and Sunday Lunches held monthly at Inspire and in the sheltered housing scheme Thomas Regan Court. Feedback has indicated that having a food-based social and communal event on Sundays (viewed as the loneliest day of the week) was more important than the food itself.

The aim is to foster an inter-generational partnership approach to providing a Sunday communal-tea that will involve an afternoon of communal cooking and eating together, with a Sunday social atmosphere (with weekend newspapers, games, and TV). Sunday Communal Tea will draw on a pool of volunteers, bringing in participants in other social eating and cooking skills sessions. This will include LGN volunteers who have

participated in the Meal Buddies pilot and who have expressed a desire to cook themselves for their befriender.

ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE MEAL BUDDIES PROJECT FOR SUPPORTING AGEING IN PLACE

Through Meal Buddies, housebound older people who might otherwise eat poorly or not at all are ensured regular nutritious meals which promote good health. The poor quality of food often eaten by some groups of older people highlights problems with the support provided by paid carers, difficulties in maintaining healthy eating, and the continuing need to prioritise issues relating to malnutrition in campaigns around public health. Moreover, a meal provides a legitimate space and opportunity for social contact between housebound older people and befrienders. It enriches the eating experience so that older people who are reluctant to eat or who experience barriers to eating well can eat more and better.

Volunteers have also reported better food consciousness and awareness of the importance of nutrition through developing an understanding of the rationale for Meal Buddies, and are able to eat better themselves through enjoying a nutritious meal. As many of the Meal Buddies volunteers are on low incomes this is an unanticipated outcome that suggests a more widespread need to be met across generations, especially in the context of the high cost of living, poor cooking skills or facilities and busy lives that can preclude eating well. This highlights the multifaceted and intergenerational nature of many of what are characterised as age-friendly needs and interventions.



MONITORING AND FEEDBACK REGIME

A number of systems supported by pro formas have been tested and some adopted accordingly to capture the necessary information about older people participating in Meal Buddies, both as part of initial engagement and ongoing monitoring. These include:

- **A referral form to capture information about the older person and their needs, to assess their suitability for Meal Buddies and indicate possible LGN volunteer matches.**
- **A spreadsheet of Meal Buddies' names, contact details, relevant medical conditions and food allergies, intolerances and preferences (permission was required to hold this information).**
- **An initial interview questionnaire for use with Meal Buddies on the first visit to provide a baseline indication of eating, nutrition and social needs.**
- **Email feedback form used with volunteer befrienders to ask about what is and is not working (Levenshulme Good Neighbours also seeks feedback from the older befriended about the befriending relationship).**

It is important that both befrienders and befriendeds have the opportunity to give feedback on meals, on how their relationship is going, and how their involvement in the project is going overall, especially in the

event that it is not working well. There is also a need to monitor which meals participants have enjoyed or not enjoyed and why. Levenshulme Good Neighbours already has robust processes that support feedback from both befriender and befriended to ensure the relationship is working satisfactorily. Meal Buddies adds an additional layer of information requirements and additional groups of stakeholders who need to be communicated with – the Inspire café in particular. It is important to monitor any overlaps or duplications between the data collection and monitoring procedures.

PROJECT 7: INSPIRE THE CHOIR

The second major project developed under the auspices of Levenshulme Inspire was the formation of a weekly choir group. The aim is for people to enjoy singing and to be able to express themselves creatively. The choir is explicitly inclusive, generating an environment that is non-judgemental. The choir aspires for participants to feel a sense of belonging, and this extends to being part of a larger choir community.

The choir has drawn in a number of new people beyond those regularly involved in Inspire's activities for older residents. It draws people from various backgrounds, most of whom are 65 and older. Membership includes those active at Inspire, involved in other local groups, and a number of new members drawn in through volunteering at Inspire or hearing the choir perform at events, and who are new to the idea of a singing in a choir. A mixture of music is chosen to appeal to the group, often drawn from popular songs from the group's youth that they are likely to know. Other songs are drawn from non-English speaking languages and choir members

having opportunities to suggest songs of their choice. This gives the group ownership of the choir and the direction it takes.

PROCESS OF DEVELOPMENT, OBSTACLES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

The project started in September 2018 with weekly choir sessions held at Inspire. By June 2019 the choir had a membership of 15 of whom around 10 attend on a regular basis. The choir is targeted at older residents although open to all groups. The idea for setting up a choir came from the response to some one-off singing sessions that had previously been offered to a group who regularly attend Inspire. Lou Armer, who works with the older people's Taskforce at Inspire, had organised these ad hoc sessions, using her knowledge of and connections to music teaching and performing.

There had subsequently been feedback from a number of the older people using Inspire concerning the desirability of having a regular choir. The sessions initially started running every two weeks, later moving to weekly, enabling them to better learn songs and sustain progress. The anonymised vignettes below capture the range of motivations and outcomes for choir members. Vignettes are drawn from a variety of data, including fieldnotes of observations of choir sessions, conversations with older residents in Levenshulme, interviews with key participants and a focus group with choir members.

CASE STUDY 1: FAYE (AGE 65)

Faye had wanted to join a choir despite being told as a child that she couldn't sing. She had previously joined another local choir where she knew a few members,

but found that she was leaving sessions feeling somewhat undermined and low in confidence. Other members were mainly musically trained and knowledgeable, and it made her feel excluded. In contrast she had really enjoyed the one-off sessions that Lou had organised at Inspire and was keen to do more. What has been important to her with the Inspire choir has been Lou's skill and sensitivity to the group's and individuals' capabilities, and what they need to learn. She is able to check their learning and how they are grasping the songs and adjust her teaching in a supportive and encouraging way. As a former teacher herself, Faye discerns the expertise skillfully deployed through Lou's approach.

CASE STUDY 2: SUSAN (AGE 71)

Susan has done a lot of singing through her involvement with the Levenshulme Methodist church. She appreciates the emphasis in the choir on enjoyment over skill because it makes it more inclusive. She observes that the choir also generates a good atmosphere among audiences when they perform because they appreciate the happy songs the choir sings. She thinks if a couple of men would join then others would follow.

CASE STUDY 3: LEANNE (AGE 68)

Leanne had just bought a karaoke machine the day before our interview - a testament to her love of singing - and she talked at length about the music she likes to listen to. Leanne used to sing in a church choir until her health deteriorated and she could no longer stand or get onto the stage. She now uses a motorised wheelchair and appreciates that the choir leader will always make sure she can

gains access to venues. In this respect the growth of the choir from an explicitly age-friendly environment at Inspire, and as an extension to Lou's existing work with older residents, ensures that the choir, while open to all, is tailored and sensitive to the needs of older members.

Leanne talked about her singing skills, such as singing the descant parts in her previous choir, wanting to sing more complicated and challenging songs, and looking out for opportunities to sing. She can be seen in a different light, both by herself and others. She is clearly confident when singing and said that she happily sings solo in choirs, at karaoke sessions, and at the St Mary's church Irish Community Care lunch club. Leanne, who suffers a great deal of physical and emotional pain, values singing as something that boosts her spirits.

CASE STUDY 4: SARAH (AGE 74)

Sarah joined a one off session 'singing for breath' partly for health reasons. She suffers from a chest condition that makes breathing difficult at times. She found she enjoyed singing, and coming to the choir has helped her breathing become easier. Singing expands her lung capacity so that her breathing improves and she coughs less often. The permissive, inclusive and accommodating ethos of the group allows Sarah to do as much or as little as her condition allows on a given day without leaving the group. This is an important factor for many members whose variable health and long-term conditions might otherwise make them self-conscious about attending or about the extent to which they can take part (for example, some are unable to do all of the warm-up exercises, others are unable to stand to sing or perform).

From choir sessions the group has started to take on performances, for which there has been considerable demand. Their first performance was in Albert Square (in the centre of Manchester) and many were daunted and reluctant to perform publicly. However, a number of members have started to join public performances as their confidence has grown. The choir is receiving regular invitations to perform and has started to feel a sense of pride, with members wearing their Inspire the Choir T-shirts at public performances. The choir's identity has formed around singing mainly happy songs, and this has become a theme of which they are proud.

The choir leader is keen to encourage the involvement of a broader constituency of residents, including encouraging men to join. There have until recently been no regular male attendees. Some older men from regulars at Inspire have occasionally taken part, however, being lone male voices could also be considered off-putting. It has been difficult to find a suitable time to run choir sessions around existing activities at Inspire, particularly as most activities at older residents are held during the day. While there is an appetite for longer choir sessions to allow for more singing time, this would be difficult to schedule within current constraints.

In terms of the future development of the choir, there is potential to encourage some members to mentor new singers, or to lead choir sessions. The choir leader would like to explore musical talents that choir members have, even from long in the past. A possible thread to pursue is eliciting stories about music from participants. They are a rich seam that taps in not only to choir members' musical preferences

and memories but provides a space for personal narratives more broadly.

ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE CHOIR FOR SUPPORTING AGEING IN PLACE

Improved confidence and voice

Members enjoy both the singing and the social aspects of the choir and believe that singing builds their confidence. Many were initially concerned that they could not sing well and felt self-conscious about singing, but have since found that audiences enjoy their singing and that as a group, imperfections tend to be evened out.

'I like the singing bit, because it can lift you up and make you laugh, for no...you know, it just does something when you're singing; even if you can't sing, which I don't think I can.'

Some members have excellent singing voices that came as a surprise to them and others.

'You see, if we were to believe it, none of us would be able to sing; but we must do, because everybody says how lovely we sound.'

Members have noted that their voices have become stronger through singing, and that they are more confident about starting to sing. It was observed that choir members using their voices for singing has a direct corollary to making themselves heard more generally. 'Having a voice' in terms of being more visible and noticed, translates into a greater sense of confidence. There is a striking contrast between the external impression many in the choir give and how they are when they talk about music. They are visibly and audibly transformed during conversations about the

songs during choir sessions. Choir members light up when they start to talk about songs they like, and they express their enthusiasm for singing through talking about finding themselves singing choir songs they have learned on their way home.

'I think with our choir we seem to sing a lot of happy, loudish music, you know, and that lifts you.'

It is apparent that choir members are often revisiting a joy of singing from the past and recapturing a sense of their innate singing skills. The choir has invoked many reminiscences of singing in the past, and associated memories and feelings, becoming a vehicle for people to tell stories about their pasts. Singing is especially valuable for members whose opportunities for expression are otherwise limited.

'Music makes you feel better, whatever sort of music it is, but if you're singing something happy then it makes you feel happy.'

Percussion instruments have been introduced into some sessions and have added to the sense of fun and playfulness, which is often missing from more earnest engagement of older residents. Choir members are keen to use the percussion more often to extend the expressiveness of music, and help them establish rhythm.

Choir performances

The choir performed with great success as part of Levenshulme Pride, kicking off the march in the neighbourhood. They have performed at the Festival of Ageing, the Age Friendly Levenshulme market, a Resident's Association street party, and the Peace

Concert in Sept 2018 for the International Day of Peace, which involved a number of local choirs. Performing with other choirs gives them access to a wider social network.

SOCIAL NETWORK BUILDING

The choir has developed into a cohesive group that is distinct from, while overlapping with existing social groups. A number of the choir members are not among the regulars at other Inspire activities targeted at older people. Individuals have been observed to develop new bonds with other members in the group and to engage in interactions that transcend the choir, such as exchanging plants, accompanying others to or from the choir or meeting outside of the sessions. There is potential to build on what has proved to be the cohesive and generative power of collective singing as a mechanism for broader engagement around creative wellbeing.

'We enjoy one another's company, we enjoy singing, and having a laugh, and socialising.'

'We're all friends, we're all happy. Nice social get together. I didn't really want to initially, because I thought I can't sing, you have to be able to sing; that's what I thought, you have to be a good singer.'

Levenshulme Village Model: Outcomes in terms of whether the project has supporting ageing in place

The Village model in Levenshulme has produced a number of positive outcomes for participants and for the neighbourhood. It has improved access to nutritious meals and raised the level of food consciousness among a range of people directly and indirectly

involved with the social eating projects. It has helped improve the confidence and mental health of participants as well as strengthening social networks.



The Village approach has enabled participants to test out and learn by enacting collaboration between different groups and organisations to bring about projects, and this activity has brought age-friendliness onto the agenda at a neighbourhood level. Inspire led, with support from Urban Villages, a successful bid under the inaugural Great Manchester Mayor's Age-Friendly Challenge, for Levenshulme to be recognised as an age-friendly neighbourhood. New knowledge and expertise have developed among participants and project collaborators about successful age-friendly work and the need for flexible, intergenerational projects and interventions that can respond to complex and highly individual needs.

CONCLUSION

This section has reviewed the various projects developed under the banner of Urban Villages. Each has focused upon issues around strengthening social connections, encouraging partnerships with different groups, reaching out to marginalised groups, and implementing principles of co-production. The discussion has highlighted a range of obstacles and issues experienced by the groups. These are discussed further, along with the recommendations arising from the Urban Villages work, in Section Four of this report.



SECTION FOUR: STRENGTHENING AGEING IN PLACE: NEW APPROACHES TO COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND BUILDING AGE-FRIENDLY NEIGHBOURHOODS

INTRODUCTION

This section provides an overview of the Urban Villages project. It considers the techniques adopted during the work, achievements as well as barriers encountered, and recommendations for supporting the goal of ageing in place. The themes identified relate to the main aim of the Urban Villages project which was to:

- Support inter-generational collaborations as part of resident-led projects to combat the separation and potential isolation of people over 50 from their wider community.

In doing this, the following objectives were established:

- first, to stimulate new collaborations and social networks
- second, to unlock additional resources as residents acquire knowledge of different options for developing support
- third, develop new community infrastructures that might benefit groups who are or feel marginalised by existing types of support.

We begin by relating the work in Manchester to the objective of developing a Village-type model in the two neighbourhoods and consider the range of issues arising from the various interventions.

DEVELOPING THE VILLAGE MODEL

An initial question concerns how activities in Manchester compared with the kind of approach developed in the USA. The answer is that activities in the two neighbourhoods departed to a considerable extent from the 'ideal type' of Village model, as originally developed. This was defined by Scharlach and his colleagues as:

'grassroots, consumer-driven membership organisations typically developed and governed by older family members that provide a variety of services and involvement opportunities in exchange for annual dues'.¹

The challenge in the Manchester work concerned how a Village-type model might be created in neighbourhoods with populations with limited financial resources, and high levels of physical and mental health needs. One observation is that, despite reservations about use of the label 'Villages', the branding was found to be helpful in bringing groups together, fostering an identity, and assisting with funding applications. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge the extent to which work in low-income neighbourhoods may require a different combination of resources, in comparison with the North American model (where Villages are sustained through a mix of membership fees and private donations):

Not only were the Manchester projects heavily reliant on key individuals leading the projects and sustaining momentum, but the research team also spent time co-developing projects and building trust at various stages of the work.



Many of the Villages in the USA employ staff to co-ordinate services, whilst also drawing on a substantial network of volunteers. However, the Manchester work differed in its reliance upon facilitators who, despite in some cases being paid (by the project) for their time, had other responsibilities in addition to those of developing Village-type work. There were also greater strains in respect of recruiting volunteers to support the work.

THE ROLE OF SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE

An important issue, highlighted by differences between Brunswick and Levenshulme, concerned the extent to which existing social infrastructure was available to assist the development of projects. A major challenge for the Brunswick Village projects was finding physical spaces in which to operate. Previous research had highlighted the limited opportunities to socialise in Brunswick, resulting in tension in relationships with the housing consortium². As a result, Brunswick projects (with the exception of Women's Footprints) developed campaigns to reclaim neighbourhood space, which meant searching for storage facilities, challenging the housing provider to provide meeting rooms, and exploring the use of spaces outside the neighbourhood such as pubs, museums, and University campus space.

Limited access to appropriate spaces meant that Village projects were to some extent 'nomadic', creating difficulties for groups trying to establish a regular routine for their activities and a sense of identity. Achieving stability in access to meeting spaces is important, given residents' variable capacity to socialise, which means they might want to dip in and out of activities, returning when they feel sufficiently well or confident.

The absence of community spaces also meant that time had to be spent on finding and booking venues, and informing people where to meet, and in some cases chaperoning people and/or organising transport. An unintended consequence was that organisers often sought spaces outside of their neighbourhood at the expense of connecting with people within their own local community.

The physical infrastructure provided by Levenshulme Inspire was crucial to the development of projects and contrasted to the situation on the Brunswick Estate. The availability of meeting space in a prominent neighbourhood location, with an accessible building, toilets, and café, allowed a mix of formal and informal social activity. In addition to physical infrastructure, organisational support was a critical enabler in respect of systems and processes for arranging meetings and events, sharing information, providing access to food and drink, and people to help with enquiries. Such infrastructure also includes the people paid to facilitate and publicise projects and meetings, particularly the administrative elements that volunteers may not be willing, able or interested in doing.

The Manchester Villages work confirmed the importance of a physical base for facilitating work supporting ageing in place. For example, at Levenshulme Inspire, the locally-embedded knowledge of older residents and their circumstances, by staff, volunteers and other visitors, enabled the provision of highly specific, personalised support, with the potential to prevent problems or issues from becoming more serious.

Examples include:

- A resident who had left his wallet in the Inspire café had it returned by a staff member who was able to drop it round to his house.
- A member of staff noticed a regular at the café had not been visiting and checked at her address to find that she had fallen.
- When staff and volunteers know that an older person has gone into hospital they help make arrangements to feed their pets or help out in other ways.

These anecdotes indicate the role that community organisations – in particular those with a secure physical base – can play in fostering supportive social networks. The development of such ties may create emotional bonds as well as providing different types of practical help. This includes members helping each other get to social activities, visiting or checking on individuals who may be ill, or providing advocacy on behalf of those needing support.

VOLUNTEERING IN THE COMMUNITY



As noted earlier in this report, Villages in the USA are reliant upon older volunteers in providing services and organising activities. However, the work in Manchester, whilst confirming the importance of volunteers, also highlighted some of the barriers to volunteering³:

For older residents, engaging with the project was time consuming, often frustrating, and with uncertain outcomes. Many of the individuals who worked on the development of projects were committed to various other activities within their communities. Some commented on their experience of projects which had bought little in the way of tangible benefit to their neighbourhoods.

The scope for volunteering may also be changing, with limitations arising from increased caring responsibilities (for a spouse or older relative), and concern as well that volunteer work is now a replacement for services previously provided by the welfare state. In addition, those in what has been termed the 'third age' may now see volunteering as part of a traditional type of ageing from which they wish to escape, seeking instead a different lifestyle after a long working life.

From these general observations about the development of the Urban Villages project, the following sections consider more specific points, beginning first of all with a consideration of the techniques developed over the course of the project.

COMMUNITY WORK AND DEVELOPING AGE-FRIENDLY NEIGHBOURHOODS

An important dimension of the Urban Villages project was the application of community work techniques: both by the research team and the projects themselves. Community work in the UK expanded in the 1960s and 1970s, with the employment of community workers in local authority social services departments. However, after a period of growth, driven by the (initially) Home Office-sponsored Community Development Projects, community work lost out to the more individual and family-orientated approaches developed by social work⁴. But the experience of Urban Villages suggests that the skills associated with community work are essential to building age-friendly neighbourhoods. These might include:

- Helping communities to share knowledge and resources affectively
- Strengthening tenants organisations
- Outreach to individuals and groups at risk of discrimination and abuse;
- Representing communities in negotiations with public, private and not-for-profit organisations.

A variety of community work techniques were deployed by the projects in Brunswick and Levenshulme:

- *The Men's Art Project* recruited through 'hanging around' in the housing blocks on the Brunswick Estate, encouraging residents to attend meetings
- *Inspire the Choir* used a 'bring a friend' approach to overcome nervousness about singing
- *Brunswick Collective* networked with other groups representing older people to gather new ideas for its work
- *Levenshulme Inspire* drew on the social as well as nutritional dimensions of food to develop its work
- *Women's Footprints* highlighted the benefits of working in groups to assist personal development
- *The Men's Arts Group* drew on the value of cultural activities in reaching out to vulnerable individuals
- *Levenshulme Inspire* and the *Neighbourly Garden Project* demonstrated the value of intergenerational activity.
- *The Brunswick Collective* and *Women's Footprints* illustrated the benefits of groups comprising individuals from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds.

These, and other approaches developed by the projects, were helpful in assisting recruitment, and identifying those experiencing exclusion of some kind or another. Against this, the groups had more difficulty with applying community work approaches to address issues relating to power imbalances within their respective neighbourhoods. This was especially the case on the Brunswick Estate, where groups

had limited influence on the consortium of companies (Solutions 4 Brunswick) involved in the regeneration and management of the neighbourhood, illustrated by the problems in accessing space for projects, and pressures arising from the redevelopment of the Estate.

Some recommendations for addressing these problems are considered below. The next section of this report considers some the achievements of the seven projects developed for the Urban Villages programme.



ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE URBAN VILLAGES PROJECT

The achievements of the Urban Villages project were varied and diverse but four overarching themes can be identified as being of particular importance:

- **Work with marginalised groups**

The project laid particular emphasis on working with individuals and groups previously marginalised in age-friendly work. In the USA, Lehning and colleagues⁵ have expressed concern about the extent to which age-friendly initiatives are 'failing to address the specific needs of racial and ethnic minority groups with low incomes'. They go on to argue that: 'this is of particular concern, given these sub-groups of older adults are likely to live in particularly aging un-friendly, under-resourced neighbourhoods'.



The majority of Urban Villages projects recruited from groups under-represented in age-friendly work, notably women from different ethnic and migrant backgrounds (e.g. Women’s Footprints, Brunswick Collective), or people with mental health difficulties (e.g. Men’s Arts Group), or those experiencing isolation through illness and disability (e.g. Meal Buddies). The challenge here is:

- **How to develop age friendly work representative of the diversity of ageing populations?**
- **How to secure the additional resources which vulnerable groups need to flourish within their communities?**

We return to these issues below in the recommendations arising from our study.

- **Focus on health and well-being**

The second achievement of Urban Villages concerned the focus on health and well-being. This was not a planned outcome from the Villages work; it was, however, a consistent theme which emerged in many of the groups:

- **The concern with exercise and mobility issues (Brunswick Collective)**
- **The importance of healthy eating (Meal Buddies and Inspire)**
- **Personal development and life course transitions (Women’s Footprints)**

- **Mental health concerns (Men’s Arts Group and Women’s Footprints)**
- **Health benefits of improving the environment (the Neighbourly Garden Project)**

The extent to which the groups focused on a broad range of health issues was an important feature of Urban Villages and supports the focus on place-based working, outlined in documents such as *Our Manchester* and *Transforming the Health of Our Population*⁶, and developed in programmes such as the GMCVO-led *Ambition for Ageing*.

A positive development was the links formed by groups with local NHS community workers, and the advice and support provided. However, where groups ran their own health and exercises courses (e.g. Brunswick Collective), difficulties were encountered in recruiting participants and speakers, and making effective connections with health providers.

The positive message is that the move towards ‘social prescribing’¹⁷ finds support in the kind of groups developed in the Urban Villages project. But groups had difficulties linking with relevant NHS resources, a finding which indicates that if the mission of tackling health inequalities is to be achieved, there needs to be new approaches developed for connecting community groups to relevant stakeholders.

- **Learning new skills**

A third achievement was supporting individuals and groups to learn new skills, especially in developing and managing their projects. Urban Villages funded individuals to attend project management and financial

budgeting courses, to assist their work in managing and developing programmes. A condition of receiving financial support for any project was preparing a costed proposal and submitting regular written reports of progress if successful. These requirements assisted the development of skills which could be translated into successful funding applications to other organisations, as has been the case with four of the groups supported by the project.



Work with Urban Villages also encouraged one group to move from dependence on University support for funding and administration of funds, to having a separate bank account and business address. Two groups (Brunswick Collective and Neighbourly Garden Project) have rented their own office to develop their work following involvement with the Urban Villages project. These developments suggest the potential for the projects continuing at least over the short and medium-term.

- **Strengthening social networks**

A fourth achievement has been that of strengthening the social networks of those individuals engaged with the various projects. This was a key objective for Urban Villages, and there is some evidence of progress having been achieved with a number of groups. This was especially the case with Levenshulme Inspire, with the work matching volunteers to people largely restricted – through physical

disabilities – to their own homes; and the establishment of Inspire the Choir. Early indications from the Men’s Art group also suggest that it has been successful in bringing together previously isolated older men with a limited number of local contacts.

There is also evidence from the work of Women’s Footprints of successful engagement with women from a range of ethnic and migrant backgrounds, some of whom were facing difficult transitions association with divorce, bereavement, and/or poor mental health. A key issue here will be monitoring the degree to which the extension of social networks is maintained over the longer-term, a topic which should be the subject of follow-up research.

BARRIERS EXPERIENCED BY THE URBAN VILLAGES PROJECT

Urban Villages also encountered barriers in developing its work, of which the following were the most significant:

- **Access to formal and informal spaces**

Limited access to formal and informal spaces was a significant barrier to developing Urban Villages - especially on the Brunswick Estate.

The problem here was the loss of the type of informal spaces which are an essential fabric of any community in respect of supporting social ties. This was illustrated by the closure of facilities (e.g. a pub, laundrette, chip shop) as part of the re-redevelopment, without temporary replacements. The Estate has precisely the population – a disproportionate number of single men and women – reliant on the types of informal spaces which have been post through the process of regeneration.

It is important to stress the value of facilities, such as those provided by Brunswick Church, which are available on the Estate. However, these need complementing with additional resources.

Latham and Layton⁸ make the point that: ‘... social infrastructure can be an important resource for the economically and socially marginalised’, and we would reinforce the importance of this point from the experience of Urban Villages. This point is developed further in the recommendations arising from this report.

- **Recruiting volunteers**

The second main barrier concerned problems of recruiting volunteers in respect of two of the projects. In the case of Meal Buddies there was limited capacity to recruit and manage volunteers through Levenshulme Good Neighbours, given only two part-time members of staff. The Neighbourly Garden Project also had difficulties recruiting people to support environmental projects on the Estate. There was some discussion around the expectation to reward volunteers with incentives of various kinds, but for various reasons this proved difficult to implement. It was also challenging to recruit volunteers to projects where the aims were still being developed and where a ‘critical mass’ of people had yet to be engaged.

- **Recruiting new members**

A third problem related to recruiting members for the different projects. On the Brunswick Estate, the housing consortium Solutions 4 Brunswick distributed leaflets and posters, and sent text messages, to help recruit participants to the Brunswick Collective, the Men’s Arts group, and activities undertaken

by the Neighbourly Gardening Project. Unfortunately, the groups encountered delays in distributing information, leaving project leaders reliant upon tactics such as ‘hanging around the blocks’ or distributing their own materials by hand. The groups also found it difficult to target particular individuals – notably those housebound or isolated – given the absence of information about where they might be found.

The conclusion is that the success of projects such as Urban Villages is dependent upon co-operation from a network of stakeholders, with community work skills associated with managing issues of power and conflict an important part of the repertoire of organisers⁹.

LACK OF TRUST

A fourth barrier concerned lack of trust in relation to key institutions affecting the everyday life of the two neighbourhoods.

This was especially the case on the Brunswick Estate, where a report from the LOOPER project had suggested that: ‘Overall the community is hard to reach because it is characterised by communication barriers, mistrust and a tendency toward disengagement resulting from experiences of marginalisation and lack of voice in the public sphere’¹⁰.

Urban Villages found a marked degree of enthusiasm, around the Estate, for developing various forms of community action. But the extent of this was fragile and dependent upon commitments being followed-up, clear lines of communication, and respect for conflicting views. One key issue is the imbalance of power between the main institutions – Solutions 4 Brunswick (S4B), the City Council, and the University – and the range of groups

represented on the Estate. Resolving this will require greater transparency around decisions on key issues affecting those living on the Estate, allied with strengthening community action on behalf of, and led by, residents (see further below).

In the case of Levenshulme Inspire, there is the danger of older and poorer residents being excluded from a vision for neighbourhood development dominated by gentrification and services designed around young professionals, rather than the more diverse voices and needs that exist in the area. This confirms the importance of the Inspire centre as the base for community activities, a source of stability given the substantial demographic and social changes affecting the neighbourhood.



FUNDING ISSUES

A fifth barrier concerned insecurities in funding for all the groups with whom Urban Villages worked. Whilst highly regarded and providing important social infrastructure, funding for Levenshulme Inspire is precarious and has still to be secured for 2021 and beyond. Inspire's services are provided (in the main) by a small number of highly committed part-time paid staff and regular volunteers whose contracts, in the case of paid staff, are fixed-term. There is, therefore, the risk

of losing local knowledge and commitment to the age-friendliness of services provided. In the case of the various groups on the Brunswick Estate, all are dependent upon applications for funding sources of different kinds, with these reliant upon the initiative of committed individuals with limited access to administrative or organisational support.



RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are designed to support strategies and policies laid out in documents such as *Our Manchester*, and *A Healthier Manchester*, and equivalent documents for the City Region. In summary, the work of Urban Villages highlights the need to strengthen work in the following areas discussed below:

- **Building social infrastructure**
- **Improving mental and physical health in low income communities**
- **Harnessing housing improvements and redevelopment with tackling health inequalities**
- **Strengthening community work skills**
- **Developing the role of anchor institutions**
- **Strengthening organisations led by older people within the community**

PROMOTING SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE WITHIN COMMUNITIES



Social infrastructure has been highlighted in this report as essential for providing the spaces and opportunities for social interaction to take place. This is an essential requirement for all age groups but especially for those facing difficult transitions, for example those associated with long-term health problems, retirement, and bereavement. Yarker notes the extent to which: 'Good social infrastructure can support a more vibrant community and voluntary sector in....neighbourhoods'¹¹.

Against this, the loss of social infrastructure had been especially damaging in the case of the Brunswick Estate, where the focus on the physical rebuilding of the Estate came at the expense of protecting and strengthening existing social ties. There is a wider lesson here for urban regeneration projects to ensure that social infrastructure (pubs, cafés, community spaces) is protected before the inevitable upheaval associated with the demolition, refurbishment, and building of new homes and facilities.

In respect of Levenshulme, the Inspire community centre provides a base for a range of formal and informal meetings and activities, helping to assist people living in a fast-changing neighbourhood. There was also

a range of other formal and informal spaces around and through which relationships could be nurtured and maintained.

SUGGESTIONS FOR CHANGE

On the Brunswick Estate: there is a need to expand the range of community spaces to complement those provided by existing organisations such as Brunswick Church and the Salvation Army. The provision of informal space is especially important, with an urgent need to re-furbish the community rooms in the three eight-storey blocks on the Estate. These are currently furnished to a poor standard but could fulfil a vital need in supporting social ties between individuals (single people in particular) living in the blocks.

The construction of the Extra-Care facility on the Estate has the potential to offer a significant resource. The best examples of this kind of facility are run as 'community hubs' developing relationships with different groups across the local community¹². Developing an intergenerational dimension to day care might be another option¹³.

In Levenshulme, our observations, over a period of two years, confirm the extent to which the Inspire centre functions as a crucial resource for different generations within the community. It serves as a formal base for organising a wide range of activities; equally, it provides a 'safe space' for individuals who may be living alone and seeking company. This kind of facility is vital to maintain, together with ensuring the long-term financial security for the staff running the building.

However, a general recommendation is that given the importance of social infrastructure for maintaining community life (for all age groups), an audit of facilities

is recommended across all local authorities in Manchester. This would seek to assess the impact of gaps in certain types of facilities, and the implications for building age-friendly neighbourhoods. At the same time, it could consider ways of 'enhancing social infrastructure'¹¹, by promoting community facilities of all kinds which serve to foster interaction and integration across different generations and minority groups.

DEVELOPING THE HEALTH DIMENSION OF AGE-FRIENDLY ACTIVITY

The majority of the projects developed in the Urban Villages project explored a range of issues relating to physical and mental health, with important implications for finding new ways of developing age-friendly activity. Given the serious and complex health inequalities facing many communities, tackling health concerns – mental as well as physical health – must be at the heart of developing age-friendly communities.

SUGGESTIONS FOR CHANGE

The Meal Buddies work in Levenshulme was illustrative of the potential for developing projects with positive social and health outcomes. The social eating programme presented an opportunity to pursue additional dimensions related to sustainable food and nutrition, food consciousness, and community-building around food and eating. With support from local health and social care organisations, the University of Manchester and Age Friendly Manchester, the Meal Buddies leads at Inspire and Levenshulme Good Neighbours, could facilitate development of plans for a 'food web'. This would promote learning about nutrition, food consciousness and social eating, involving the Inspire allotment and café.

A men's gardening project could be incorporated to improve the involvement of older men in activities, based at the Inspire allotment. The allotment activity would encourage older men to engage in activities which allow for 'slow' organic forms of sociality. The food grown on the allotment could also be used in the Inspire café to help trial a model of more sustainable consumption. Better nutrition and food choices could be fostered through teaching cooking skills, and raising the level of knowledge of nutrition as a by-product of these classes and social eating activities. Cook and eat classes could be supplemented by the involvement of older residents in sharing expertise. This would facilitate inter-generational activity, keep older residents involved in local activity, and recognise the value of older residents' skills and experience. The Food web would aim to generate activity and awareness across the food lifecycle from growing, to cooking, though to social meals.

Following the success of the Meal Buddies project, we recommend that it should be formally integrated into the work of Levenshulme Good Neighbours as an extension to their core offering. They would take the lead on coordinating the service with additional resource to do so and an operationalised agreement with the Inspire Café. In addition, educating care agencies around nutrition might be approached through direct engagement and co-development of a charter that includes commitment to improve attention to supporting eating during care visits.

This activity might be endorsed by Age Friendly Manchester and other partners. We also recommend linking the Meal Buddies concept to issues discussed in Our Manchester, and to the aims of the Age Well: Nutrition & Hydration programme laid out in Transforming the Health of Our Population in Greater Manchester⁶, embedding the project within wider Greater Manchester healthy ageing and nutrition-related work.

The Urban Villages work also highlighted the difficulties facing groups seeking to improve their health and well-being, by promoting physical and related activities. The importance of such interventions is confirmed by research on levels of inactivity amongst older adults, with findings from the Active Lives Survey showing 53 per cent of those 75 plus in the North-West of England are classed as inactive (less than 30 minutes of moderate activity per week¹⁴). This issue is being addressed in the Greater Manchester Active Ageing Programme¹⁵, but problems remain for groups of older people attempting to develop initiatives of their own.



Based on the experience of Urban Villages, we recommend closer working between NHS Health Coordinators and Local Authority Neighbourhood Officers, to provide support and resources to community groups seeking to develop programmes with a health dimension.

There are also broader interventions that could be considered in respect of aligning health and age-friendly issues. The regeneration of the Brunswick Estate could link housing improvements and refurbishment with the challenge of tackling health inequalities. Health-related interventions may be especially helpful in addressing the social dislocations which are an inevitable accompaniment to urban regeneration¹⁶. Macgregor¹⁷ highlights the extent to which: 'urban generation projects could aim to improve the availability, quality and prices of healthy food, improve the accessibility to sports grounds and green spaces, aim to lower crime, and improve primary health services'. Lessons from the NHS Healthy New Towns programme are also relevant to consider¹⁸, for community health interventions in general, and urban regeneration in particular.

PROMOTING COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

A significant challenge for age-friendly work is developing effective interventions in what are often fragmented and poorly-resourced neighbourhoods. The implications of this suggest a case for strengthening community work skills as a pre-condition for developing age-friendly communities. Such skills will be essential for developing the leadership required for promoting place-based work amongst people and the communities in which they live.

However, both 'people' and 'communities' (such as the Brunswick Estate and Levenshulme) are becoming increasingly diverse and complex. Hambleton notes that the: '...increasingly fragmented nature of local government and the growing number of service providers active in a given locality means that complex issues that cross

boundaries, or are seen to fall between areas of interest, need to be taken up by leaderships that have an overview and can bring together the right mix of agencies to tackle particular problems¹⁹. And populations themselves comprise a wide mix of age, ethnic, and social groups (as indeed was the case with our own neighbourhoods). In these situations, securing strong local leadership is vital.

Hambleton makes the point that: 'In modern systems of local governance leadership is dispersed and multi-level. The neighbourhood activist or social entrepreneur can make a significant contribution to place-based leadership alongside the strategic efforts of, say, city mayor'²⁰. Hence, our argument that promoting and refining community leadership is an essential component of developing age-friendly programmes in general, and Village-type work in particular.

SUGGESTIONS FOR CHANGE

On the basis of our activity with Urban Villages, we think that community work is already widespread in many neighbourhoods but often goes unrecognised and unsupported. On both the Brunswick Estate and in Levenshulme, a range of groups and individuals were actively attempting to promote change and improve the lives of residents. It is recommended that more attention is given to providing resources to those involved, increasing their influence within the community, and extending their range of skills. In this context, it might be argued that 'community work' as an activity has gone 'underground', pursued by people who are committed to improving their neighbourhood but often lacking the necessary recognition and support which might increase their effectiveness.

This is an important issue for age-friendly as well as other types of interventions: especially if such work is to reach beyond the usual groups of older people, reaching out to those yet to be fully involved or convinced of its merits. One of the achievements of Urban Villages was its engagement with a wide range of people, drawn from different cultural and minority ethnic groups. However, this was only possible because of the skills and networks of those leading and developing the projects.



Some recommendations which might be drawn from these observations are:

- **Manchester City Council might work with a local university or further education college to develop an accredited community work programme, focusing on a broad range of skills, as well as specific modules on activities and interventions with particular groups**
- **Programmes might be targeted at particular groups currently under-represented in age-friendly and similar work – notably those from minority ethnic groups, and the LGBTQI community**
- **The effectiveness of such programmes could be increased if developed in co-operation with bodies such as GMCVO, housing providers, and other relevant groups.**
- **Greater recognition needs to be given to the importance of community leadership as a key constituent of building age-friendly communities.**

Such a programme of work would send out an important message about the social value of types of 'volunteering' which gain, in many cases, insufficient recognition from lead organisations within the community.

STRENGTHENING THE ROLE OF ANCHOR INSTITUTIONS

Section One of this report identified the importance of universities in their role as anchor institutions within local communities. Such institutions are generally understood as large 'geographically place-based organisations that have been in the community for generations and provide economic, social cultural benefits to the locality in which they reside'¹².

This definition might be qualified in that, first, anchor institutions may also – through their own expansion – create unwelcome pressures on their immediate community; second, they may not fulfil their potential to create opportunities for the locality in which they reside; third, they may be only one of a number of 'anchors' within communities, complicating attempts to produce positive local change.

The University of Manchester is an important 'anchor' within the context of the Brunswick Estate. This has been formalised through the development of the University Ardwick Partnership (UAP), established as a Community Interest Company in 2019, and is reflected in a range of University activities, alongside Urban Villages, on the Estate, including:

- LOOPER (Learning Loops in the Public Realm),

- Community projects funded by the Social Responsibility Directorate,
- An advice service provided by Law Students,
- An employment centre The Works (a partnership between the University and a range of organisations based in a building owned by the Salvation Army)

The University is of major importance to the Estate, with the new Engineering Campus alone now providing an imposing physical presence. Given this context, we would suggest a number of initiatives that might be considered to develop a longer-term influence on the Estate. We also think that there is the potential for considerable University engagement in Levenshulme, aimed at addressing challenges now facing the community.



SUGGESTIONS FOR CHANGE

The development of the Extra Care facility on the Brunswick Estate offers substantial scope for University involvement. At the time of writing this report, the plans for the building include: a Bistro, Community Centre, Day Care facility, together with Care and Support services. There is considerable potential for University departments and institutes to provide support, student

placements, as well as to develop research projects in collaboration with the partners involved in the scheme. The School of Nursing, Midwifery and Social Work, along with the Manchester Institute for Collaborative Research on Ageing (MICRA), might be of particular relevance here.

We see an exciting prospect for developing links with university courses and research programmes. There might also be a potential role for the University in expanding facilities within the Extra-Care facility, for example in supporting the provision of a library, IT equipment, and other information services.

Our work also suggests that the University might develop a longer-term presence in Levenshulme, especially through the work of two of its research institutes: MICRA and the Manchester Urban Institute. We think that MICRA could play a supportive role assisting with the evaluation of work undertaken at Inspire, for example through support from students undertaking dissertations for master's degrees.



There is also scope for involving Inspire as a partner in research programmes looking at pressures facing older people 'ageing in place' in communities undergoing substantial social and economic change (of which Levenshulme is certainly one). There is also the potential for researchers linked with the Urban Institute to

propose more general studies, notably around the effects of gentrification (developing in some parts of the locality), the social impact of changes in the housing market, and the role of the retail sector within the local economy.

More generally, the University might consider the merits of becoming an Age-Friendly University, joining the global network of universities working to adapt higher education to the range of challenges associated with demographic change. Such a move might be an effective way of bringing together the range of initiatives promoted internally as well as externally by the University of Manchester in supporting research and policy development around age-related concerns. Such work might be expanded to include:

- recognition of the educational needs of older adults
- promotion of intergenerational learning
- development of public discourse on how higher education can better respond to the needs of older adults
- participation of older adults in the core activities of the University
- support for community development in low income neighbourhoods

DEVELOPING THE VILLAGE MODEL

The Urban Villages work developed a number of valuable projects in the two communities in which it worked. At the same time, we are conscious that these departed to a considerable extent from the type of work developed in the USA. They were not membership associations and provided a limited range of community support services;

and they did not connect with local businesses to establish a system of 'preferred providers'. On the other hand, they developed group activities, with different aspects of health promotion, and assisted in strengthening social networks in the areas in which they were active.

Although the projects provided benefits to the groups and communities involved (although this itself needs to be tested over the longer-term), their impact could have been greater. This was especially the case on the Brunswick Estate, where community organisers faced considerable pressures in the context of a large-scale regeneration programme and the style of management associated with a PFI contract. But we think there are wider lessons from our experience that might have relevance for developing what we view as the next phase of age-friendly work.

SUGGESTIONS FOR CHANGE

From our work, Village-type models might be seen as the next phase in the development of age-friendly work, but one where the emphasis now is more on a 'bottom up' approach. That is to say, an approach where older people (and others in their neighbourhood) engage directly with the relevant institutions (anchor or otherwise) influencing their lives. The first phase might in a sense be seen as 'top-down', with the idea of age-friendliness spread through neighbourhoods through a range of projects and initiatives tackling particular areas of concern – social isolation being a notable example.

We think there is now a need for a new age-friendly model, one which has a more

organisational dimension, where the focus is on community change in a broad sense but where groups of older people run associations which have sufficient power and resources to negotiate with local services, housing providers, anchor institutions, and related bodies. This is especially necessary given the trend towards increasing complexity in the range of agencies providing services, set against the continuing vulnerability (growth of single person households, lifelong poverty, pressures on family carers) of the individuals and communities they are designed to serve. The result is an imbalance of power requiring the development of new age-friendly models if the focusing of services around 'people and communities' is to be achieved²¹.

Developing a Village-type model with appropriate physical and social resources, would seem fully aligned with a devolution agenda focused on giving greater powers to local communities. We suggest taking a number of pilot neighbourhoods across Manchester, where 50 – 100 people, say from 50 years upwards, are brought together to develop new approaches to building age-friendly activities within their communities. The range and type of activities might vary according to the type of neighbourhood:

One Village might have a particular need for a food co-operative or a handyman service; another might focus on health and well-being; another might develop an educational and social dimension. Some might bring together groups under-represented in age-friendly work (e.g. Muslim women; LGBTQI groups; older people from newly arrived migrant communities). Some might draw upon all of these different elements and/or develop others.



The key issue is that the plans to integrate services at a neighbourhood level proposed as part of Our Manchester and across the region in the Greater Manchester model, need to be matched by strengthening neighbourhood groups representing older people. Without this, groups will continue to be marginalised in gaining access to, and influencing, amenities and services being developed on their behalf.

CONCLUSION

The question posed by the Urban Villages research concerns how best to support people ageing in place within their communities. This is now the preferred option in public policy, one given considerable emphasis with the Greater Manchester Model²¹. Our study, examining the relevance of the Village model, has led to the following conclusions:

- **Community work skills are an essential element in building age-friendly neighbourhoods: the network of unpaid workers within neighbourhoods require greater resources and recognition from local authorities**
 - **The role of anchor institutions within neighbourhoods needs to be enhanced and co-ordination amongst them improved**
 - **Ageing in place must be supported by organisations run by and on behalf of older people, these given sufficient resources to negotiate with the public, private, not-for-profit, and voluntary bodies, providing services within communities.**
-
- **Ageing in place must be supported by formal and informal spaces within communities which can allow relationships to flourish**
 - **Activities promoting health and well-being are an essential part of age-friendly work but their development requires support and co-operation between health centres, local authority neighbourhood workers, and the voluntary sector**

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ANNEX A ORGANISATIONS AND INDIVIDUALS CONSULTED FOR THE PROJECT

THE BRUNSWICK ESTATE

Choel Cartwright, Neighbourly Gardening Project

Alishia Johnson, Hope is the Key

Gareth Smith, Men's Art Project

Sandra Cotterell, Women's Footprints

Mo Blue, Women's Footprints/Positive Steps

Rev. Simon Gatenby, Brunswick Parish Church

Rev. Jess Davis, Brunswick Parish Church

Siobhan O'Connor, Manchester Libraries

Patrick Hanfling, Neighbourhood Lead (Ardwick), Manchester City Council

Justin Haqui, Secretary of Brunswick Tenants and Residents Association

Katrina Keane, Neighbourhood Officer for Ardwick, Manchester City Council

Carlos Tait, Health Development Coordinator for Ardwick & Longsight, NHS Manchester

Bethan Galliers, Health Development Coordinator for Gorton and Levenshulme, NHS Manchester

Ross Hemmings, Community Regeneration Manager, S4B

Janice Astbury, Research Associate, Learning Loops in the Public Realm (LOOPER), University of Manchester

Age Friendly Manchester

Greater Manchester Ageing Hub

Manchester Urban Ageing Research Group

Manchester Institute for Collaborative Research on Ageing

Milk & Honey, St Peter's House

Individual residents on the Brunswick Estate

LEVENSHULME

Ed Cox Chair of the Inspire Board

Noah Mellor Buzz Manchester (Levenshulme and Gorton)

Paul Graham One Manchester

Yasmin Rehana Madina Mosque Women's Group

Rahat Ashfaq Madina Mosque Women's Group

Jeremy Hoad Levenshulme Community Association

Ray Olaniyan Levenshulme Good Neighbours

Naomi Smith Levenshulme Good Neighbours

Kate Williams Levenshulme Inspire

Lou Armer Levenshulme Inspire

Phil Murphy Levenshulme Old Library

Zhara Treanor Irish Community Care

Ikhlas Ur-Rahman Neighbourhood Officer - Levenshulme

Al Henry Levenshulme Methodist Church

Judy Williams Rose Court Sheltered Housing scheme

Vicky Harrold Manchester Cares

Daud Gill St Peter's Church

Individual residents living in Levenshulme



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