Amy Barron

Beyond Older Age

Approaches to understand the
diverse lives of older people

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Foreword

As I write, the UK is facing the twin challenges of rising Covid-19 levels and a cost of living crisis.

We know that many older people, especially those living on low incomes and who might be part of a marginalised group, are experiencing uncertainty and anxiety about the future.

The Greater Manchester Older People's Network and the newly established Older People's Mayoral Advisory panel have both said that the impact of the pandemic, and the financial crisis are their priorities for action.

During the pandemic, an alliance of public, private and community organisations mobilised to protect those most at risk, and we are seeing something similar emerge across Greater Manchester's communities and neighbourhoods as fuel and food bills soar.

At the core of Greater Manchester's response to these crises have been committed and passionate researchers. Colleagues from our local universities have given a platform to those struggling most through a series longitudinal interviews with older people who live in low-income communities. Leading researchers have also co-produced campaign materials aimed at keeping older people well during the winter months. Researchers have also advised, lobbied and organised to get older people's voices into strategies and policies across the city-region. Throughout, they have

been a critical actor in Greater Manchester's Doing Ageing Differently approach.

Right now, the Greater Manchester Ageing Hub is looking forward.

We launch our Ageing in Place pathfinder programme soon, and our age-friendly strategy is being updated.

Amy Barron's new publication, Beyond Older Age, represents the best of what is often referred to as the age-friendly movement, has to offer. Amy's work is based on a long-term commitment to improving how older people live and it combines innovative and challenging thinking, with a set of practical and inspiring methodological insights.

It gives a platform to older people to tell their stories and it moves our work forward.

Paul McGarry
Head of Greater Manchester Ageing Hub, GMCA
Manchester, September 2022

Contents

I believe in living life to the full
until you can't live anymore.
I've had a wonderful life,
but I'm not old yet!
I keep a zest for life and an interest.

Molly, aged 90
Research participant

Building up the skills of the 'frontline' workers
is always important, and people who work
in community roles with older people possess
a great amount of skill and expertise.
Promoting inclusive practices to place-based
working is always useful, and there's certainly
a demand for doing things differently, as this
booklet advocates.

Paul McGarry
Head of Greater Manchester Ageing Hub
GMCA

Introduction

Why think beyond older age?

'Older people'. It's a term used in many everyday conversations, in the media and – increasingly – in policy circles. The World Health Organisation (WHO) take it to mean everyone aged over 60. If we adopt this definition, by 2030, it will refer to one sixth of the population. This ageing population, which will overwhelmingly play out in urban areas, is precisely why so-called 'older people' are high on the policy agenda of cities worldwide.

The risk, though, is that this catch-all term becomes a catch-all agenda. A cookie cutter approach, responding to the needs of one in six of us, that treats all 'older people' and places the same.

The point is that 'older people', however you choose to define them, are not *just* older people. Some may even take exception to the term. There are many other words with which they may choose to describe themselves: parents, carers, grandparents, workers, retirees, LGBTQ, Sikhs, locals, dancers, authors, experts, friends, neighbours... The list is as diverse as our society.

The point is this: If we are to address the needs of older people, then we need to think beyond older age. In response, this booklet demonstrates an approach for how we might be attentive to the richness and diversity that we can find within this group of people.

It will be useful for policy makers, academics, and ultimately anyone who wants to work with 'older people'.

This booklet initially began with an interest in the 'age-friendly city', a policy movement which aims to make urban environments more inclusive and accessible for older people. As I started to explore policies with a focus on ageing and increasingly urban populations and thought more about how older age is understood in everyday life, I became curious about how the complex and varied lives of older individuals are so often generalised.

While a greater proportion of cities across the globe are making their environments more inclusive and accessible for older people, and while exciting methods and approaches are being explored to ensure the voices of older people are placed central in the formation of policies; I strongly believe that we can do better at speaking to the full gamut of what it means to be an older urban individual.

What is more, whilst there are of course common experiences of ageing, older people in Luton lead different lives than those in Lahore, those in Doha are different from Dubrovnik, and Chaohu different from Cairo – and there are manifold differences within these places.

In the pages that follow, I want to introduce readers to the lives of self-identified older residents of Prestwich. This is a town in the metropolitan borough of Bury, Greater Manchester, England – about 3 miles north of Manchester City Centre. The narratives and

photographs I draw upon are taken from a photo and story collection called *Place, Belonging, Manchester: Significant Stories from Manchester and Beyond* which I co-produced with participants in my research. I include these, in part, to provide an archive of everyday life and of what it means to be an older person, the sheer variety it contains, and how it can vary deeply, shaped by the places 'older people' live in.

My other aim, though, is to demonstrate *how* we can generate rich material that better represents those in the category, and that could be put to good use in policies, projects, and programmes. As such, later in this booklet, I will detail the immersive, participatory, flexible and creative approach that I drew upon and that I am advocating. I will also introduce a selection of research tools that could be drawn upon within this approach. This is not a simple plug-and-play method – and for good reason. The key word here is perhaps 'flexibility'. If older people are different, then our approaches for understanding them should be different too.

So, whilst this guide can never offer a single silver bullet approach, it does offer a general approach for engagement that can be tailored to local contexts and individuals. It strongly makes the case for immersive, participatory, flexible and creative approaches and provides a clear, and practicable direction for those wanting to champion such approaches.

Dr Amy Barron
Manchester, September 2022

It's lovely to read stories of place and ageing that would be lost otherwise. These are individual personal stories that resonate universally, thank you for sharing.

This is one of the most exciting projects I have come to see. There is a great need for someone to record and publish a genuine memory of what life is today; people, places, work, play and the rest.

Anonymous comments left by attendees of the *Place, Belonging, Manchester: Significant Stories from Manchester and Beyond* photo and story collection at the Greater Manchester Festival of Ageing 2018

How to use this booklet

The Beyond Older Age booklet is for anyone who wants to engage with older people in a more inclusive, creative, and participatory way. It aims to equip policy practitioners and academics with creative tools to better understand the diverse practices that comprise the everyday lives of older people and provides insight and inspiration for how to better understand specific place-based needs.

Working with strategic partner organisations who aspire to make places more 'age-friendly', this booklet demonstrates how creative, participatory approaches can:

1   Offer inclusive approaches for researching with diverse older populations.

2   Enable an understanding of how ageing relates to place.

3   Create a living archive of everyday life that is of significance to policy and interested residents.

The booklet finishes by detailing how policy communities and academics can use the creative, participatory approach developed. These methods can be used to better represent older people's lives in policy and research: something pivotal to the creation of age-friendly cities.

By showcasing how older age is experienced differently, this booklet responds to research and campaigns which have identified that representations of older age often fall back on medicalised, stereotypical accounts of what constitutes older lives.

The booklet might be used when wanting to better understand:

·   The specific place-based needs of older people
·   The everyday practices of older people
·   The world from the perspective of older people
·   How to work with older people in an inclusive and accessible way
·   How those aspects of life which are difficult to represent (memories, hopes, desires, practices, fears) shape experiences of ageing and place

The booklet will be accompanied by a short animation video. Available at: amycbarron.com/beyondolderagevideo

More-than 'Older Age'

A few years ago, I used to have
my grandchildren every weekend.
It was a big break when they stopped coming.
It was terrible at the beginning,
I didn't know what to do with myself…
I felt really old and redundant.
I don't feel like that now.
I'm not dependent anymore,
that's a long way off for me.

Iris, aged 74
Research participant

Older age as fluid

These are the words of 74-year-old Iris who, at the time, was tilling soil whilst we were at her allotment.[1] The words illustrate the awkwardness of older age as a category. On the whole, 'older age is something which is deferred to a future, or someone elsewhere'.[2] This account shows how changes in other people's lives have knock on effects on how Iris understood herself.

For Iris, older age was something that gathered around a particular time in her life, but which dissipated as her life (and the lives of family members) changed. Old age was understood as being synonymous with redundancy and dependency: something which Iris actively worked against, and which she now understands as being 'a long way off'.

This account also highlights the fluidity of 'older age'. It is something which is experienced differently, and which is shaped by a range of factors. A 60-year-old, for instance, may feel young when caring for their own parents, while a 15-year-old may feel old when babysitting a younger sibling. A person with mobility needs may feel older than someone who is more physically able due to experiencing some of the same bodily limitations as those typically experienced by an 'older person'. Moreover, a person aged 50 living in Birmingham, England, may feel older than someone of the same age living in Kyoto, Japan.

What older age means and how it is experienced is at once highly personal yet shaped by the ways older age is collectively understood and represented. Despite this fluidity, 'there is a tendency in everyday

life, in policies geared towards older people, and in academic literature to speak of older people as though easy to identify'.[3]

Older age and the biological clock

It is a chronological understanding of age that tends to dominate in society. In other words, age is expressed as the number of years someone has lived. It is an expression, and a rather crude generalisation, of the ticking biological clock that we all experience – albeit in different ways. What is more, society is structured around this chronological approach. Consider, for instance, pensioner bus tickets or age restrictions on alcohol or tobacco.

Older age, and those in the chronological age bracket that it is often associated with, is frequently stigmatised. The stereotype of older age is that it is the antithesis of youth, where silver hair and hearing aids become tropes that overly define a whole host of complex and diverse individuals. This is despite a sustained effort over the past decade to promote more positive interpretations of older age through initiatives like 'lifelong learning' and 'active ageing'.

The biological clock clearly matters – its physiological and cultural effects shape why some individuals are thought of as older by both themselves and others. There is a risk, though, that a focus on the biological clock might lead to a reductive understanding of the many aspects that make up older age. The problem comes when characteristics are

mapped onto a whole cohort of people in ways that are totalising and often negative.

For some, these representations of older age can be harmful, whilst for others it becomes something to be resisted. Take for instance, the words of 90-year-old Molly which featured at the beginning of this booklet, who relished in resisting older age as a way to sustain an enthusiasm for life. It is these common representations that shape older people's experience of the world, and this can often happen unconciously too.

How we represent older age matters

The way we represent older age – whether that be in the media, everyday conversations, or in policies surrounding age-friendly cities – gives rise to certain ways of thinking about who these people are, 'characterising them in hierarchies of worth and value against other social groups'.[4]

Older individuals, however, do not just accept these representations, becoming the 'thing' society tells them to be. Rather, older people shape these representations by challenging, reinforcing, or resisting them in different ways.

Take the 'graffiti grannies', for instance, a group of people aged over 65 who make street art to 'age actively' and remain engaged in city life. Originating in a street art movement in Portugal known as Lata65, the graffiti grannies now have international traction and have become a 'go to' example of how older people

can actively remake ideas surrounding what it means to be an older person.

What's more, the extent to which we feel old, middle aged, young, black, white, Asian, heterosexual, gay, or any other identity factor, is shaped by what we encounter in our everyday lives. We may not be consciously thinking about our age, for instance, until we are asked to present ID before entering a nightclub.

How we feel or identify can also be shaped by our sensory experiences of a place. A particular sight, sound, smell, taste, or fleeting glance may temporarily connect us with elsewhere and else when. The smell of a particular food might reignite memories of school dinners; the fleeting scent of a perfume in the city may transport us to a first date; or the sound of a street busker might put a spring in our step making us feel younger, even if only for a moment.

The immersive, participatory, flexible and creative approach shared in this booklet welcomes an understanding of older age that embraces this fluidity. It does this by being responsive to the needs of participants and the researcher, and by focusing on how older age features in the participants lives, rather than placing them within this category from the get-go.

1   Barron, A. (2021). The taking place of older age.
     cultural geographies. 28(4), p. 661-674.
     doi.org/10.1177/14744740211020510
2   Ibid., p. 668.
3   Ibid., p. 662.
4   Ibid., p. 665.

Ageing in cities

Why are more cities becoming age-friendly?

Population ageing and urbanization are two of the most pertinent trends affecting modern life. At the same time as people are living longer, a greater proportion of older people are choosing to live in cities.[5] With the older urban citizen emblematic of the future, these trends pose a set of challenges and opportunities for those charged with the planning and governing of the world's cities. As the potential implications of this transformation are being realised, many have turned their focus to envisaging what a more age-friendly city might look like.

The World Health Organisation's (WHO) age-friendly cities initiative is one such vision. Grounded in decades of research and policy development, this initiative pairs top-down leadership with a bottom-up participatory approach to create an inclusive and accessible environment for all. An age-friendly city is one where the physical and social environments are designed to support and enable people to remain independent for as long as possible and to age actively.

Devised and developed based on the experiences of thirty-three cities representative of notionally developed and developing countries, and varying city sizes; eight domains were identified which represent the different elements of city life that can affect what it means to age in place (figure 1). Cities that are

Figure 1: the eight domains of an age-friendly city

aspiring to become more age-friendly use these domains to shape their policies and services.

Becoming an age-friendly city requires a holistic approach to ageing, where different sectors come together and understand their policies and services through an age-friendly lens; where older people are understood within the context of their whole lives; and where co-design and participation are the norm. As Rebecca Lines, learning officer for the Centre for Ageing Better, said in a Greater Manchester Age-Friendly team meeting, 'becoming age-friendly is best thought of as a journey rather than a destination. How things are done is perhaps more important than what is done'.

Age-friendly Greater Manchester

Manchester has a long history of working alongside older people's organisations and placing the voices of local residents at the centre of its programmes of action. In the 80s and 90s Manchester City Council supported retired trade unionists groups and a range of older people's community organisations. In the late 1990s the Council formed new structures to develop a programme aimed at improving the quality of life of older people, especially in its low-income communities and was awarded 'Beacon Council' status in recognition.

The multi-agency Valuing Older People initiative, founded in 2003, represented a new phase of work, including the formation of an Older People's Board, a representative body of residents and a Positive Images publicity campaign, amongst its early work. Other noteworthy projects included the Sex and Relationships guide for the over-50s, the establishment of a network of local community projects and an annual Festival of Ageing. Age friendly Manchester succeeded the Valuing Older People initiative and a ten-year ageing strategy *Manchester: a great place to grow older* was launched in 2009 and then updated and relaunched in 2017.

Manchester was the first UK city to join the global network of age-friendly cities in 2010, and the National Lottery Community Funded programme 'Ambition for Ageing' was launched in 2015, running until 2022. Ambition for Ageing, one of 14 Ageing Better programmes, delivered a test and learn, place based approach to creating more age-friendly communities and understanding how to reduce social isolation in people aged 50 and over. Using a co-production approach and working in 25 neighbourhoods in 8 local authorities for the majority of the delivery and then all ten in later stages – the programme engaged 23,860 older people in project design and delivery and delivered 1,500 microfunded projects, investing over £2 million in communities across Greater Manchester.

In 2018, the Greater Manchester Combined Authority became the world's first age-friendly city region. This prolonged engagement with older people, coupled with the proliferation of productive partnerships between the three Universities in the city region and age-friendly policy makers and practitioners has resulted in a dense network of information infrastructure surrounding the city and city-region.

'Old Frame, New Picture', Greater Manchester Older People's Network

Established in 2015 as part of the Ambition for Ageing Programme, The Greater Manchester Older People's Network is a network of people aged 50 and above and organisational representatives working for positive change for older people in Greater Manchester.

The Greater Manchester Older People's Network 'Old Frame New Picture' Campaign was designed to challenge the negative and stereotyped ways that older people are often represented in the media, as vulnerable or frail.[6]

The campaign began with an online event which discussed how older people are represented in the media and what can be done about it. This was followed by a photography competition in which people from across Greater Manchester were invited to submit photographs to capture the diversity, positivity and contribution of people aged 50 and over. For two weeks, digital billboards around the city-region featured the winning images.

This campaign calls on partners across Greater Manchester to use images to replace stereotyped and negative representations that might appear in communications and publications. The hope is that the wider media will be inspired to represent older people with more positive, diverse and realistic images. Figure 2 shows the winner of this photography competition: 'A Proud Man' by Darren Robinson.
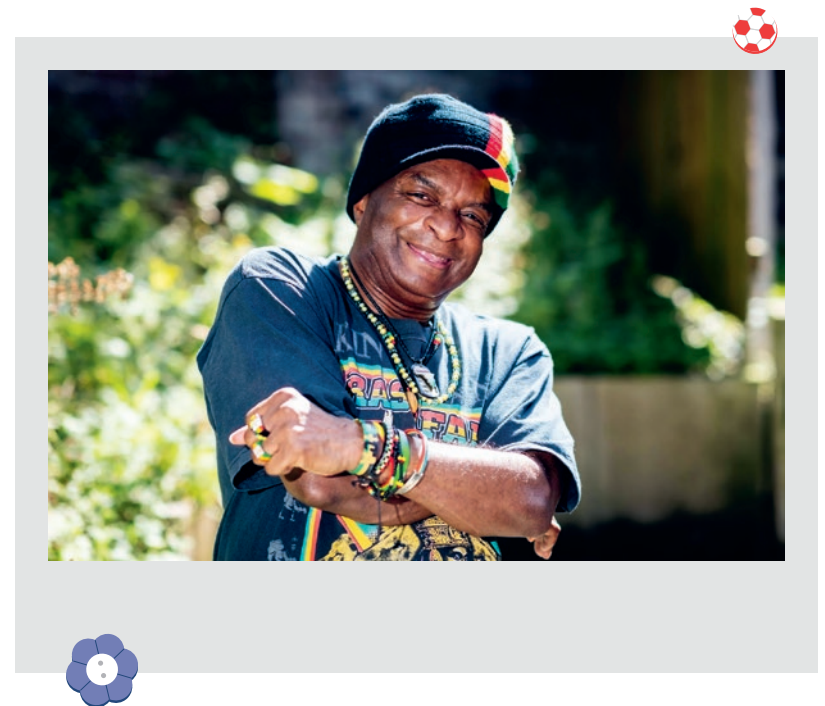

Figure 2: A Proud Man
© Darren Robinson

Age-friendly cities: a growing national and global movement

Age-friendly work is not just happening in Greater Manchester, but nationally and, increasingly, globally. The global network of age-friendly cities was created in 2010 to connect cities and communities who want to become more age-friendly to share best practice and provide guidance on policy planning and implementation. The global network currently includes 1333 cities and communities in 47 countries, covering over 298 million people worldwide.[7]

Affiliated to the WHO's Global Network of Age-Friendly Cities and Communities, The UK Network of Age-Friendly Communities is a growing movement with over 56 member places across England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland.[8] Members of this growing national movement support, learn from one another, and promote age-friendly practices. These expanding networks of age-friendly cities provide a hub of resources, ideas and training through which age-friendly principals can be brought to life.

How ideas travel: 'Take a Seat'

A number of UK local authorities adopted the New York 'Take a Seat' campaign. Designed to make local shops and stores more accessible and responsive to older customers, Take a Seat was piloted in Nottingham and Manchester, with local variants such as Wigan's 'Sit Thee Down'. Local pubs, community centres and restaurants also joined the scheme.

5   Although these two trends overlap, it is worth problematizing this blanket statement, noting that urbanization is predominantly in the global south, whereas the ageing revolution is mainly in the global north.
6   Greater Manchester Older People's Network 'Old Frame, New Picture' Gallery (2015). Available: www.gmopn.org.uk/old-frame-new-picture-gallery
7   WHO. (2022). About the Global Network of Age-friendly Cities and Communities. Available: bit.ly/globalagefriendlycities
8   Centre for Ageing Better. (2022). UK Network of Age-Friendly Communities. Available: bit.ly/ukagefriendlycommunities

2 Approaches and Tools to go Beyond Older Age

Immersion, participation, flexibility, creativity

Approach

There are a set of guiding principles that I advocate for policy makers and other practitioners to adopt when researching with older people and which underpin the material shared in this booklet. These principles are immersion, participation, flexibility and creativity. In this chapter, I introduce each of these principles and give an example of how I used them in practice whilst producing the material shared in this booklet. Flexibly drawing on a combination of participatory and creative methods can offer an in-depth understanding of what it means to be an older person and their place-based needs. Promising to create rich and honest material, this approach embraces messiness rather than trying to distill catch-all facts and silver-bullet solutions.

Immersion

To be immersed is to become entangled with the lives of participants rather than observing from afar. Immersion is more about entering into a dialogue with the people and places you are working with rather than extracting generalisable information from them.[9] It is guided by a want to research *with* rather than conduct research *on* participants, and it places their needs and wants central. An embeddedness in cultures, places, practices, or social groups can help researchers to understand the world from the perspective of participants.

→ Immersion in practice

The material shared in this booklet used a combination of methods to engage with 32 participants over 12 months. Participants were always met more than once, some six times and for up to six hours. While shorter encounters often involved going along with a participant on a regular activity (such as walking a dog), longer encounters happened over the course of one day. Being immersed in participants' lives over time helped to build rapport and cultivated a situated understanding of what mattered to older residents of Prestwich. Recognising that immersion takes both time and embeddedness, one strategy might be to enroll and train community members as researchers, as introduced below.

Participation

Participatory research gives participants an explicit steering capacity in the direction of research, its focus, how it is done and its outcomes. It involves participants in the exploration of ideas, rather than having them respond to a set of pre-defined questions or gathering their views on prescribed topics. Co-production is an example of participatory research, whereby all participants work together on a research issue from the start, producing the research together and having co-ownership of it. Co-production might involve training participants to become researchers themselves.[10] Participatory research can be an empowering experience for participants as they shape the direction of research.

Flexibility

Flexibility involves an ability to improvise and shift strategies on the fly to meet challenges and grasp opportunities. It encourages researchers to be responsive and adaptive to the contexts in which they find themselves, and to reflect on the appropriateness of methods as they are used in practice. When research is approached flexibly, methods are understood in a looser and more flexible way rather than as rigidly defined 'off-the-peg' tools. Instead, researchers think on their feet, tailoring how different methods are used to suit. Driven by a respect for others, flexibility can enhance the researcher's ability to communicate and build relationships.

→ Participation and flexibility in practice

Many social scientists see walking as a 'go-to' method to research place because participants can reflect as they move through places. However, in my research, I was concerned that walking may not be the ideal or easy choice for older participants. Moreover, those who were less mobile were likely to call into play very different associations with place, and so using walking in isolation could be exclusionary. On those occasions where participants preferred to not walk, I developed alternative tools, such as participant packs (introduced shortly), which allowed participants to communicate their experiences of place without necessarily being physically in the places they were talking about. Many also chose to drive, pausing and talking when it suited.

Creativity

To be creative is to 'think outside the box'. While creativity can play a part in each stage of the research process, it does not have to be extreme or draw on the creative arts. Creativity can be as subtle as asking questions in a slightly different way in an interview or focus group. Participants could be asked to draw on their five senses to describe a place, feeling or experience, or to talk around an object or metaphor.[11] More conventional research methods, such as interviews, could equally be supplemented with participatory, creative activities such as video, mapping or photography.[12] Creativity might influence the dissemination of research (such as through exhibits or performances) ensuring it reaches a wider audience.[13] To approach research creatively is to understand it less as an extractive means of information retrieval, and more as a creative process in and of itself.

⊕ Creativity in practice

The research on which this booklet is based began with relaxed discussions at a regular community group meeting as participants engaged in their usual activities. Instead of hosting a more traditional focus group whereby 5–10 participants would be invited into a separate room to discuss pre-defined themes; open-ended, casual discussions were held with 10–15 participants over a series of months. Participants were encouraged to bring any artefacts that interested them to discuss (newspaper clippings, photographs, postcards) which often ignited conversation on the participants terms. Creatively reimagining what a focus group could look like meant that individuals could decide when, if, and for how long they wanted to talk as part of the group without feeling any pressure.

9   In advocating immersion I draw inspiration from the huge amount of work in Anthropology and across the social sciences on ethnography that seeks to provide deep, situated understandings of particular cultures or groups.

10   Goulding, A. (2016). An introduction to co-production for the Ambition for Ageing Programme. Available: bit.ly/introducingco-production.

11   Pottinger, L. Barron, A. Hall, S. Ehgartner, U. Browne, A. (2022). Talking methods, talking about methods: invoking the transformative potential of social methods through animals, objects, and how to instructions. *Geo, Geography and Environment.* doi.org/10.1002/geo2.107

12   Brown, N., Buse, C., Pottinger, L. and Barron, A. (2021). Graphic Interviews, in Barron, A., Browne, A.L., Ehgartner, U., Hall, S.M., Pottinger, L. and Ritson, J. (eds.) Methods for Change: Impactful social science methodologies for 21st century problems. Manchester: Aspect and The University of Manchester.

13   Irving, A., Swannack, R., Mbazima, N., Barron, A. and Pottinger, L. (2021). Participatory Film Making, in Barron, A., Browne, A.L., Ehgartner, U., Hall, S.M., Pottinger, L. and Ritson, J. (eds.) Methods for Change: Impactful social science methodologies for 21st century problems. Manchester: Aspect and The University of Manchester.

Tools

Within this overarching approach, there are many different tools that could be flexibly drawn upon. The combination of tools used will be shaped by the questions the researcher is interested in answering and the nature of the material they would like to produce. In this section I introduce four methods or 'tools' that could be drawn upon in this approach: participant packs, photo go-alongs, collage, and life histories. I then provide an example of how these tools might be used and offer some 'top tips'.

'The participant pack is a flexible and open-ended research method which includes non-prescriptive prompts for engagement'.[14] Participant packs might include a note pad in which participants can write ideas or sketch; coloured pens; newspaper articles; plans for future schemes or developments; photographs of the present and past to encourage discission and reflection; a disposable camera; worksheets; craft materials; and a dictaphone (voice recorder).

Participant packs can be used in a directed and focused way or be more open-ended and exploratory. For instance, participants could be left with a set of activities to complete, such as keeping a diary, reflecting on photographs, or collecting newspaper clippings around a particular theme. Alternatively, participants could be left with the participant pack and asked to engage with the contents in whatever way they wish. This latter approach would work best when used in combination with other methods, such as photo go-alongs (introduced below).

Participant packs could work well as an online method, where participants are emailed set of materials to engage with. This method is also good for engaging with socially isolated groups, or those who may not want to walk or have the time to meet in person.
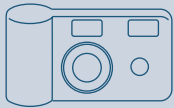
Newspaper
articles
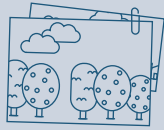
Photographs of the
present and past
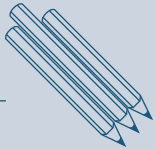
Plans for future
developments
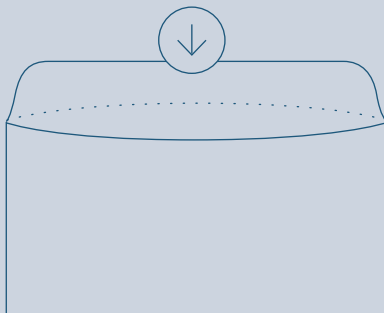
Disposable
camera

Dictaphone

Note pad

Coloured
pens

Paper glue

Scissors

⊘ How might participant packs be used?

Participant packs might be useful when researching with those who are socially and physically isolated or housebound; when face to face research is either not possible or not preferred; when walking is not the ideal choice; when researching with those who have mental or physical ill health; or to expand the geographical reach of a project to minimise costs.

The participant pack was used in the research around which this booklet is created to include older people who preferred to not walk to avoid excluding them from this study. The pack, however, developed a life of its own with its uses becoming more diverse than initially anticipated. Many participants who wanted to walk also asked for a participant pack, often using the photographs included as a prompt for group discussion, while others explained how they took the packs to various community groups and other social gatherings, using them as an excuse to speak with people they would usually not converse with.

⊙ Top tips:

· Tailor the materials included in the pack to the people you are working with.
· Include a list of the materials in the pack along with an open description of what you would like the participants to do.
· If the participant uses the pack in an unintended way, have the confidence to let this happen.

Photo go-alongs

'Photo go-alongs involve undertaking a journey with a participant whilst talking and taking photographs'.[15] The walk or journey can follow a structured route; be an unstructured wander; or involve the researcher going-along on a regular activity with the participant. Whilst moving, participants are encouraged to discuss and photograph anything of significance. This could range from street furniture, to heritage buildings, and everything between. The combination of photography, movement and talking encourages participants to think critically and reflexively about the places they are moving through as they consider which routes to take and what to photograph.

The material produced by photo go-alongs can add depth and richness to policy by providing insight into what matters to different people. When used with several participants, common themes can be identified which can shape place-based policies.

→ How might photo go-alongs be used?

Photo go-alongs might usefully be incorporated into urban design or place-making decisions and policies by providing insight into how different people use, interact and relate to a place.

Photo go-alongs might be used to foster dialogue between different stakeholders, particularly in diverse communities. For example, individuals from different backgrounds could be asked to photograph what
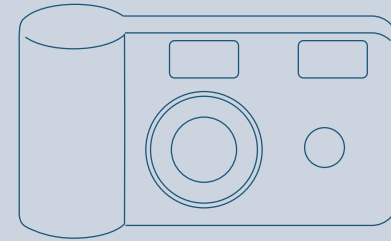
is important to them in their neighbourhood in relation to a proposed redevelopment or initiative. The photographs taken could then be used to engender conversation, build understandings of difference,
and enable decisions to be made that will best serve the community as a whole.

The 'Age-Friendly Seating and Sense of Place Report' used photo go-alongs in combination with a seat audit to explore how older people understand a variety of seating in five different city-centre areas in Manchester.[16] The photo go-along highlighted the importance of developing a place-based understanding of seating, based on the perspective of older people going about their everyday lives.

① Top tips:

- Move at the participant's pace.
- Remind the participant that there are no 'right' and 'wrong' routes or answers and no 'good' and 'bad' photographs.
- Be flexible. If a participant would prefer to not walk, ask if they would prefer to be driven or to take the bus with you.

Collage

'Collaging' describes the process of assembling and sticking different materials to a backing. These materials might include photographs, maps, writing, drawings, fragments of material or even small objects. The layering of these materials creates a new whole which represents what matters to those who created it. The process of collaging can reveal how participants understand the connections between different things. Researchers can observe this process of making and ask questions where appropriate. Collaging could be used to better understand people's place-making practices, memories, moods, experiences or even life-histories.

Collaging can be used with an individual or as a group activity. Collaging with a group can reveal points of commonality and difference between participants through the layering of colour and the repetition and juxtaposition of materials. Collaging can result in an eye-catching end-product which could be used to illustrate reports or in an exhibition.

⊖ How might collage be used?

Collaging might usefully be used as a 'way in' to exploring an unclear or hard to define topic, such as collective and individual memories of a place, which may not always be straight forward to narrate.

Collaging does not put pressure on a participant to tell a clear narrative in the same way an interview

might. In this way, the process of making and layering removes the pressure for participants to tell a coherent story, providing the opportunity for them to communicate in a different and perhaps more enjoyable, comfortable way.

In my wider research, I have used collaging in combination with photo go-alongs to better understand the role of memory in fostering a sense of place for older people in their neighbourhood of Chorlton, in Manchester, UK. I accompanied participants on a self-directed walk or drive around Chorlton and asked them to photograph anything that resonated with their personal and collective memories of the place. All participants were then asked to select just three of the photographs they had taken to bring to a group collaging session, along with any other artefacts (newspaper clippings, personal photographs, postcards). It was the process of creating the collage and the layering of different and similar photographs which highlighted the collective memories and places that were understood as key to the senses of place of older people in Chorlton. The conversations that unfolded also revealed discrepancies between how different participants remembered events and places. Collaging highlighted the messiness and connections between social and individual histories while the making fostered connections between different participants.
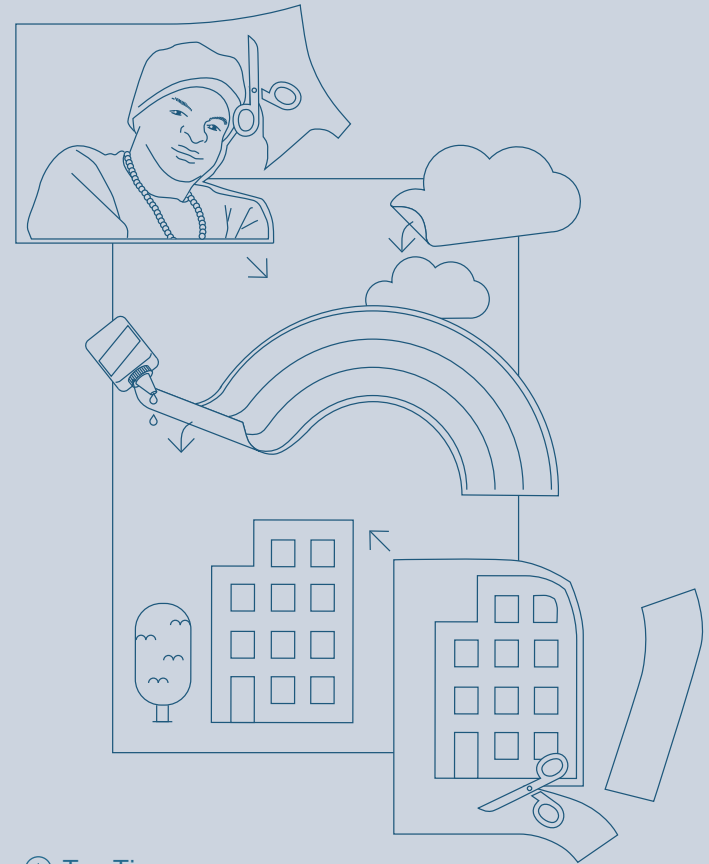
(!) Top Tips:

· Remember to clearly explain the purpose of the collaging activity.
· Let the participants lead.
· Try to not concentrate too much on what the collage looks like. Focus instead on the process of creating and the debates and discussions therein.
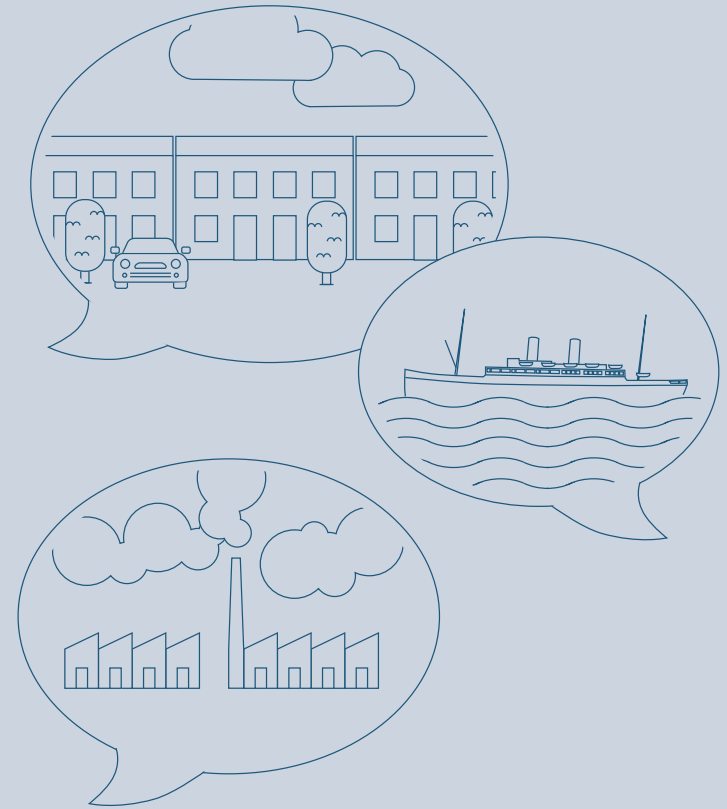
Life Histories

Life histories use interviewing techniques to record, document and preserve experiences.[17] The aim is to get an overall picture of a participant's life in relation to the theme, topic or issue being explored. Life histories do not necessarily intend to perfectly represent an individual's life, but rather to get a sense what is important to that individual. Talking about someone's life can also be used to bring to light the otherwise forgotten or overlooked histories and experiences of organisations, buildings or places that were significant to them.

While interview questions typically move chronologically from the past to the present, it is not uncommon for participants to jump between different points in their lives or to linger on some moments more than others. Observing this can help the researcher to understand what is significant to that individual.

Participatory and creative exercises can be incorporated into life history interviewing.[18] Participants could be asked to 'map' or collage their lives with the researcher using this process as a prompt to ask questions.[19] Moreover, a future oriented element could be introduced, whereby participants are encouraged to reflect on the prospective as well as the past, perhaps by writing 'a post-card to their future selves'.[20]

⊕ How might life-histories be used?

Life histories could be used to explore the experiences of different generations, or sub-cultures around a particular theme, place, community, organisation or event. They could be used to understand an individual's life in depth, to better understand points of change or disruption.

For example, life histories could be used to explore how a community service or form of welfare support has featured in the lives of a participant over time. In doing so, they could help to inform future developments, brand identities or policy processes and adaptations by highlighting what matters to those who use a particular service. Housing providers, for instance, could use life histories with service users or other stakeholders to understand how the participants' experiences of using that service have changed over their lives. Transport providers could use life histories to understand people's perceptions and experiences of transport systems over time.

Moreover, life histories could be used to understand an individual's movement in and out of poverty, an emotional journey, shifting work and employment trajectories, or someone's physical health over time.

⊙ Top tips

· Make the interview feel less extractive by briefly sharing something about your own life.
· Let the participant know that these interviews can take longer than anticipated.
· Expect the unexpected. Even if unintentional, participants may revisit upsetting moments in their lives. If this happens, offer to pause or stop the interview.

Something else entirely

These are just some of the many tools that could be drawn on when adopting an immersive, participatory, flexible, and creative approach. There are a whole host of other qualitative social science research tools that could be used to better understand the everyday practices that comprise the lives of older people. Take a look at *Methods for Change: Impactful social science methodologies for 21st century problems* for 'how to' guides on 30 other methods.[21]

14   Barron, A. (2021). Participant Packs: A Flexible, Inclusive and Accessible Method, in Barron, A., Browne, A.L., Ehgartner, U., Hall, S.M., Pottinger, L. and Ritson, J. (eds.) Methods for Change: Impactful social science methodologies for 21st century problems. Manchester: Aspect and The University of Manchester. p. 2.

15   Barron, A. (2021). Photo go-alongs, in Barron, A., Browne, A.L., Ehgartner, U., Hall, S.M., Pottinger, L. and Ritson, J. (eds.) Methods for Change: Impactful social science methodologies for 21st century problems. Manchester: Aspect and The University of Manchester. p. 2.

16   Barron, A. (2015). Age-Friendly Seating and Sense of Place. Available: bit.ly/seatingandsenseofplace

17   Sharma, D. and Barron, A. (2021). Life Histories, in Barron, A., Browne, A.L., Ehgartner, U., Hall, S.M., Pottinger, L. and Ritson, J. (eds.) Methods for Change: Impactful social science methodologies for 21st century problems. Manchester: Aspect and The University of Manchester.

18   Tinkler, P., Fenton, L., and Barron, A. (2021). Biographical Mapping, in Barron, A., Browne, A.L., Ehgartner, U., Hall, S.M., Pottinger, L. and Ritson, J. (eds.) Methods for Change: Impactful social science methodologies for 21st century problems. Manchester: Aspect and The University of Manchester.

19   Garratt, E., Flaherty, J., Barron, A. (2021). Life Mapping, in Barron, A., Browne, A.L., Ehgartner, U., Hall, S.M., Pottinger, L. and Ritson, J. (eds.) Methods for Change: Impactful social science methodologies for 21st century problems. Manchester: Aspect and The University of Manchester.

20   Hall, SM., Barron, A. (2021). Oral Histories and Futures, in Barron, A., Browne, A.L., Ehgartner, U., Hall, S.M., Pottinger, L. and Ritson, J. (eds.) Methods for Change: Impactful social science methodologies for 21st century problems. Manchester: Aspect and The University of Manchester. p. 5.

21   Barron, A., Browne, A. L., Ehgartner, U., Hall, S. M., Pottinger, L., & Ritson, J. (Eds.) (2021). Methods for Change: Impactful social science methodologies for 21st century problems. University of Manchester.

3

Everybody ages differently

The following pages comprise of photographs and accompanying narratives that were created with self-identified older residents of Prestwich, Greater Manchester. Whilst walking, talking, and photographing, participants reflected on the things that mattered to them in their everyday lives.

Participants were not instructed to take photographs that were artistic, conventionally beautiful, or even visually appealing. Rather, the camera was used as a device through which to reflect on the landscape as we moved through it. Some participants chose to not take photographs, instead pausing and talking at significant places while others asked me to take the photograph for them. The point was to be flexible and adaptive.

The photographs and stories are not explicitly about 'older age', for the purpose of this booklet is to go beyond that. Instead, they show what matters to those who find themselves within this category; the different ways older age surfaces in people's lives, and the many factors that might affect that.

It was often fleeting sensory encounters, such as a smell, sight, or sound, that provoked memories and feelings of connectedness or detachment to rupture as we were moving through a place. Similarly, changes in the lives of family members and friends were frequently understood as being the trigger for an alteration in the everyday practices of participants. Moreover, experiences from earlier phases of the participants life courses often shaped their experiences of, and practices in, older age.

Older people are the sum of their whole lives. The places in which participants live can provide cues to forge and maintain these connections to the past and walking through certain places that other people may not pay attention to has the capacity to evoke deep senses of belonging, comfort, and memory.

'Everyday' places such as department stores or roads became the locus through which family members, jobs and social events were remembered. Many of the accounts say something about the need to preserve the shared histories of certain groups of people, be they migrants, LGBTQ+ individuals, or working-class locals. For many participants, there was often a sense that these stories needed to be repeated and documented or they would otherwise be lost.

St Mary's Church,
Prestwich

I loved doing my Pilates class on Church Lane. Like I did for today's class, I would put blue-tack on the door, stick my sign and balloons up and listen to the church bells. Church bells are so nice, it's like a time gone by. As I brought my stuff out of the car, it felt perfectly safe – it's got a kind of country feel about it that little area. The pub next door is 16th century or something and has a quirkiness about it and the church itself is lovely. The church yard next-door is wild, it's not manicured like some of the cemeteries are, it's a country church yard, it's wild and it's attractive.

Lara, aged 69

Lara and I met at a community group in Prestwich where older people get together over a cup of tea and do some crafting. Whilst knitting, Lara explained to me that the tragic passing of her husband 30 years ago provided the impetus for her to train with North Manchester Fitness to regain a sense of purpose and structure in her life. Lara now runs several exercise classes across north Manchester, some of which I attended. Lara identified the running of her Pilates class on Church Lane as a significant part of her everyday life, describing how the atmosphere of the place (the soundscape of the church bells and the heritage buildings) and the routines she engages in (tying balloons on the doors with ribbon) make it particularly enjoyable. Lara's son also works in the field of sport, and this influenced her want to remain healthy and active in older age. For Lara, being independent and active along with having a variety of hobbies is essential to her happiness.

I'm the leader of a group of volunteers who look after the church yard, and we've been going for about 12–14 years. When we started, we were meant to hand the responsibilities back over to the church, but we're still here now! When we first started it was all overgrown with weeds and brambles up to five feet high!

It was exciting uncovering and discovering what was under all this undergrowth and we found lots of things that we didn't know about. Every year they used to open this tower for the public and my family would help: me, my son and my daughter. We staggered ourselves up the tower, one at the base, one in the middle, and one at the top.

Benedict, aged 73

Ben and I also met at the community craft group for older people. Ben, however, was not attending this group to craft, but was rather quickly grabbing a cup of tea as a break from gardening along with five other older male volunteers in the nearby church yard. The above words were shared just before Ben and another volunteer, Reg, invited me on an impromptu trip to the top of the church tower. Ben has lived in Prestwich all his life and spends time maintaining the church at least twice weekly. On each of the 5 encounters Ben and I shared, he fondly recounted the history of the church, proudly explaining when Coronation Street was filmed there, and frequently interspersed this with happy times spent with his wife and two children around the church.

The Allotment

I have an allotment here and I'm the secretary. It's the end of the year now, but I have sweetcorn, beetroots, I've got leeks in, cabbages, Brussels sprouts. These are winter things, but I grow all sorts of things like asparagus, but that's done and finished for this year.

I would like to live here really. I spend a lot of time here. I try to get here as often as I can. It's surrounded by mature trees and it's a sunspot – it has its own little micro-climate. Once you step into here, it's quiet and the most noise you hear is the birds or the hawks coming down. It's so therapeutic.

In the summer it's especially lovely, when everything is out. I just like that it's back to nature and that's what everything is about isn't it? These days, everything is so materialistic, and you forget what is important about life, you know. It's just lovely, it makes you feel good. People just want stuff. You have to have a certain amount of stuff to get by, but people are obsessed with buying.

Enid, aged 67

→ Enid and I met on six separate occasions, one of which involved a long stroll around Drinkwater Park and Prestwich Clough before finishing in her allotment plot – the same allotment other participants had shared as part of this research. Whilst walking, Enid spoke at length about playing with her granddaughter in the brook, having barbeques with other allotment plot owners in the summer, and hosting pumpkin competitions in the autumn. Whilst Enid clearly enjoyed harvesting the fruits and vegetables she had grown; she also took value from overseeing the allotment in her role as secretary.

Ribbon Rolls
7mm- £2.50
10mm- £3.
15mm- £4.00
25mm- £6.00
20 mtr

Bury Market

I just wanted some small buttons for a baby's cardigan. That reminds me, I need some red wool for the angels we're making at church.

I more or less come here every Wednesday. I started coming here when my husband died. You've got to do it, you've got to start doing things. I used to bring my Mum, I think it is a good market. Along this row here, they used to have all flowers, which I liked. It's like an old market isn't it, you can buy anything – I like bargain hunting, you can do a bit of searching and get some quality and different things.

I like sitting here, outside Katsouris deli. You can see the world go by. I like to people watch. I will say "ooh I don't like her shoes, or I like her coat or… oh, I wonder where she got that from?"

Iris, aged 75

Iris has lived in Prestwich her whole life and Bury Market has been a significant place throughout. Iris and I went to Bury Market early one Wednesday morning on one of her weekly visits. Visiting the market is an enjoyable practice which connects Iris to earlier phases of her life as well as to loved ones who have since passed away, facilitating a sense of continuity in times of discontinuity. Iris enjoyed the conviviality of the market: to simply be and observe the world.

FREE
WELL ROTTED
HORSE MANURE

Please help yourself,
and close the gate behind you

This is where the countryside begins

"Well-Rotted Horse Manure" – once you get to that sign on Clifton Road, you know you're at the farm, you're in the countryside. They do leave produce out sometimes, you can put money in for strawberries and things, it gives you that really rural feel.

It's barren, abrasive and peaceful, it's almost a wilderness experience. I like this time of year, the autumn. I think the decay process is quite amazing. Society struggles with the idea of decay, but I think we should celebrate it in some ways.

You feel you're out there in the elements don't you, but of course it's comfortable, it's not cold. It's unkempt and you feel like the only eyes on the place are those of birds and you feel that the trees are aware of the passage of time because they will be around for a lot longer than you or me. It's as if they're sort of watching you.

It's as if they're looking at the absurdity of us all getting caught up in the busyness of our lives. Time stops running away from you doesn't it, you get a feeling of enclosure as well, it's protecting you from the motorway.

George, aged 50

While George and I met at the community crafting group, he was not there to craft but rather to make a podcast with members of the church yard volunteers about the history of the church. George began making podcasts when he first moved to Prestwich from southern England as a way to meet new people and to better understand the history of some of the buildings, businesses and people. Mobility was an issue for George who, since his diagnosis with Multiple Sclerosis about seven years prior to this research, has been a wheelchair user. George was not able to travel far, yet craved wilderness and distance from the urban centre. This small sign for horse manure and the atmosphere that the increase in leaves and animals brought provided George with the means to cut off from the town where he lived most of his day-to-day life. Although one of the youngest participants, George decided to take part in this research as he felt his disability meant he experienced some of the same bodily feelings as an older person.

Prestwich Clough

Old Ma Bentley's was always a favourite of mine. It's a gorgeous villa and, unfortunately for Mrs Bentley, the house backs on to the clough and they had a pond in the back garden. That pond was full of newts, tadpoles and diving beetles. Every type of aquatic life lived there, it was fantastic – a complete massive magnet for every boy in Prestwich to go and catch newts and taddies. When she came out of her house, we would jump over the stream and run up the bank. It was like playing a game, everybody would run!

Paul, aged 67

I was introduced to Paul and his wife Janette through George. Paul and Janette have lived in Prestwich most of their lives and have four children, all of whom are now at university. These words were shared whilst Paul and I were walking his dog in Prestwich Clough on a route he takes twice weekly. Paul explained how Prestwich Clough has always been significant to him: he played there as a child, took his own children, and now takes his dog. Walking the same route at a similar time each day means that Paul often encounters the same people, engaging in brief conversations and exchanging a smile. While walking, memories from throughout his life often unexpectedly come to mind.

I used to go down to the tip at the bottom of the clough and make bikes and boggies when I was a kid. Now I lead bat walks through the clough in the summer, I do them in Blakely forest too. We make nest boxes at the Men's Shed project for the clough too. I usually come to this pub once a month for a meeting about the 'Clough Day', and I'm also on the committee for the Lancashire Wildlife Trust.

James, aged 78

I was introduced to James through another participant at one of Lara's exercise classes who described James as 'a Prestwich history enthusiast'. James has lived in Prestwich all his life and now lives alone since the passing of his wife two years ago. James has always enjoyed spending time outdoors and particularly enjoys leading bat walks around Prestwich Clough in the summer months. During the evenings and in winter months, James makes the bat boxes at home. James's interest in bats was first sparked when he used to watch them at dusk as a child on the farm in which he grew up. James is proud to be from Prestwich and plays a leading organisational role in 'Prestwich Clough Day' – a free annual event which brings the community together around activities and entertainment. For James, maintaining, curating, and looking after Prestwich is an important part of looking after himself.

The Manchester
Industry Bee

Look at all those bees, it's a lovely symbol, isn't it? I can remember, my friend taught embroidery and she embroided all these tiny little beaded bees on the Lord Mayor's coat. The bee has always been the symbol of Manchester, it's for the workers, and that's what Manchester was all about: it was a working city.

Manchester's people have always been quite full of themselves, quite confident and proud to be Mancunians. I'm not Mancunian, but I am proud of Manchester. Yes, one seriously considered getting a bee tattoo. I sort of think, well, that will last until I die, and somebody will look at me wherever I am and think "oh that's something to do with Manchester isn't it, she must have a Manchester connection". So, I am proud to have lived here, been here and, you know, being part of Manchester, if you like! It comes from the people; it has to be the people.

Petunia, aged 67

Petunia and I initially met at the community crafting group. Having grown up in Ireland, Petunia moved to Manchester to live with her husband who studied there. I quickly came to realise that Petunia very much enjoys teaching and doing crafting activities of all kinds and that she volunteers her crafting skills to several charities across Greater Manchester. Petunia and I later embarked on a walk around Manchester City Centre in which she shared with me the various craft shops she buys materials from. Prompted by a large mural of bees on a wall in the Northern Quarter, Petunia shared the above words. For Petunia, the iconography of the bee was important in providing a collective sense of identity, helping her to feel a sense of belonging to a shared history and pride for the city in which she lives.

Lewis's

There was about four floors when it was Lewis's. It used to be covered in thousands of navy-blue tiles and my stepdad put those blue tiles on and I was like "oh my god, famous!".
My friend's dad was a manger in Lewis's: skinhead, suited and booted. One summer, I went to stay with my friend and our boyfriends in a typical grotty B&B in Blackpool and he was there, playing an organ with a Hawaiian shirt on and a wig! It was like this double life, it was like a comedy sketch, you know, parallel worlds! I said, Judy, I can't keep a straight face! It was just crackers! So that was the manager of Lewis's in Manchester, sat there with a Hawaiian shirt on a and a wig, playing the organ in a B&B in Blackpool. So, I have a lot of memories of Lewis's in a weird sort of way.

Nora, aged 51

↓

Nora and I met whilst I was introducing the research on which this booklet is based to age-friendly policy makers and practitioners across Greater Manchester. Having lived in and around Prestwich for most of her life, Nora asked whether she could be a participant. Whilst walking across the Piccadilly Garden's area of Manchester City Centre, Nora stopped abruptly, pointed towards Primark and, with a smile, shared the words above. Many participants photographed and spoke about Lewis's Department Store because it was a place that this generation who lived in Manchester frequented in their youth. For many participants, the building itself was a locus through which family members, jobs and social events were fondly remembered.

I was a, shall I give it a posh name, I was a display artist at – well you won't know it. Where Primark is now was a big store called Lewis's and I used to make the most fabulous displays. When it was the Queen's coronation, we made Papier-mâché coats of arms and crowns for the different shops. When Lewis's was closing, I went to the staff entrance and asked if I could have look around because I was so upset, so they let me in, and I had a little look around. Oh, I did love it.

Bella, aged 83

↓

Bella shared these words while talking with James and I over a selection of old photographs and maps of the city supplied by James. Looking thoughtfully at an old photograph of Piccadilly Gardens where Lewis's was located, Bella fondly recounted several memories of her time working as a window dresser. Bella was not the only participant who had actively sought to rekindle her memories of Lewis's with several participants having asked to be given access to the unused upper levels of Primark to reminisce. The cityscape is far more than stone and mortar. Rather, buildings are enlivened by memories, experiences and associations that are forged over a lifetime.

Little Italy

I'm from a village called Fontanarossa, it is further down toward the end of the boot of Italy. Near Calabria, Sicily on the Almalfe coast, Naples. Italy was very poor, and when I came to England in 1961, it was very hard – I wanted to go home. I came to Cheetham Hill first as I had a four-year contract there for domestic work. In Italy there were festivals and things like that, here I was always in the house: clean, children, work, work, work.

Shaftsbury Road was known as the Italian village when I lived on Cheetham Hill. Most of the Italian families have gone from there now, they moved up to Prestwich and Whitefield.

There are Italian processions in Manchester in June, I used to go years ago but it's not like it used to be. It's a festival, like in Italy. We went every year when I first came to England, my children, my sister, everyone went. Clapping, screaming, playing, it was really nice! It is in Ancoats, a place called Little Italy, near the Express building. The church there is where the Italians meet up, I went last year.

Valentina, aged 78

Nora introduced me to Valentina who lived near to her in Prestwich. Whilst walking around a part of Manchester City Centre known as 'Little Italy', Nora mentioned that her neighbour was of Italian heritage and attends the Italian festival every year. Moving to Manchester when she was a teenager, Valentina worked as a cleaner for Jewish families on Cheetham Hill Road before settling in Prestwich with her Italian husband and son. Whilst speaking together in her home, Valentina explained how she travels across Greater Manchester in search of the best fresh food. Attending the festival, Valentina explained, not only offered a sense of connectedness but helped to build a sense of pride in her hybrid identity. Valentina's words therefore highlight the importance of repeated practices and cultural events to identity.

Cheetham Hill Road

There seems to be a particular migration along Cheetham Hill Road, Bury Old Road and moving up to Prestwich. Everyone who I went to school with in Crumpsall seems to have moved up toward Prestwich as I have. When I was a toddler, I came over from Ireland and lived in Cheetham Hill. It was poverty that made us come. We lived in a horrible, horrible bedsit in Cheetham Hill. We all lived in one room. There was one double bed, a kitchen and a table and that was it! I remember bashing mice with a brush and stuff. Yeah, (laughs) that's my first childhood memory of Manchester!

I love cooking, and when I was about eight, Cheetham Hill started getting exciting food shops. A lot of the Italian and Polish shops moved up toward Prestwich and then Cheetham Hill got all of these types of Asian food shops. I used to go to them – they found it fascinating that I wanted to buy their food. This was in the 80's and it wasn't really heard of you know. I remember getting some proper curry spices to do my proper curry from there.

Talking of shops moving and waves of migration, there used to be an Italian café in Cheetham Hill called Roma and, when the next wave of immigration happened, that moved to Whitefield.

Nora, aged 51

→ Nora moved to Manchester from Ireland when she was a toddler with her mother and two brothers. On the journey in which the above words were shared, Nora chose to drive around all the places she had lived, slowly moving up Cheetham Hill and finishing at her current residence. Nora paused outside of different houses, shops, and other places of significance, describing what life was like back when and asked me to take photographs on her behalf.

Prestwich Cricket, Tennis
and Bowling Club

It's come a long way this place. I joined this club in 1966 at the age of 16. When I was 18, I joined the committee and I had so much to say. I met my wife here, the kids have all grown up here, it really is a family club.

Before I retired, I worked with two global companies and from that, I had a lot of friends in industry who sponsored this place massively which allowed us to create what we have today. Before that, it really needed work doing. I always remember, in an Annual General Meeting in the 70's, a lad stood up and said "the Americans are on the moon and we're still crapping in a bucket – ladies as well as gentlemen!".

We get fantastic support, and it's all voluntary. The guy running the tennis camp runs all our coaching and everything else, all the people gardening are voluntary, I am voluntary. I work here 7 days a week, and when I'm not, I walk my dog here. It's very hands on. We don't employ a landlord or anything like that, we do it ourselves. We want to move forward, we're not going to stand still.

When I say this place is run on volunteers, we are struggling as it gets quite demanding, and a lot of our trustees are quite old. This club would not operate without our older volunteers.

Billy, aged 69

→ I was introduced to Billy by some of Nora's friends. Billy has lived in Prestwich all his life and the cricket, tennis and bowling club has been central throughout. Whilst talking together over a selection of photographs and brochures Billy had brought of the club in the bar, Billy explained that many of the sponsors of the club that ensure it keeps running are from connections to his previous employment. Billy finds comfort, stability and pride in that he and his family are connected to the club. Billy is particularly proud that the club is run entirely by older volunteers and sees himself as a key driving force behind its improvement.

4

How might this approach assist in the creation of age-friendly cities?

Given the complexity of what it means to be an older person, a one-size-fits all approach to engagement cannot suffice. We can only ever strive to represent the lives of older individuals to the best of our ability: there will always be something that cannot be represented. I have argued, though, that this approach, and the flexible and adaptive toolkit that stems from it, can enable policy makers and academics researching older people to further understand some of this complexity.

Reflecting on this approach and the stories collated around older people's lives, I wish to close this booklet by suggesting three general principles which should guide policymaking around age-friendly cities, older people, and indeed other social categories. I suggest *movement and mobility, heterogeneity, and a flexible and adaptive mode of engagement.* I also make the case for more engagement with qualitative social science research methods.

Movement and mobility

There is a need to focus on *movement and mobility* and to avoid thinking of places as backdrops within and against which people live out their lives. Instead, buildings, streets, towns and cities need to be understood as animated through the practices of those who engage with them. Static material interventions are of course valuable – consider for instance, the introduction of dropped curbs to assist mobility – but there is a need to focus on those people, practices and institutions that animate cities. Those seeking to improve the lives of older people could ask themselves – how can we intervene to support those social activities that older people enjoy?

Heterogeneity

Heterogeneity must be understood as being at the core of what it means to be an older person. The category of older age should not be understood in any totalising or homogenising way. With a mind to this heterogeneity, those working with older people must also consider that when they do represent 'older people' out of necessity, these representations play a role in shaping the lives of those within this diverse group. Take, for instance, chronological age which is often the basis for policies geared toward older people. If those who are aged 65 or over are represented as being vulnerable, dependent and in need of care, then these representations may well become felt and even practiced by those people who find themselves within this chronological age bracket. Moreover, some 'older people' may not attend classes and groups aimed at older people because of the negative associations made with the category. Indeed, to talk of the age-friendly city suggests that the defining feature of an older individual is their age, and in doing so, it risks removing other aspects of identity, and dampening the diversity that their lives entail.

A flexible and adaptive mode of engagement

This booklet encourages those working with older people to adopt a more *flexible and adaptive mode of engagement.* This is important as it assists in uncovering, rather than imposing, the things that are significant in the lives of older people. There is a need to move beyond consultation after the fact: those working with older people need to continue to foster more participatory and flexible modes of engagement where they work *with* and not *act upon* people and places. This requires a different mode of listening where creative and participatory methods of engagement must be encouraged. This might include journeying with older people around their communities to understand what is significant to them, even accompanying them on their daily tasks, to better understand the needs of different individuals in a place-sensitive way. For those older people who are less mobile, a creative participant pack could be offered. But the precise details of what this methodology could be is not the crucial point here. Rather, it is the ethos of situated and flexible learning that is crucial, which will allow older individuals a steering capacity in remaking the areas in which they live.

Valuing qualitative social science methods

Too often qualitative social science research methods, such as those introduced in this booklet, are used in a tokenistic way outside of the academy or not used at all. When they are used, it is often to 'add the flesh to the bones' of a quantitative evidence base, or to creatively disseminate research rather than as a mode of data collection in and of themselves. This booklet has showcased the rich material that immersive, participatory, flexible, and creative approaches can generate. It has introduced a selection of tools which might be drawn upon within this approach, detailed how they might be used and provided links to further resources.

Afterword

In 2014, Age-friendly Manchester in collobaration with Age UK, the RIBA and MICRA produced the Alternative Age-Friendly Handbook: an alternative guide to Age-friendly spatial practice. The original ambition of the handbook back then was to encourage policymakers to attend to those less easily-acknowledged aspects of urban ageing: to account for older people's less visible social and psychological, and not just their tangible, physical relationship to a place.

Eight years on, this booklet, Beyond Older Age, builds on the ambition of that handbook: to improve older people's lives by moving beyond reductive conceptualisations of older age, to move beyond still-dominant biomedicalised models of ageing (with its focus on the physical, ageing body). But the particular and radical proposition of this booklet lies in the way that it starts to show how we can make space, beyond that biomedicalised body, for the multiple realities of older people's complex, changing lives.

This is a booklet that explicitly advocates for the different ways 'older age' is lived and experienced; calling on us to recognise the complexity of those lived lives – and to acknowledge, in particular, the close, entangled interrelationship between older age and place as these co-evolve over time. It shows us the kinds of non-standard processes and practices that policymakers and practitioners can use to draw out diverse, more muddied experiences of a place:

relational, open-ended methods that are sensitive to diversity, nuance and complexity.

These methods are presented, intentionally, as offerings only (Beyond Older Age carefully avoids the prescriptive tenor of a how-to guide). They are also methods that borrow from other disciplines and fields of knowledge (ethnography, creative practice) – methods that do not ordinarily sit within the domain of Age-Friendly policymaking, but that enable other forms of knowledge.

There is a deliberate openness here in the approaches advocated by Beyond Older Age: drawing on alternative fields and modes of practice; promoting flexible, adaptable and responsive forms of research – all the while carefully avoiding the prescriptive language of toolkits, guidance and checklists. It is an open-ended approach that has the capacity to reveal – and share – the often hidden, shifting complexity of older people's lives.

This open-ended, process-driven way of working is not the familiar terrain of policy practitioners. Many of these processes, methods and ways of working will be new. And yet it is these kinds of fluid and flexible methods that will allow us as practitioners and policymakers to move beyond reductive conceptualisation of older age – and enable us, as Beyond Older Age shows, to respond closely and meaningfully to the complex realities of our diverse ageing lives.

Dr Sophie Handler
Author of the Alternative Age Friendly Handbook
Architectural Association, September 2022

Glossary of Terms

Ageing   A social and biological process of change over time.

Age-Friendly City   A city which encourages active ageing by optimising opportunities for health, participation, and security to enhance quality of life as people age.

Flexibility   An ability and willingness to adapt and shift strategies in response to situations as they happen.

Human Geography   A social science discipline concerned with humans (including communities, cultures, and economies) and their varied relationships with space, place and the environment.

Life-course   A way of understanding the different phases an individual progresses through over the course of a lifespan in relation to the social, cultural, political, and economic contexts in which that life happens.

Method   The tools drawn upon to do research to answer a set of research aims.

Methodology   The reasoning of the choice of methods in relation to a set of research aims.

Older Age   A social category used to understand the ageing process, usually referring to those aged over 65 years.

Place   A proportion of space that is imbued with meaning. A coming together of different people, ideas, information, and things within a geographical locality.

Representation   Representations are portrayals of something else. They have a power and act into the world.

Social category   The grouping of individuals based upon at least one unifying characteristic. Social categories are comprised of different representations.

Acknowledgements

The idea for this booklet arose while co-producing a photo and story collection ('Place, Belonging, Manchester: Significant Stories from Manchester and Beyond') with self-identified older people from Prestwich, a Greater Manchester suburb, during Dr Amy Barron's research.[22] The author would therefore like to thank those participants who contributed stories, photographs, and time to this project.

Developed over the course of four months, the booklet has benefitted from the critical input of project partners, as well as discussions in the Age-Friendly Greater Manchester wider team meetings and with older people, designers and policy makers and practitioners interested in and working around ageing and urbanisation.

There is a large print version of this handbook available to download at: amycbarron.com/beyondolderage

You can provide feedback on this booklet at: amycbarron.com/feedback

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Available: amycbarron.com/beyondolderage

22 Barron, A. (2022). Place, Belonging, Manchester: Significant Stories from Manchester and Beyond. Available: amycbarron.com/placemanchester/

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Ambition for Ageing

Beyond Older Age highlights the different ways in which people age and therefore the need to engage older people using different techniques that meet their needs. Creative approaches to understanding the place-based needs of older people are always going to gather rich and engaging stories and this booklet makes suggestions of a number of inclusive and participatory ways of gathering data – with an over arching message of understanding the individual. If we are going to make more age-friendly places we need to understand the complex and different needs of older people living in those places, and the examples in this booklet bring to life the stories of people living in Greater Manchester and are proof that taking a participatory approach to research works.

Thea Monk
Programme Manager,
Ambition for Ageing, GMCVO

Creative Ageing Development Agency

This booklet offers great insight into the diversity of life experience of older people and some practical and effective research methods. It also highlights the central importance of social connection and agency to ageing well.

Dr Virginia Tandy
Director, CADA
The Creative Ageing Development Agency

Greater Manchester Older People's Network

Beyond Older Age resonates with the work and approach adopted by the Greater Manchester Older People's Network since its formation in 2015. The network aims to ensure that older people have an influence in key decision-making and that their voices are championed in the areas that most affect their lives. The booklet also demonstrates creative ways to engage with older people and listen to and capture their opinions and experiences. As also highlighted in this booklet, we must all actively promote the significance of older people as vital members of communities and society. We must also ensure that those who undertake research adopt an inclusive approach and engage older people from the outset as co-designers and co-researchers.

Elaine Unegbu
Chair of Greater Manchester
Older People's Network Steering Group

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