

Sustainable Living for Over 50s **Building A Community for Our Futures**



(from Manchester Evening News)

The colourful Chinese New Year celebrations came to an end on 10th February, with the dragon parade ending weeks of red lanterns adorning city centre trees.

Meanwhile the Western New Year has brought us new readers – our mailing list has now grown to more than a hundred subscribers.

In this edition we look at the ongoing problem of finding a suitable site.

Working with the Hub

In January we met with Bill Lovatt and Rachel Summerscales of GM Community Led Homes (aka the Hub) to discuss some of the issues around finding a suitable site. We've now starting to review and update our preferred site boundaries and land brief and have booked a session to use the Hub's LandInsight tool to see what new sites we can find.

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We'll also be considering what we might look for in a refurb rather than a new build – the lower embodied carbon of a retrofit rather than a new build is definitely something to bear in mind.

If you're considering joining MUCH, we'd love to hear what your priorities would be in terms of location

Read more about site finding below and keep an eye on our website for updates.

Sites!

Setting the initial criteria for the ideal site

Soon after MUCH was formed we were fortunate to work with a PhD student called Mark Hammond, who has continued his interest in age-friendly housing as a Senior Lecturer at Manchester School of Architecture, and with a secondment to GMCA to work in the GM Ageing Hub team.

The subject of Mark's thesis was "Exploring the role of the architect in older people's cohousing through a collaborative design research approach" and, helpfully for MUCH, the research included a number of collaborative design sessions. As well as design criteria which looked at the use of spaces and their layouts within the cohousing community, we developed site criteria, and we've been pleased to be able to report back to Mark that both have stood the test of time.

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We use a site survey template based on the original site criteria to help us assess whether potential sites might be suitable.

We've begun to revisit both our site criteria, location and our sites list - the 'what' and the 'where', to make sure they still address the needs of both current and future members.

What do we look for in a site?



As well as satisfying our site criteria, we consider the size of the site, and its availability. MUCH have considered more than 40 sites over the last decade and members have carried out a full assessment of around half. We have commissioned several feasibility studies from an architect. Most of these have been within our preferred site search area of South Manchester, but we have also looked at sites in Trafford, Stockport and further afield.

To help explore new areas, we're going to make use of the GMCLH Hub's LandInsight tool, while members continue to keep their eyes peeled for unused pockets of land.

We have a great on-line toolkit and lots of resources to help us carry out an initial desktop assessment, and we follow up anything that looks like a possibility with a site visit. We can even rustle up PPE when required!

Our first pass at reviewing the 'long list' of sites identified some which have now been redeveloped.

We have now removed those from our long list, as well as some sites which didn't tick enough boxes in our site criteria. We have also flagged up those with planning applications or planning permission, or which have recently changed hands, but which may still become available – increasing construction costs mean that developers sometimes give up on a site. We now have about 10 sites on a 'watch list'.

How wide is our site search area?

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Geographical boundaries continue to be more of a problem. While MUCH has always aimed to build cohousing in south Manchester, each new member brought with them connections to a different area within south Manchester.

Distance as the crow flies is not the only factor in closeness to 'home' – walking, cycling and journey time, frequency and reliability of public transport all matter.

At various times we've mapped out members' preferences, making a 'Venn diagram' with overlapping circles, but with a wider geographical boundary each time. We've spent some time looking at potential sites close to the boundary areas, and it became clear that they were too far from 'home' for some of the group. However with few sites coming up in our initial area, we are trying to keep an open mind about areas we are prepared to consider. We'll publish a new diagram on our website soon.

It's well known that many of the groups who are now living in cohousing ended up some distance from where they started off looking!

Community Tree Planting

by Vera, MUCH member



Our local MP can be relied upon to support all kinds of community activities. Here he is happily planted the 471st tree in the Rusholme Ward of Manchester. The planting of 47 trees was in commemoration of the late Gerald Kaufmann, the previous MP for the area. After the 47th tree was planted, the suggestion was to continue to 470. Now this has been achieved, the next target is 4700, but the ward is running out of spare space & the proposal to rename the local constituency Rusholme may have saved the day.

My particular interest in this was that I'd donated 2 trees to the project, expecting to be able to plant them myself on the designated activity day. I realised I was supposed to be pleased that my trees had been selected to be

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planted by important invited dignitaries who were supporting the project. Forgotten acorns surprisingly germinated, neglected for several years in very small pots then tenderly transferred to bigger pots when I realised they must be quite tough and hardy, surviving year after year despite my lack of attention to them.

Surprisingly I felt quite proud & emotional watching my plants being the stars of the show – I just hope they've survived. I've quaintly imagined my grandchildren possibly even taking their children to see my trees – I certainly intend to visit them myself, especially in the summer as there seem to be anxieties that the trees will need to be watered in the hot droughts of the next Manchester summer.

Cohousing in the news

New Ground and Cannock Mill continue to be in the public eye:

- ['We built our own co-housing community'](#) (New Ground, BBC News 23 Dec 2023)
 - [UK's First Cohousing Community for Women Wins World Habitat Award](#) (Pollard Thomas Edwards - New Ground architects, Jan 2024)
 - [We Just Held Hands and Jumped](#) (Cannock Mill Cohousing, Guardian, 30 Jan 2024)
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We hope you've enjoyed this newsletter. Do get in touch if you'd like to know more about any of the content.

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