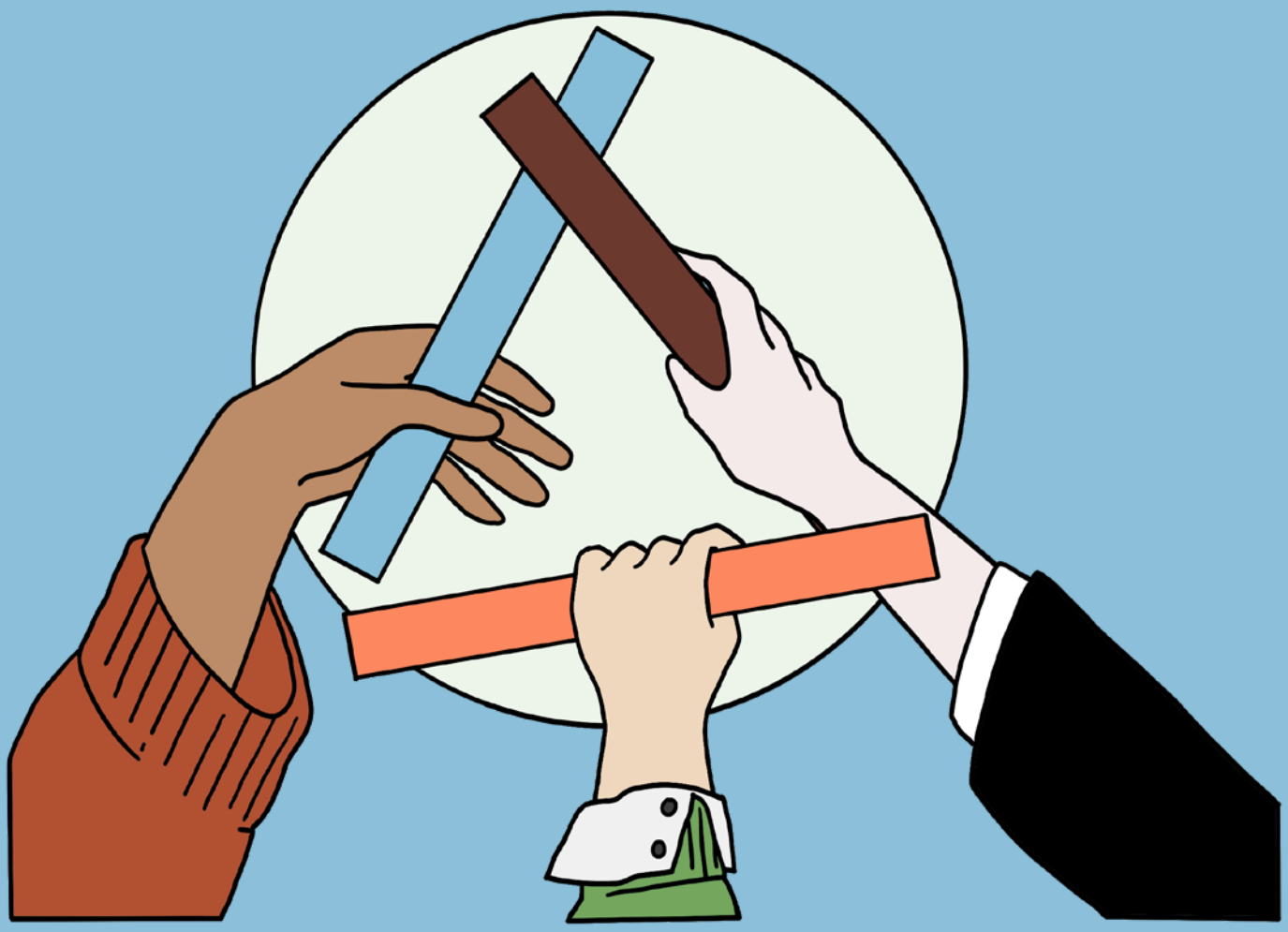
homefolk

Critical Review Document

University of Sheffield Live Projects 24/25



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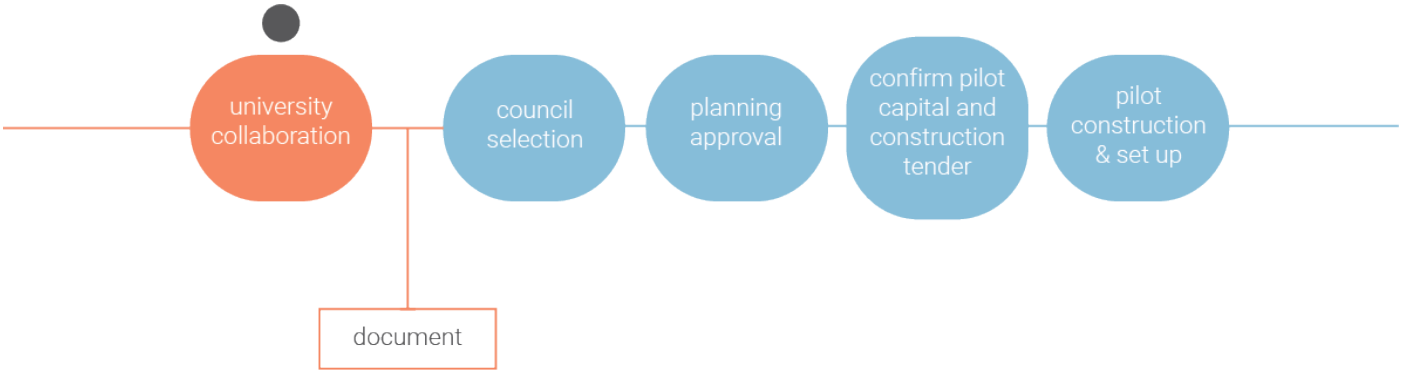
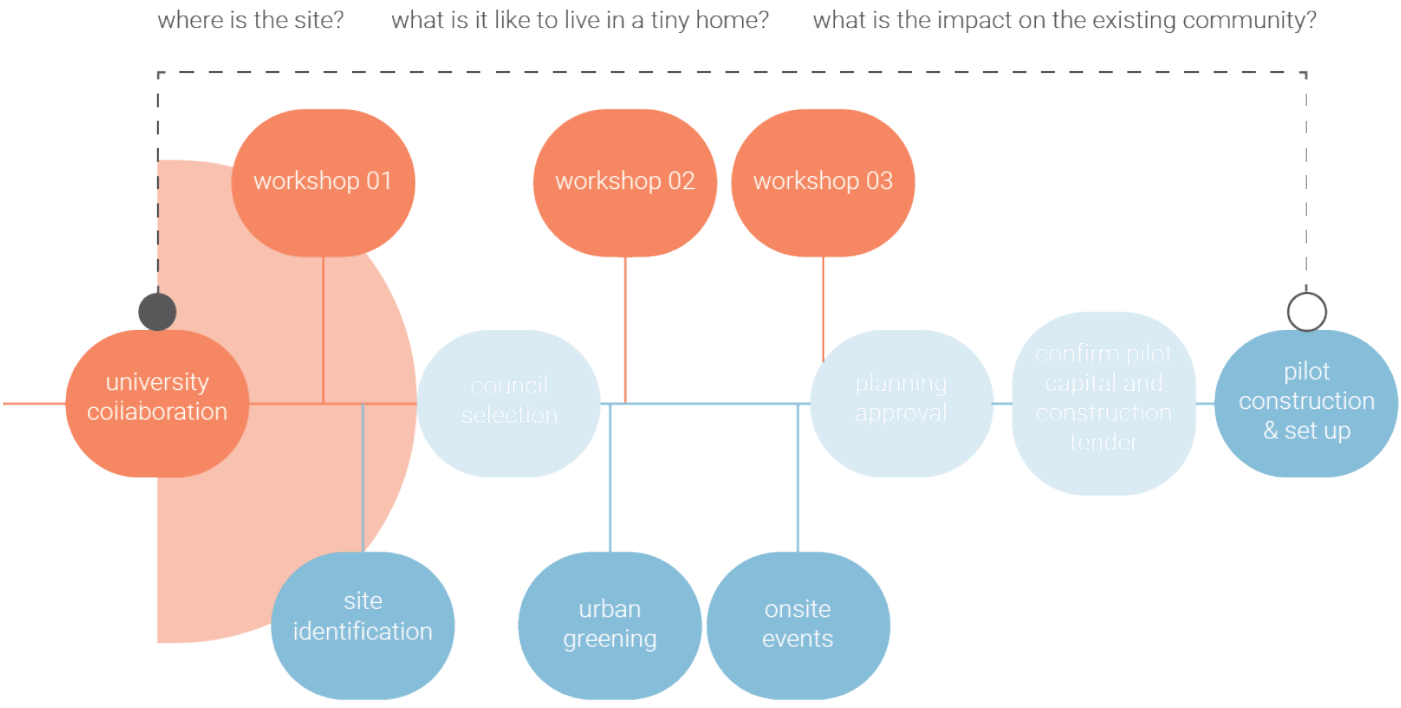
Pilot process

As discussed in our early meetings, we felt that the initial brief to provide a document for convincing councils, required some additional steps in the pilot process, particularly in relation to community engagement.

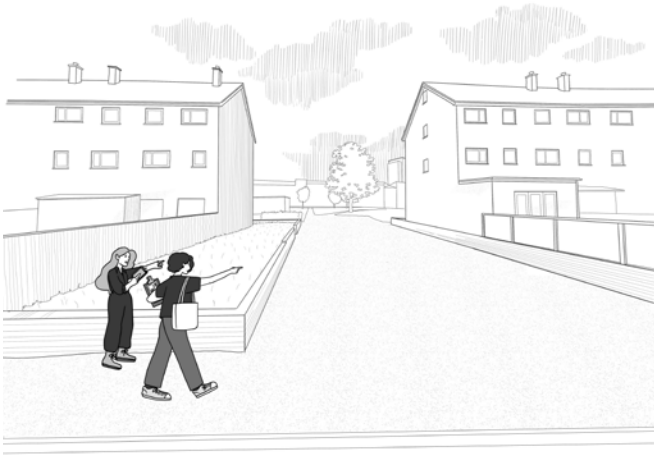




We have therefore provided toolkits to facilitate on the ground conversations with communities which will help to build familiarity with Homefolk, provide feedback into the process, and help to find answers for some of the remaining questions.

Urban Room

In week 3, we shared with you our idea for an urban room which came from our aim to make the pilot an opportunity for an activism hub and maintaining an open conversation about housing. We also viewed it as a ‘test home’ which could warm up sites and allow people to engage and understand the scale of a tiny home as well as an aid to visualise what a tiny home village could look like on site.



After further conversations, it became clear that it would be difficult to include this within Homefolk’s capacity and budget for the pilot. We therefore created a vision for the same engagement activities on site in the lead up to the village, to be done with the introduction of planters and outdoor events.

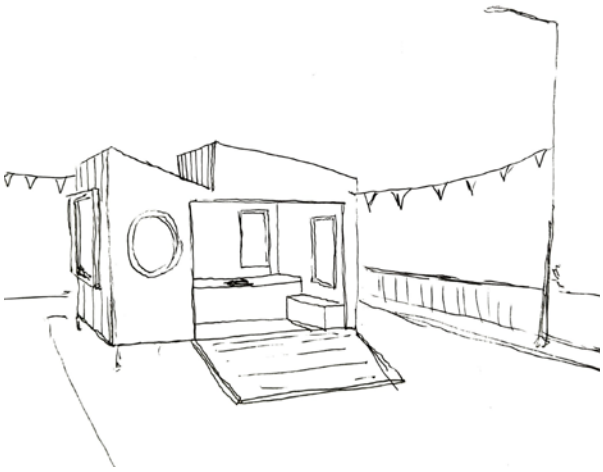
We wanted to reiterate the importance and value that we believe phase 2 of this site process has, in order to ensure that villages are not imposed on communities, and instead part of an open, collaborative, and iterative process with the local communities they will be situated within.

Physical Urban Room

Although we focussed on the ‘urban greening’ in our proposals, we still see a lot of potential in a physical urban room if funding and people capacity was acquired for it in the future.

This could provide a transportable resource to give Homefolk on the ground presence and be a multi-purposed tool for engaging with communities.

Our vision for the space was that it could speak for itself when not staffed with information such as the timeline wrapped around the outside. The space could then open up for special events and allow people to step inside and test the home.



Feelings Library - Caukin Studio

Initial design appraisal

Alongside the work on our outputs, we have kept testing Homefolk's proposals as a group to provide our architectural input and outline areas which we feel require further consideration and testing.

Our understanding of the project has developed over time as we have continued meeting with Homefolk. However, below is a summary of our initial design appraisal which was shared in week 2, as we still believe some of the areas of concern should remain at the forefront of future design decisions.

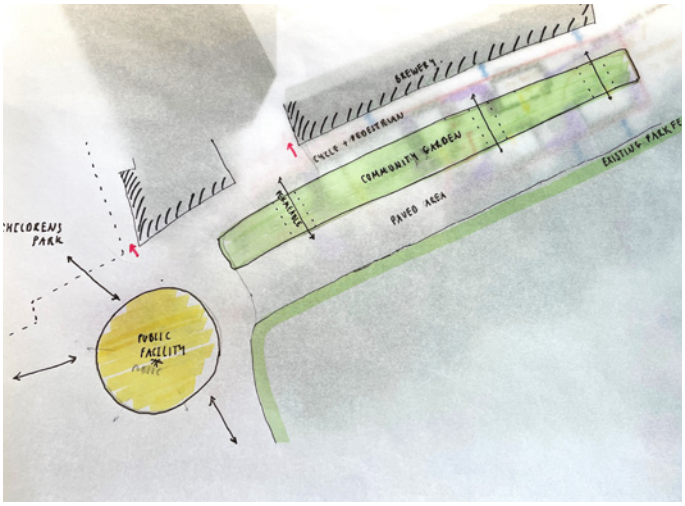
Design appraisal

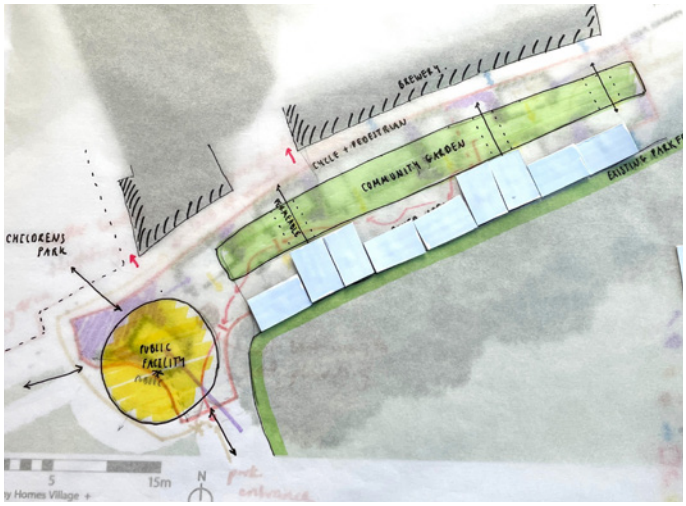
Concerns:

- **'Shadowy areas'** created between homes which may feel unsafe to walk past
- Feeling of **safety when going to the toilet** at night, particularly for women, disabled, and other potentially **vulnerable residents**
- Accessing **facilities in poor weather**
- Impact on existing pavements - no windows on this side therefore **creating an alley**
- Will this seem like a gated 'hipster' community which may exclude local community or contribute to **gentrification**?

Proposals:

- Consider addition of **en-suites** to the homes to ensure they are accessible to a **wide demographic of potential residents**. If not included at this stage, discussing the topic in co-deisgn workshops with future residents would be beneficial
- Consider **covered walkway** between facilities for during bad weather
- Maintain wide pedestrian routes on site with **passive surveillance**
- Incorporate **community engagement** into pilot development to test suitable sites. Include residents from an early stage to **center on the voices of the users and neighbours** to the sites





Key themes

Access to essential facilities

As future architects, we believe that it is important for **homes to provide secure and sheltered access to essential facilities** at all times.

Through interviews with Harrison Marshall (skip house) and van residents, we are aware that there are people who are interested in alternative housing models for the benefit of low costs which do not include a bathroom within the home. Residents like this may be interested to a camp site style provision such as Homefolk's, however, there is an acknowledgement that it is alternative and a temporary situation.

With Homefolk's goal for establishing high quality, longer term housing, we believe this issue would benefit from further consultation with potential residents and stakeholders.

Access to natural light + privacy

In our interviews with students at St Mary's, one student said that although they lived in a flat with big windows, it was on the ground floor facing a street. This meant they had to have the **curtains closed** for most of the day **for privacy** reasons meaning they didn't benefit from **access to natural light.**

With some of Homefolk's proposals being **street facing**, it is important to bear this in mind in deciding the positioning of windows, arrangement of pods on a site, as well as the appropriateness of more public sites.

The addition of **rooflights** could also help to ensure constant access to natural light.

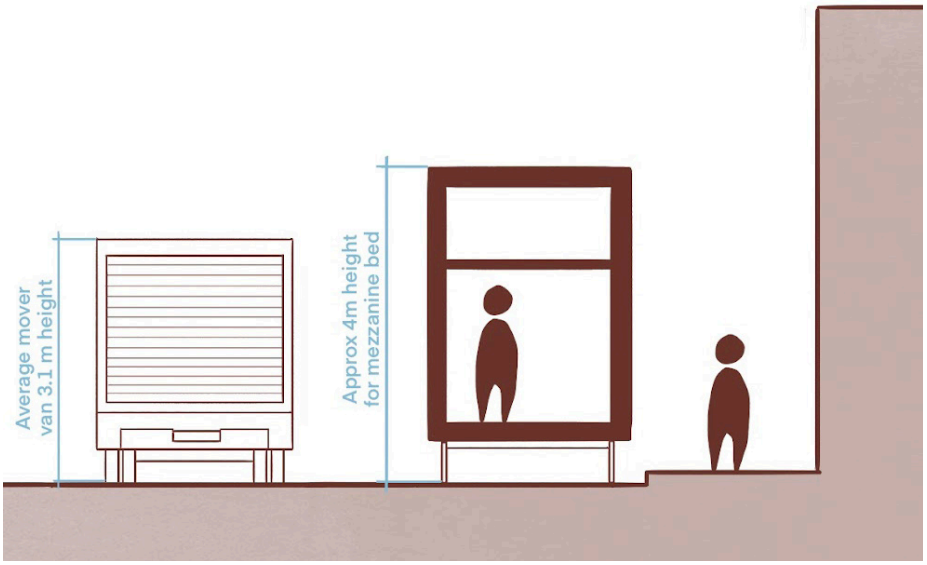
Site selection

As a starting point for our desktop site search exercise, we used existing community centres as nodes and searched for sites within a 300m radius. We then selected 3 as case studies to test Homefolk's village on.

Our key findings on different site typologies are summarised in this section.

Street sites

The cross section below explores the impact of a tiny home on a street-scape. To allow for a mezzanine, the height of a home would be around 4m depending on roof specifications and ceiling heights. In comparison, a standard movers van is on average 3.1m high. The impact of a village on a street will therefore be significant if they are parked along a pavement creating alleys which may feel intimidating to walk down.



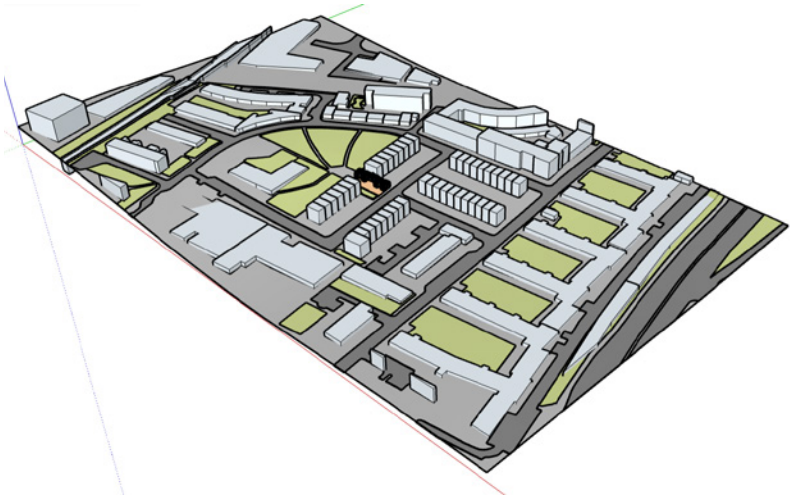
Furthermore, it is important to consider the impact on existing street frontages. The Wennington Road site (below right), doesn't have active frontages which provides an opportunity to activate the space while maintaining wide pedestrian access. However, standard streets with building frontages either side may not be appropriate for the tiny village model due to the significant impact of the homes in creating narrow or overshadowed spaces, and disrupting active frontages.

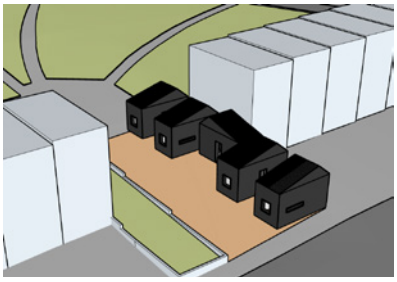
Moreover, in considering pedestrianised streets as potential sites, it is important to consider the thresholds between public and private space and ensure that residents have a sense of ownership and privacy to their homes.

Site selection feedback

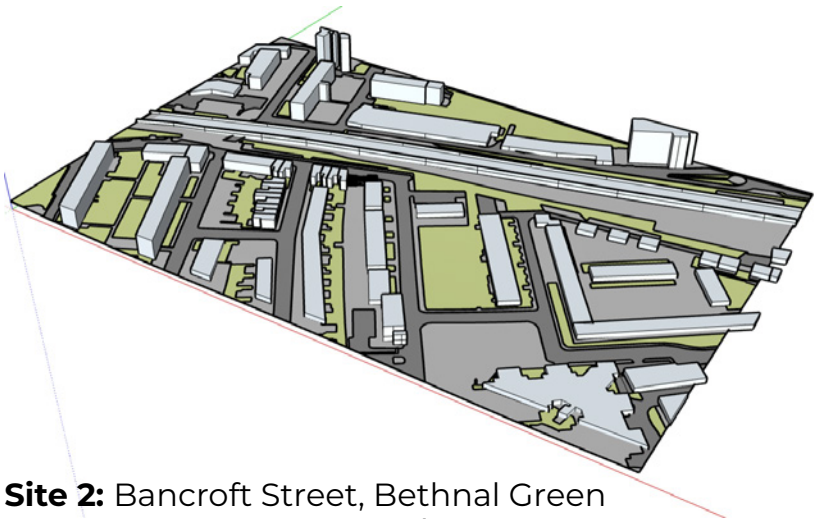
Marginal paved sites

As a case study, we selected 3 sites to model and test Homefolk's villages on. Sites 1 and 2 are marginal paved sites.





Site 1: Celtic Street, Poplar



Site 2: Bancroft Street, Bethnal Green

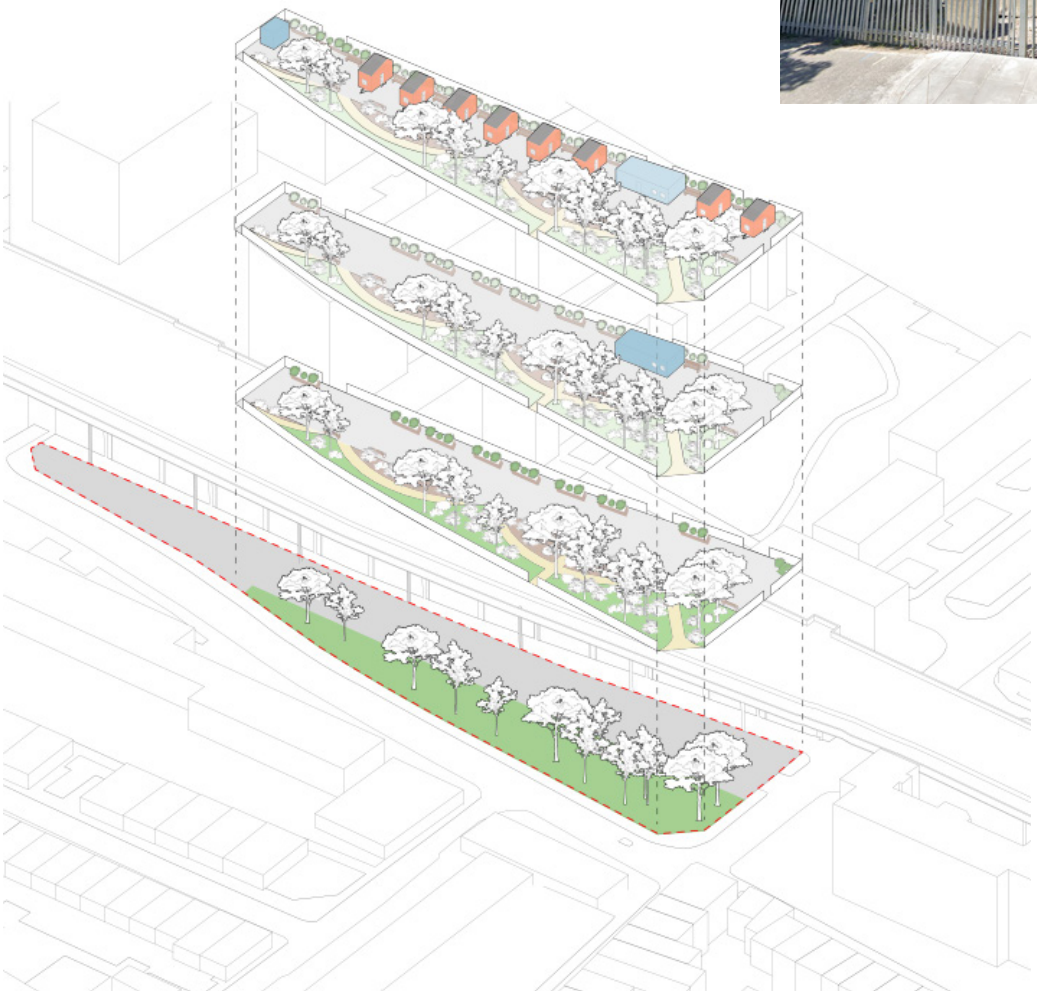
Although both sites seemed to be ideal examples of underused paved sites that could benefit from development, when tested they were too small to fit a Homefolk village on. Each could fit between 3-5 'pods' with suitable distances between - or a maximum of 3 homes.

Interventions on these sites would need to look at alternative solutions such as more compact terraced solutions, individual tiny houses (e.g. Agile Home's TAM houses), or community garden solutions.

Under developed sites

The third site which was tested, is Cable Street in Whitechapel. This site offers a larger space which is more separated from the street. It is owned by the council and up for sale looking for proposals including co-housing.

Although it is not a paved site, the scale and separateness of the site offers opportunities to appropriately lay out a tiny home village and reactivate the space with green space and public facilities as well. Sites such as this or other meanwhile use spaces may be more appropriate for Homefolk's villages.



Test community engagement event

We hosted a trial engagement event in the architecture communal space with the workshops we prepared to demonstrate how they could be used for an event.

Although it was a select sample of people (architecture students from a variety of years), we had some great conversations and engagement which is summarised on the following pages.

We put up the posters and timeline, and laid out the BESCA charrette for people to comment on, the 1:20 model (workshop 2) with pre-made furniture for people to play with, and a 1:200 site map with 3D models (workshop 3).

Workshop 2

Workshop 3

Community engagement

In a more formal workshop rather than a drop-in, the furniture cut out sheets for workshop 2 could be used to to create a more focussed and structured activity.

What worked well?

Prompted questions (we used ones on the workshop 2 cut out sheets) were great ways to **initiate conversation** with people.
There are similar questions on the workshop 1 site exploration leaflets - easy to answer starter questions which can initiate further conversation.

What didn't?

There were some big questions which we didn't necessarily have the answers for as consultants to Homefolk - hopefully as these have been identified now, Homefolk can anticipate them for future events.

There were some recurring concerns from people which we have highlighted as we believe it is beneficial for Homefolk to consider these, and be prepared that they may come up at future events as well. However, overall, there were also lots of positive conversations. People were curious about this new idea and it was a useful tool to generate wider conversations about housing experiences, and re-imagining streets.

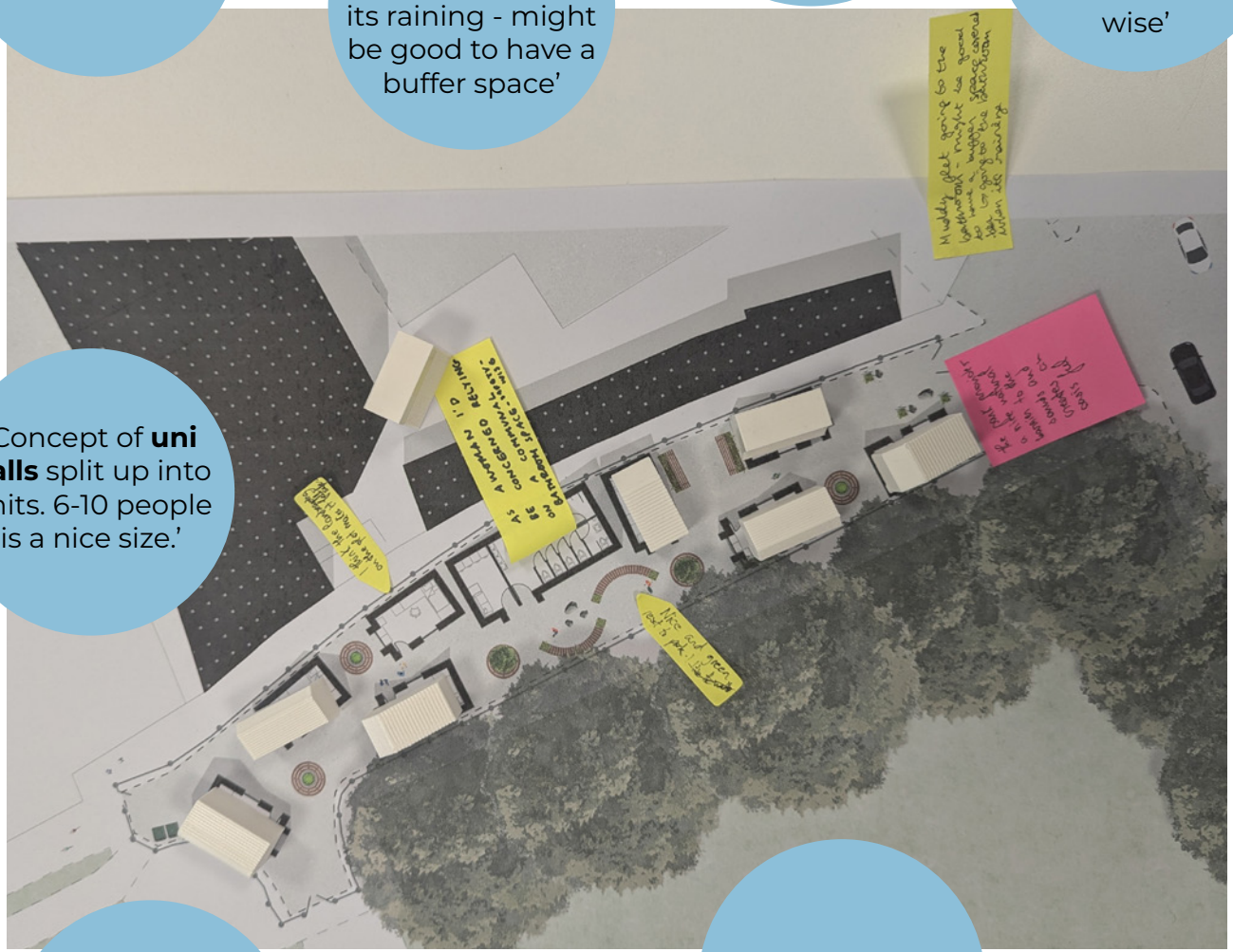
Design charrette comments

‘Nice and **green** next to **park**’

‘**Muddy feet** going to the bathroom when its raining - might be good to have a buffer space’

‘**Gated is a fine line** - it feels safe but it’s not the most appealing’

‘As a **woman** I’d feel concerned relying on a **communal bathroom safety** wise’



‘Concept of **uni halls** split up into units. 6-10 people is a nice size.’

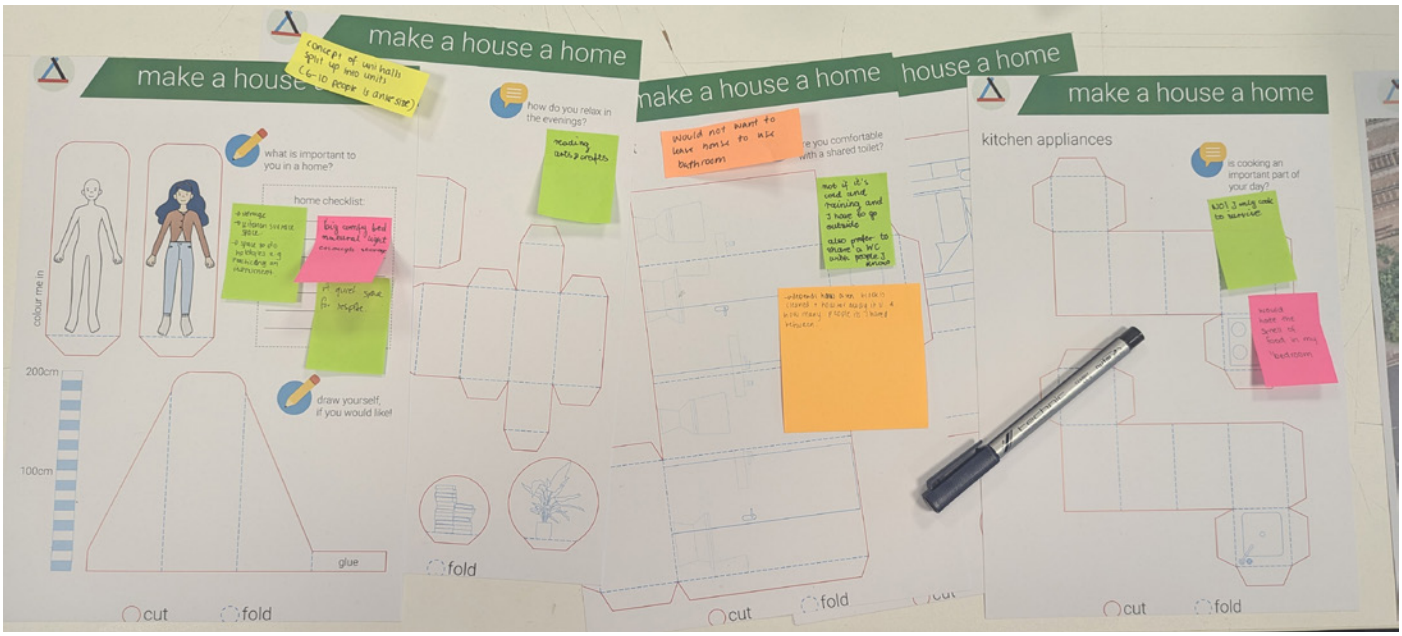
‘Makes sense for **those in need**/ homeless but not necessarily the average person’

‘The **park** provides a nice **natural barrier** to the sounds and creates an oasis feel’

‘Would feel **vulnerable**’

‘The **landcaping** on the plot makes it feel **safe**’

Prompted question answers



Home checklist?
'Big comfy bed, natural **light**, enough **storage**'
'**Storage**, kitchen surface space, space to do **hobbies** e.g. play an instrument'
'No bad **landlord** pls'
'Private space: bed & bathroom. Communal space: Kitchen, workspace, **prayer/well-being** space, garden.'

Are you comfortable with a shared bathroom?
'Depends how often block is **cleaned**, how far away it is and how many people it's shared with'
'not if I have to go outside and it's **cold and raining**. Also prefer to share bathroom **with people I know**.'
'would **not want to leave house** to share a bathroom.'

Is cooking an important part of your day?
'Opens conversation **interaction**'
'No! I only cook to survive'
'would hate the **smell of food** in my bedroom'

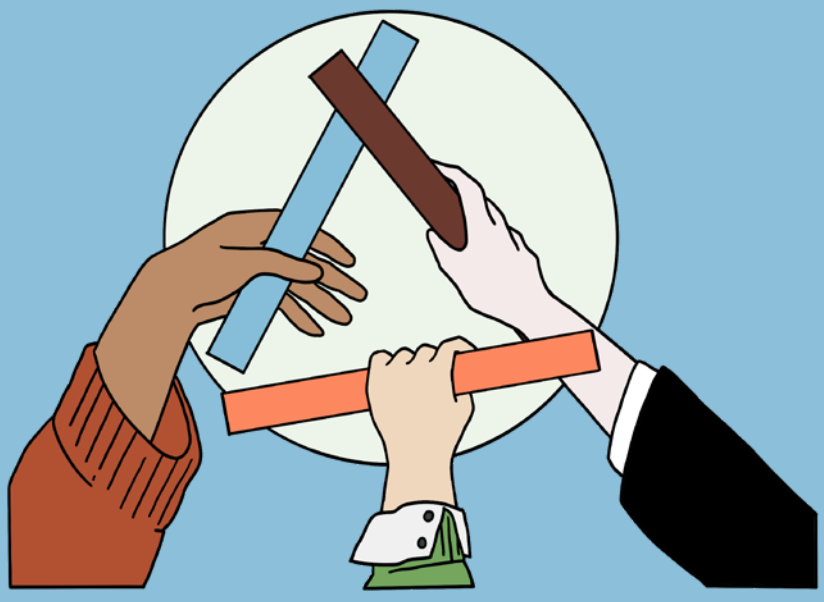
Summary

There were some recurring themes that came up when speaking to people at the event which were:

- concerns on **bathroom provision**
- concerns on **feelings of safety + vulnerability**
- confusion on the who? **Residents**
- **where is it** and what do the people around it think of it?

As previously mentioned, we think it is important therefore to be clear on the reasoning for Homefolk's decision on toilet provision regardless of what this is, and to be aware of who this may exclude in the process.

Although we understand Homefolk is not at this stage yet, we also think that getting residents for the pilot on board from an early stage in the process will be beneficial, as it will help others understand who this is for and why alternative living situation may be beneficial for some.

Another idea for quickly processing data from these events is to transcribe any sticky notes or feedback and put this into free online word cloud generators. We have shown an example from the feedback we had below. Although it is not necessarily the most accurate because it doesn't take into account the context of the words, and includes filler words in this case, it is still a useful tool for a quick overview.

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