
Learning from Open House: Oxford's public talking shop on housing and homelessness

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The entrance to Open House on Little Clarendon Street in Oxford.



1. Introduction

Open House was the venue for a year long conversation about housing and homelessness in Oxford. Operating from late 2018 to October 2019 it aimed to involve as many people as possible in discussions and decisions about housing in the city, particularly those without secure, affordable and comfortable homes. The conversation was facilitated by regular sessions of poetry, art and craft as well as housing advice and one-off events, including workshops, talks and day-long festivals. Over 5,000 people visited Open House during the year and half of them attended an event.

This report is based on interactions and observations at Oxford's Open House over the course of a few days in October 2019 – just before it was due to close – and interviews with a dozen individuals who had participated in, supported and appreciated the experience of Open House in a variety of ways. Interviews were organized around three core questions:

- What has been your experience of Open House?
- What has been different/particular about the way it has operated?
- Have there been any impacts on individuals/organisations/systems?

The purpose of this report is to capture and record the learning from the Open House experience and to highlight what were the factors which made it special.

This report was written by Sara Scott of DSS Research and funded by Lankelly Chase Foundation.

If you have any questions or you would like to explore a partnership with Open House, please contact Lucy Warin, lucy@transitionbydesign.org

Background to the project

The Open House project was established by Transition by Design¹ as part of a three-year action research project to explore how alternative housing models and empty and underused space might provide accommodation for people experiencing homelessness. The aim was to develop a process that would involve organisations and individuals with experience of homelessness in 'a three-year living laboratory for the inclusive co-development of housing models'. The intended outcomes of the overall research included: a new set of community-based housing strategies and a community-based system of support for people experiencing homelessness; accompanied by new strategic partnerships to aid delivery, and a changed narrative on housing, homelessness and the utilization of underused space in Oxford.

¹ Transition by Design is a workers' co-operative bringing together architecture, strategic design and social change practice to build a more equal and convivial low-carbon society.



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Local residents discuss what to do with Oxford's abundance of empty shops.

Taking advantage of a meanwhile lease of a shopfront premises from Oxford University Estates Department, on a 12-month peppercorn rent, the Open House project has been both a vehicle for, and a journey towards, inclusive co-development. It drew on three particular sources of inspiration and experience: The Farrell Review of Architecture and the Built Environment (2014); Camerado's concept and practice of 'public living rooms' (www.camerados.org) and learning from the queer activist spaces of East London which formed around the 50th anniversary of the partial decriminalization of homosexuality.

The Farrell Review highlighted the importance of governments, architects and urban planners engaging positively with citizens on large-scale changes in the built environment. It advocated for new processes of public participation and suggested revisiting the early 20th century ideas of Patrick Geddes of using exhibitions and dialogue to strengthen citizen involvement in the narrative of civic life.² Geddes' original vision was of an 'educational museum' being established in every city and village to enhance social cohesion and act as a 'thought exchange,' 'information bureau,' 'academy of civic art,' and 'office for suggestions'.³ The Farrell Review updated this concept as: 'an urban room where the past, present and future of a place can be inspected.' In the wake of the review the Urban Rooms Network was established and urban rooms have since appeared across England, mostly as pop-up spaces and events programmes.⁴

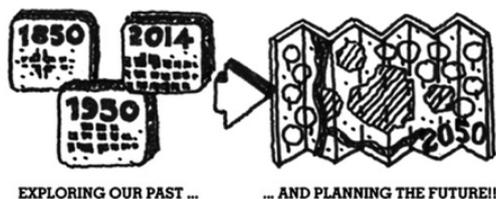
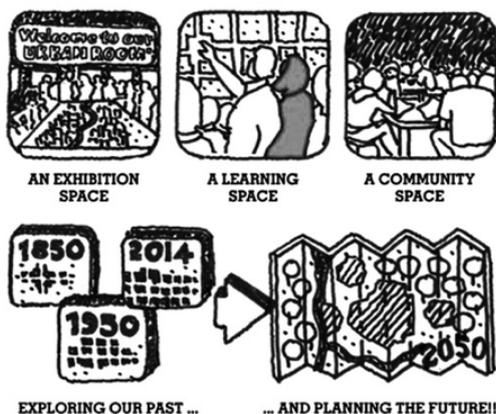
² Our Future in Place: The Farrell Review of Architecture and the Built Environment. London: Farrells, 2014. Geddes, Patrick. *Cities in Evolution: An Introduction to the Town Planning Movement and the Study of Civics*. London: Williams & Norgate, 1915.

³ Freestone, Robert. "The Exhibition as a Lens for Planning History," *Planning Perspectives* 30, no. 3 (2015): 433–446.

⁴ For example see the City Futures initiative, held in Newcastle-upon-Tyne in 2014 involving a pop-up planning exhibition and a related series of public events with an emphasis on the visual and the participatory as a way to engage people in debate about change in their own city and create inter-organizational trust and collaboration that could endure beyond the lifetime of the exhibition. Mark Tewdwr-Jones, Dhruv Sookhoo & Robert Freestone (2019) From Geddes' city museum to Farrell's urban room: past, present, and future at the Newcastle City Futures exhibition, *Planning Perspectives*, DOI: [10.1080/02665433.2019.1570475](https://doi.org/10.1080/02665433.2019.1570475) Published online 29.11.19

Camerados is a social movement which declares that 'the answer to our problems is each other' and aims to bring all kinds of people together in relationships of mutual support. Public Living Rooms are spaces where this can happen: places to go, relax, chat and look out for other people – places where there is no pre-set agenda, hierarchy, expectations or service provision. Crucially, they are 'outcome-free zones' and are not trying to achieve or facilitate any particular changes in people's lives. Camerados believe that human connection is good for everyone - opening up new possibilities for individuals and communities – and that having things to do and being needed by others is what best helps people through hard times in life.

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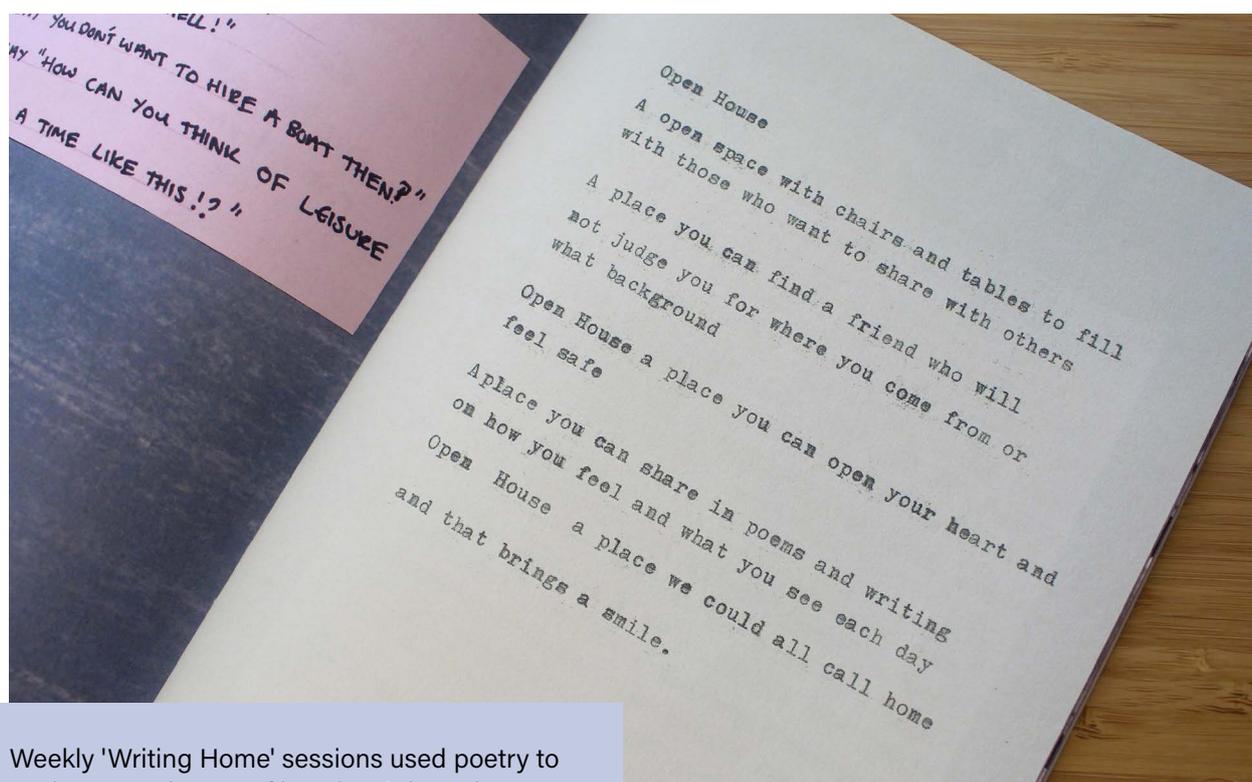


#camerados



A number of activist groups focused on LGBTQIA+ issues came together in the early months of 2017 to organize around the 50th anniversary of the partial decriminalization of homosexuality in the UK. These groups created spaces including weekly open space meeting in East London for 'radical queers to challenge oppression through collective action and fun.' This open space was based on the assumption that people like talking to each other but may need some help to do so and therefore open spaces still need to be thoughtfully curated:

- People need to be actively invited and welcomed in.
- Barriers to participation need to be addressed
 - there should be money for transport and childcare when these are needed.
- Spaces needs to be comfortable, tidy and cared for.
- Meetings should be alcohol-free and monitored by a 'vibe checker' who can ensure that anyone struggling or in distress gets support.



Weekly 'Writing Home' sessions used poetry to explore experiences of housing & homelessness.

The Open House concept

Transition by Design drew on these ideas about public participation and inclusive places and processes in developing their concept of a 'public talking shop.' They started with three suppositions:

- Oxford has a huge problem with housing and homelessness – but also lots of energy and ideas about solutions.
- Solutions start with conversations - and finding ideas that work for everybody means including everybody in discussing them.
- People and ideas need the right space in which to come together and turn into action, and a community-based, volunteer-run project could provide this.

Open House developed a programme of events: evening talks, panel discussions, and film screenings, regular daytime sessions and one-off workshops. It provided a venue for meetings and opened daily for people to call in and chat over a cup of tea.



An 'open space' session allows people with different expertise in the city to explore a topic together.

In designing the space, Transition by Design took the concept of 'conversation' as central and conducted consultations and co-design activities to create a room which would best enable people to connect with others. This was done through the look, feel and layout.

Further considerations were safety and how the design of the space could encourage a sense of ownership by different parties. The shop was designed to be easily run by anyone. It contained little of monetary value and had simple opening and closing procedures.

Daytime sessions included weekly poetry drop-ins and 'arts and craftivism' workshops. These were important entry points for all kinds of individuals to join the conversation about housing. People who were currently homeless, or in housing need, found a warm, accepting place to hang out, and in some cases gained the confidence to attend events, volunteer or write for the Open House magazine.

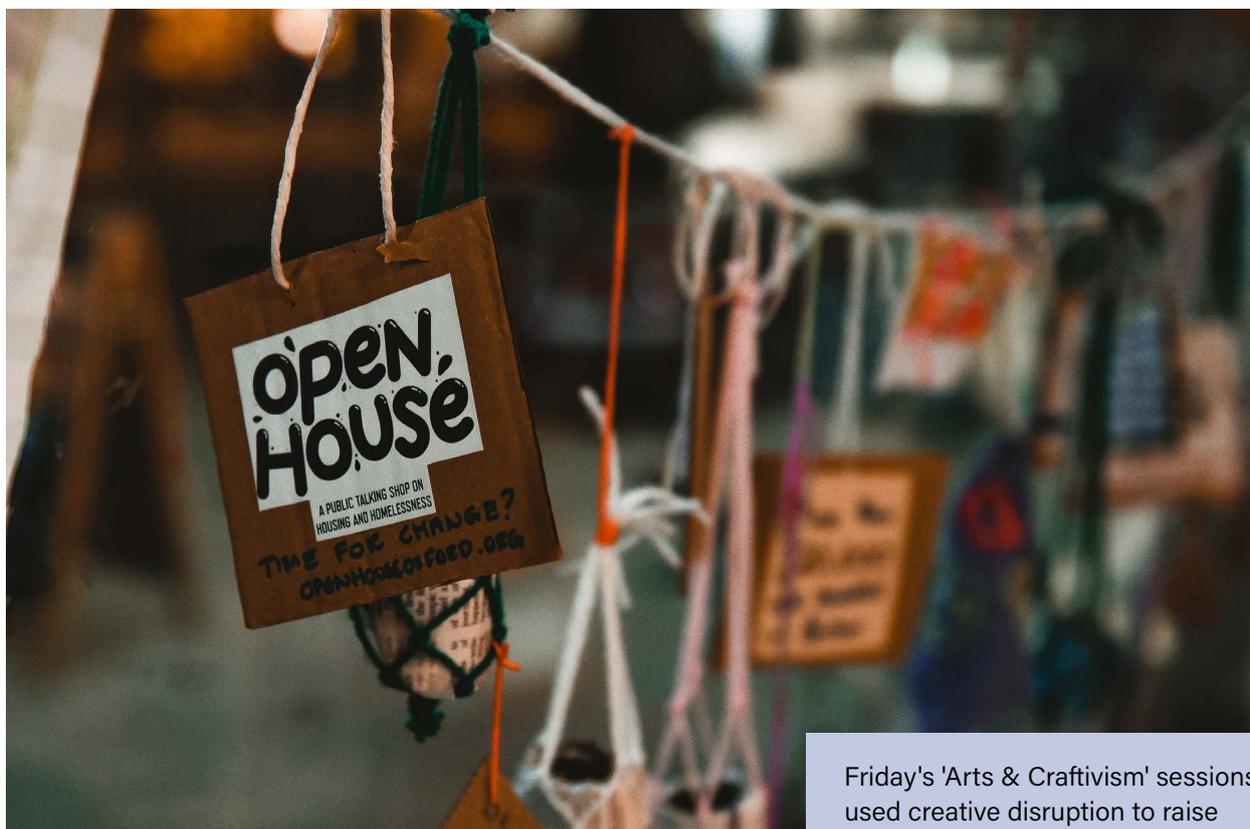
In addition to sharing experiences of housing and homelessness and exploring the meaning and significance of having a secure home, popular topics of conversation were:

- how to finance and build more social housing,
- making 'meanwhile use' of empty property,
- how to better help people experiencing homelessness,
- what can be learnt from the squatting movement,
- how Oxford can meet its housing needs without harming the environment,
- how to make best use of Oxford's abundance of empty shops.

Topics for evening events included: 'A Home of Her Own: women's experiences of housing and homelessness'; 'Rough Sleeping in Oxford'; 'Re-imagining the city centre'; 'Renters rights and precarious housing.'

2. Learning from the Open House Experience

In evaluating thousands of public spaces around the world, the Project for Public Spaces (PPS) found that to be successful, they generally share the following qualities: they are accessible; people are engaged in activities there; the space is comfortable and has a good image; and finally, it is a sociable place: one where people meet each other. All of these were features of Open House which were highlighted by the people interviewed for this report. However, there were also other factors identified as important to the success of Open House, notably the location of the place itself, including the importance of the wider Oxford context, and the strengths and characteristics of the people involved. In this section, we describe these features in more detail and highlight how they have interacted to create the success of Open House.



Friday's 'Arts & Craftivism' sessions used creative disruption to raise awareness of housing issues.

Place

There were three important features of Open House's location which impacted on its development and success. First, it is impossible to ignore the significance of the fact that Open House was located in Oxford:

"There's an Oxford factor definitely. There've been well-known national level speakers that can draw an audience. If you invite people to speak in Oxford they'll come, and Open House has made good use of that."

"Oxford is such a particular city. Dominated by the University in so many different kinds of ways and still as split between town and gown as ever. There are just very few places that people from both come together...students coming in here [to Open House] have got to see a whole 'other' Oxford."

The size and nature of Oxford were important because they made it seem possible for change to take place:

"It's a human scale place but it's also a 'can do' place in general, as well as that being the approach of Open House. It's a benefit of privilege – a lot of people who are able and confident and feel entitled to set things up and make things happen without waiting for permission or needing funding."

Second, there were some implications of Open House's location within Oxford: situated next door to the University admissions building, on a street on the edge of the city centre known for decades as 'little trendy street.' This location was variously described as 'workable,' 'accessible' and 'a bit ironic,' and it was seen to have both contributed to, and in some ways limited, the inclusiveness of the project:

"It's just on the edge of town, Jericho and North Oxford. The street is very up-market: the shops opposite are a cheese-monger and a bakery selling sourdough loaves for a fiver. There's a lot of student accommodation up above. There'd have been different passers-by and maybe more footfall if it had been right in the city centre."

"There's a symbolism to the location that I've liked. It's right next door to the University admissions building and their terrace is somewhere street homeless people often sleep – especially in the winter. So, it's somewhere there was already a collision between those worlds. The symbolism was good re property use."

"There's an Oxford-y sign outside – it wouldn't work in Didcot – but here it's fit for place."

Third, it was clearly important that Open House was located in a shop rather than an office or a place where housing/homelessness services are often provided. People commented on it being a 'neutral' space and that this had been important for bringing together people from homelessness charities, local government and the housing sector. People also spoke about how the place in which meetings happen shapes the kinds of conversations people have:

"When you go to meetings about homelessness they are normally in homeless spaces. If you want to change the narrative you have to get out of there."



The entrance to Open House on Little Clarendon Street in Oxford.

Space

Where Open House was located was important. Equally so was how the place itself was shaped to create the welcoming, comfortable and inclusive space needed to enable the conversations to happen.

An initial conversion and clean-up of the building was supported by Makespace Oxford, Aspire Oxford, the Oxfordshire Community Foundation and the Sankalpa Trust. A collection of people from partner organisations then came together in what was just 'a box with white walls' to imagine how the space could be used and what it should look like. The ultimate aesthetic of Open House was 'found and donated', but nice: colourful and comfortable, tidy and clean but 'a bit battered round the edges.' The room was partially divided into living room sized areas with sofas and tables for sitting round. A range of seating types and lighting levels created distinct areas to accommodate different needs and designed to make neuro-diverse visitors and people dealing with the effects of trauma feel comfortable. Whilst some seating faced each other, there was also seating in which someone could be sure no one would sit directly opposite from them. There was a tiny kitchen and toilet open to all and no 'staff only' areas.

The care taken to develop the space was in recognition of the impact which spaces have on how people feel about being there. It was important to pay attention to the details which contribute to peoples' safety and comfort:

"I think the place itself has an independent effect on people. The space is made up of various elements: light, heat, décor, comfort, plants, things to do and read – so nobody needs to feel like a spare part. It's been somewhere that can be used by anyone – not just a place for the disadvantaged – and that in itself is destigmatizing."

"It's one big room with a plate-glass window onto a moderately busy shopping street. You can cruise past a few times and check it out. Crossing the threshold is the hardest bit so we leave the door open a lot. It's easy to feel safe in such a space."

The walls displayed posters with some facts and figures about housing costs in Oxford; there were a couple of shelves of books that could be borrowed and a 'visual survey' involving jellybeans in jars – just enough 'stuff' to provide conversation starters without overwhelming people with information.

"The information on the wall helps people to see the big picture – the system that their housing struggles are the result of. It helps people get beyond their individual story."

The atmosphere of Open House tended to be gently purposeful. World music played quietly in the background. The arrangement of furniture, volunteers on welcome duty, easy coming and going and free-flowing tea made for a relaxed, sociable atmosphere:

"Some areas are cosier, others lighter and right for a bigger group. If there's someone here you don't really like you can just go to a different area."



Visitors could contribute to a 'living graph' of housing and homelessness in Oxford.

Activities

What people do in spaces matters. Ultimately, Open House aimed to enable conversations about housing and homelessness – but if they had done that only through a series of meetings, it is unlikely that the same diversity and depth of discussion would have been achieved.

Activities at Open House involved a lot of cutting and sticking, some knitting, drawing, a bit of sewing and a lot of jigsaw puzzles and writing poetry. All this creative activity was purposeful on a number of levels. It meant people had something to do, which encouraged people to linger beyond the initial entry point conversation which tended to involve seeking/giving information about the nature of the project ('What is this place?' 'Who funds you?' 'We've got an event next week').



Volunteers use model-making to help a diverse group of residents contribute to a consultation on Oxford's Local Plan.

Like the mugs of tea that accompanied it, the crafting activity seemed to lubricate conversation:

"Chatting with strangers is easier when your hands are occupied and you don't either have to join in or make eye contact until you want to."

"My parents are moving into a shared housing project. There's lots of meetings! I couldn't do it - you have to have the time to live like that. They're retired in their 60s so it's OK for them."

"I'm commuting to London three days a week - living in London would actually be cheaper but I can't bear to leave Oxford. It feels like if I leave I'd never get back, never afford to come back."

"It's the same in Berlin. In the countryside you can afford to buy."

"I tried living here but I've drifted back to London. I don't think I'd ever belong in Oxford."

"I've found working from home changes the significance of home - the meaning of it is different now..."

Extracts from a conversation between 6 people engaged in cutting up magazine pictures to make a collage.



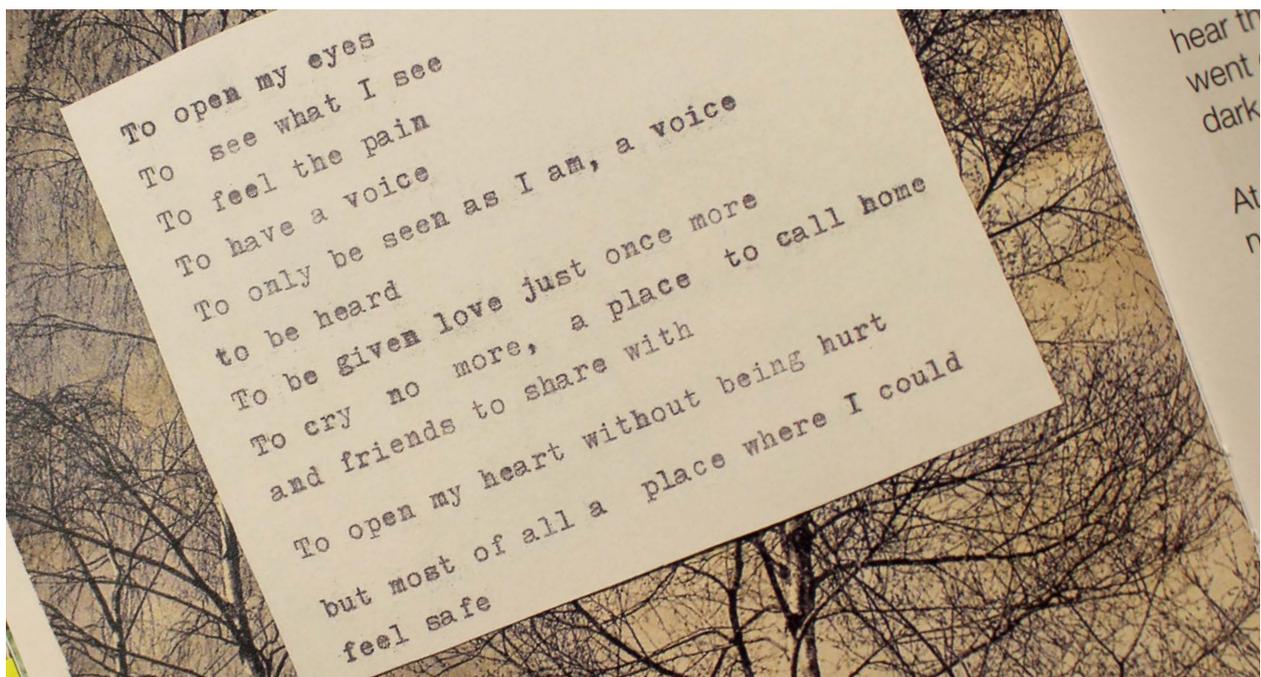
A page from 'Oxford Is My Home', a zine produced by Open House volunteers and visitors in partnership with the Oxford Poetry Library.

In addition, sitting next to people doing a shared activity is companionable and equalizing – it is reminiscent of the domesticity of watching TV or eating dinner with people – and it elicits different and more relaxed kinds of talk than do interviews or seminars.

Telling, hearing and capturing lived experience was a crucial part of Open House – after all homes are where we ‘live’ and homelessness is a ‘lived experience.’ At the same time there was an awareness that many disadvantaged people are required to tell their stories repeatedly in order to access services:

“People’s personal stories become a kind of currency; people have to trot them out - to get treatment in A&E or just for a voucher for the food bank. It debases them.”

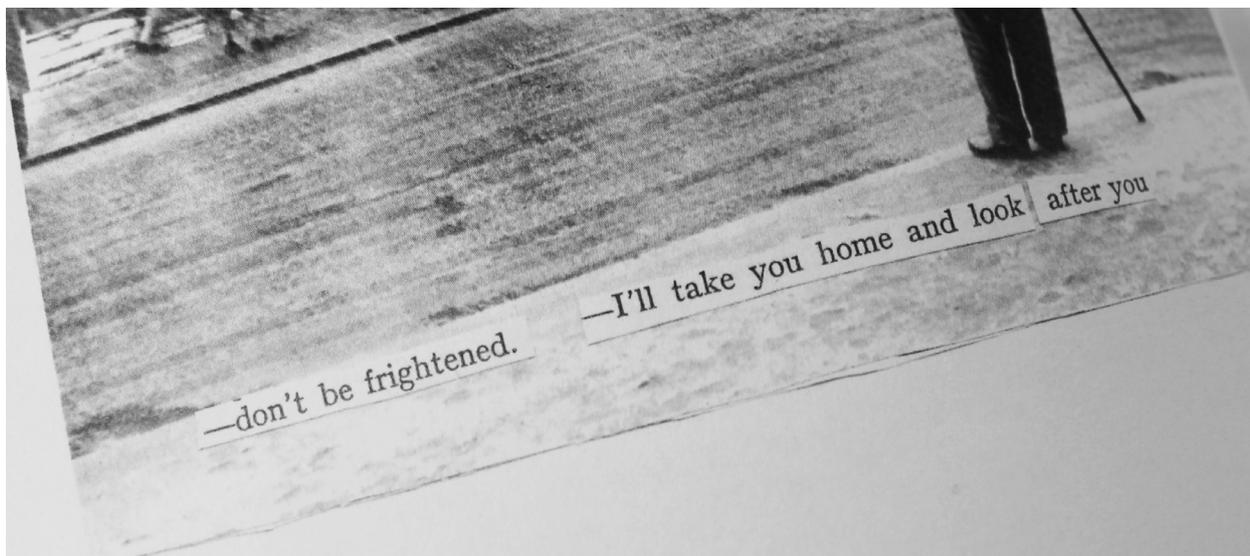
The project therefore encouraged people to talk from their experience rather than just ‘tell their stories.’ While some people did write or record autobiographical accounts for the Open House Zine or the audio booths, others contributed to collectively produced collages and poems. In this way individual experiences were recognized as shared – part of a pattern – and the creative activities became a medium for consciousness raising about causes and possible solutions.



The 'Writing Home' poetry drop-in, run in partnership with the Oxford Poetry Library, was one of Open House's most popular weekly groups and poetry proved a particularly powerful means of exploring, capturing and pooling memories, ideas and opinions:

"Poetry – especially writing collectively or using the magnetic poetry – is a 'gateway drug' to writing. It's simple, accessible. The words are given, the choice is limited. It's not threatening or exposing. And with a poem there's no plot or characters, you can just emote."

For some, participation took the form of one-to-one conversations or creative contributions in collage or poetry, while others gained sufficient confidence to speak at public-facing events. This was the key way in which the day and evening strands of the project were joined up: daytime users' ownership of the space via creative activities empowered them to participate in evening events with professionals and politicians on much more equal terms.



Over leaf. The national RENT STRIKE! campaign host their annual gathering at Open House, Professor Danny Dorling discusses the housing crisis, volunteers get ready for the weekly Camerados Coffee Morning, and regulars Les & Tony interview each other about their experiences of living in supported accommodation for a sound instalation featuring different stories of living in Oxford.



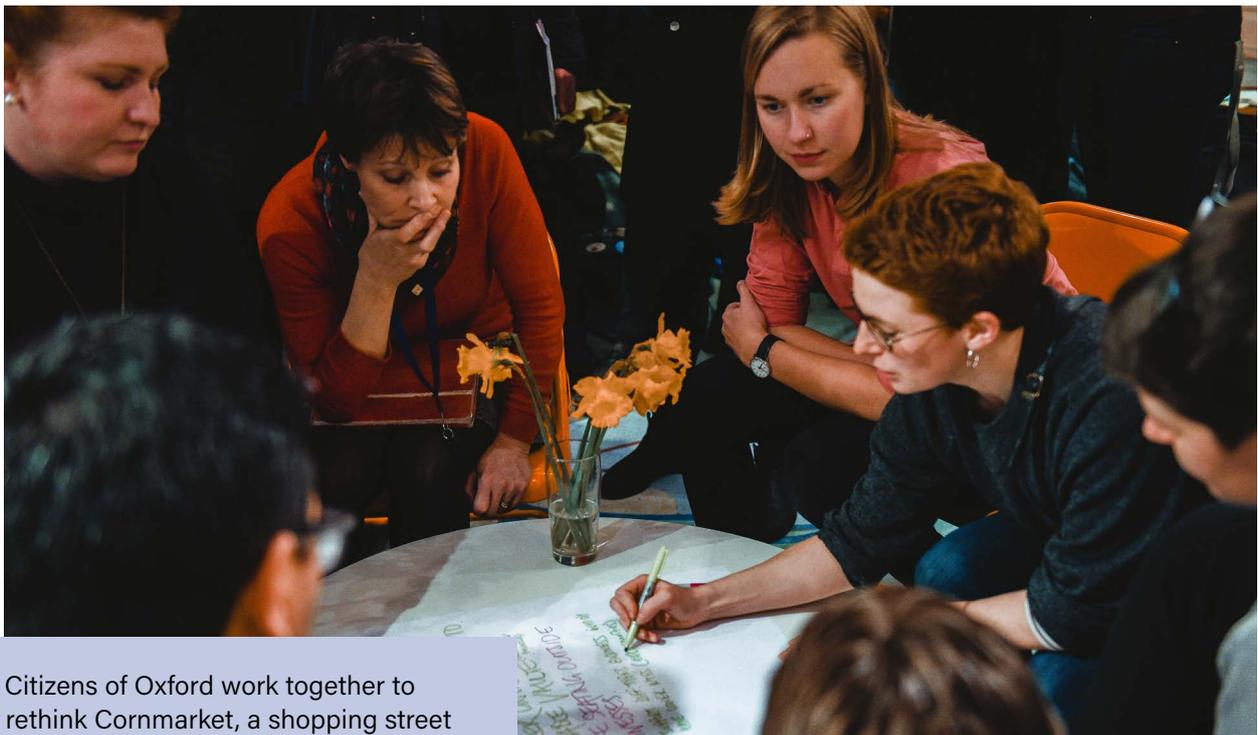
People

Successful places depend on human beings adopting, using and managing the space: 'people make places, more than places make people'.⁵ The look and atmosphere of a space impacts on how people feel when they are in it and therefore how they behave.

Interviewees commented on Open House being welcoming, interactive, diverse and inclusive and described how they had experienced this for themselves:

"There are no defined roles. You don't have to do anything to be here. The set up gives you permission to talk to other people but there's no intrusion: not an expectation that you will. It's very special that you can just be – and leave your identity at the door. [...] Here 'voice' is a person speaking not 'service user involvement'. We need places that don't 'differ' people, this is one of those."

⁵ Worpole, K and Knox, K, 2005 The Social Value of Public Spaces, Joseph Rowntree Foundation



Citizens of Oxford work together to rethink Cornmarket, a shopping street in central Oxford.

This interaction between the features of the space and the way in which people were gently encouraged/enabled to be with each other, helped to create more equal, non-hierarchical relationships – which in turn gave everyone permission to be themselves and have a voice. Central to this was the observation that Open House was not owned by the ‘professionals’ and this contributed to more creative kinds of conversations. For example, Open House was used for public meetings, partnership meetings and campaign launches, and housing and homelessness organisations held staff meetings and awaydays there specifically in order to have ‘different kinds of meeting’:

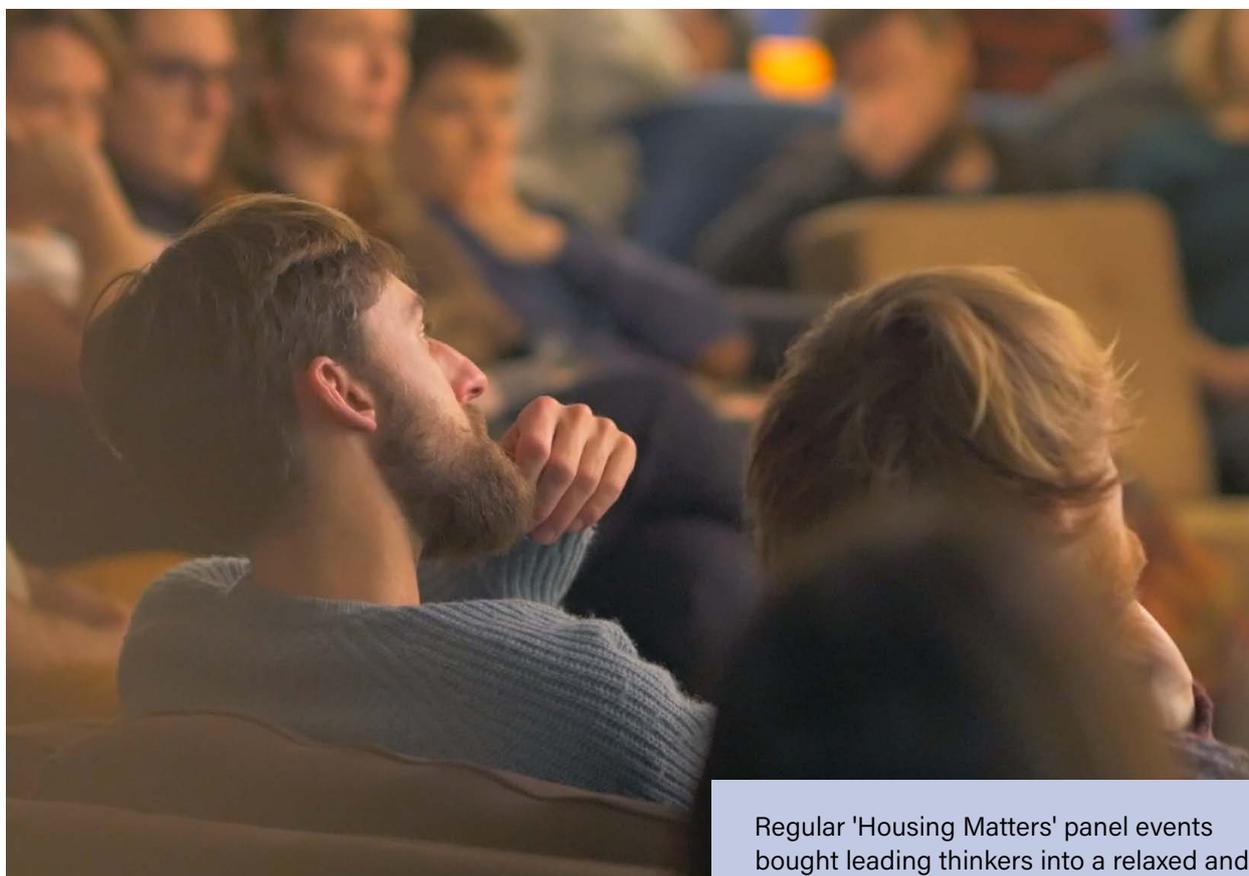
“The space invites events to be a different kind of meeting – because it is already pre-owned by people that don’t usually ‘own’ any space, let alone a meeting space. In Open House this has literally been people who don’t normally have any space to call theirs because they are homeless. If it’s their space first of all then people coming into an event feel that... I’ve seen people, professionals, being courteous in a different kind of way, a non-patronising way, and homeless people welcoming them in. It changes the dynamics around who has the right to be there, to take up space, to be heard. And that changes the conversation.”



People recognised that Open House provided a conducive space for much more equal participation to take place and that this impacted on the more powerful as much as on the less:

"There's almost always an eclectic mix of people at events – if there were more places like this there would be far less 'us and them' [...] I've seen it change people over the year. There's one man [a senior management figure] and I remember him at an early planning session. I've never seen anyone look more uncomfortable than he did in that space – he was visibly freaked at everyone being mixed together. And there he was at [an event] last week – taking part, transformed."

"Because it's a small space and people feel they have as much right as anyone else they say things as they see them. The discussions can therefore be quite forthright, 'direct'. [I was at one event where] there was a speaker who was evidently quite taken aback by the directness of opinions expressed. It wasn't what they were used to."



Regular 'Housing Matters' panel events brought leading thinkers into a relaxed and accessible space for rich discussions.

For those with the least social capital the opportunity to develop an ongoing personal relationship with Open House, and to feel at home there, were the factors that most enabled their participation. Individuals appeared to have gained a sense of what they had to offer and that they were entitled to be heard; something that being invited to contribute to a one-off consultation can rarely provide.

“It’s the fact that the space existed over time that was important for the least heard. It’s entirely different to a one-off consultation. It was a series of events plus the level of contact. The place became familiar to people and relationships that grew over time really enabled people to share in a very natural way. You have different conversations when you know people.”

The juxtaposition of strangers of different age, class and gender was often striking. On a particular morning a young mother was doing some colouring-in with her small daughter, while an elderly man took a nap in his favourite armchair and a volunteer chatted with a research student from Malaysia and a canal-boat dweller about self-build projects.

Whilst Open House was very successful in including a wide range of people of different backgrounds, experiences and identities and facilitating their active participation as volunteers and in events, there were some groups of people who were not there. Visitors and volunteers were largely white – as is the overall population of the city - and while women made up a significant proportion of attendees at evening events and some came with children for Saturday craft sessions, the daytime regulars tended to be mainly older men living in supported accommodation. This was despite women-only Thursdays and considerable efforts made to create activities and provide resources for women with small children. This reflects the fact that women who are homeless and in housing need are generally less visible than men; they are less likely to be street homeless or to engage with services and more likely to have dependent children and therefore tend to be very locally based.⁶

⁶ McNeish, D and Scott, S (2016) [Women and Girls Facing Severe and Multiple Disadvantage](#) Lankelly Chase Foundation.

In addition, there were limitations on who can be drawn into a city centre venue:

"Lots of people from Blackbird Leys or Rose Hill never come into the city at all and if they did they wouldn't visit this street or have the nerve to walk into a trendy looking shop and join a meeting. For an open house to be open to them it would have to go where they live."

People as facilitators

Open House was true to its name. It was open to all and there was no differentiation into 'categories' such as 'service users', 'professionals', 'managers' and 'staff'. However, some people played an important role as facilitators of Open House, including its volunteers. Open House was reliant on people volunteering in order to open at all, and therefore volunteers had to be recruited, inducted, organised and supported. All of this was done with as light a touch as possible so that volunteers remained interested individuals rather than becoming semi-professionalised 'unpaid staff'. Indeed, volunteers were encouraged not to behave as staff and activities such as washing up, welcoming in and closing up were considered to be the collective responsibility of whoever was present. Potential volunteers attended an open induction and then largely self-selected; there were no risk assessments or DBS checks undertaken. Safety and safeguarding were taken very seriously but were addressed through relationships, communication and careful planning rather than merely as issues of policy and procedure.

A total of 78 people volunteered with Open House. A handful stuck with the project for the entire year but on average volunteers stayed for 4-6 months. Many transitioned from visitor to participant to volunteer, and some reverted to visiting when they no longer had time to volunteer. They ran events, helped with design, marketing and project management, but most operated the shop, two at a time, on a rota basis. The shop role largely involved making people welcome:

"I was told to work it out as I went along: make people welcome... get to know the regular folk. The space is geared up for making relationships with people. I've learned a lot from the responsibility – about managing around people getting upset for example. And the whole business of hosting. I'm a naturally quiet person but that's OK as there's no hierarchy so you don't have to be different to how you really are."



Every week saw a rich programme of events at Open House, many organised by volunteers, visitors and partners.

A lot of volunteers were themselves in various ways displaced or in transition. They found themselves 'not-at-home' in Oxford, new to England, newly single, no longer a student or overcoming mental or physical ill-health. About half had direct experience of homelessness and/or insecure housing.

"There's been a lot of recovery here – people doing better – including the volunteers. Even for the students it's an escape room: somewhere they are able to go where they are not the focus and get to ask others: 'How are you? Are you OK?' Somewhere [people] are not judged for being alone and there's no pressure to leave.

There's also been learning...I am the opposite of homeless. For me it has been a complete eye-opener. I've gained insight and engaged with people I would never otherwise have met and heard things I've never heard before: how someone's mother wouldn't let him in the house; how terrible the shelters are; how frightening the streets; how it could happen to anyone."



A model of Open House, created with volunteers and visitors by architects from Transition by Design.

Volunteers were 'hosts' so all visitors were treated as welcome guests - and the expectation that everyone would therefore behave well was almost entirely met. Visitors observed that the style of warm and respectful interaction was modelled by volunteers and regular visitors who in turn had taken the behaviour of the Open House co-ordinator as their model:

"The tone is set by Lucy. How Lucy works with people and brings them together - that's how you create community activism."

"Who else just hands their keys over? It's that atmosphere of trust. She expected the best and got it."

In the context of a project focused on inclusion and equal participation the role of the originator/co-ordinator is a complex one. Lucy was the route-planner and driver of the experiment, but she was also concerned to avoid it being a one woman show. A reflexive, self-aware stance - compassionate but not 'rescuing' - combined with the short-term nature of the project and of most volunteer 'careers' at Open House helped avoid a dependency culture. However, it was also clear that the skilled leadership of the project was crucial to its success:

"Lucy is the glue. It's her passion and intelligence - people trust her reasons for doing this and they want to be around her. There's nothing jaded about her ever."

"Lucy owns her own privileges and uses them to create space and make change."



© Transition By Design

Local councillors talk to students about homelessness prevention.



The Oxford Homeless Movement visit Open House to gather input on their new website, local illustrator Lisa Made It joins in for a day of crafts and visitors arrive for a talk from author John Boughton on the past, present and future of social housing.

3. Summary and conclusions

There were many features of the Open House experience which contributed to its success, but it is the relationship between these features which matters the most. In particular, it is the interaction between the features of place, space, activities and people which makes the difference – and all have to be given care and attention.



Everyone interviewed for this report agreed that Open House had been a very engaging and effective process. It was intended to make a contribution to the three year action research project of which it is part and there is good evidence from interviewees that Open House may well have nudged some organisations towards a new and more inclusive narrative on housing and homeless. It has certainly provided a powerful example of utilizing underused space in Oxford. It has also encouraged some new cross-organisation working and demonstrated what co-production values and a strengths and equalities approach really look like in practice. Whether the conversations it has facilitated will inform a new set of community-based housing strategies or new systems of support for people experiencing homelessness delivered by new strategic partnerships is not yet known.

A remaining challenge following the closure of Open House is whether the data that has been generated has been effectively captured and if so, how it can be used. There is a huge amount of qualitative data – a year’s worth in fact- and, it is in a number of different forms, not all of which are amenable to traditional analysis or can be readily shared with a wider audience: the messages embedded in a collectively produced collage do not sit easily alongside more conventional findings from a survey or focus group.

Although the longer-term impacts of Open House cannot be known, the people interviewed for this report identified several outcomes that they attributed to the Open House experience:

OPEN, HOUSE ...

“...brought people together who would never otherwise have met

...challenged people’s image of homelessness

...challenged the institutionalisation of homeless people and made them welcome in a public space

...demonstrated that making a different, more egalitarian space for public debate is not that difficult

...galvanized housing and homelessness organisations to ‘raise their own game’ in terms of consultation and co-production.

...started a new conversation about homelessness: taking it out of the homelessness industry and connecting it with wider issues of housing

...stimulated an appetite for new connections amongst housing and homelessness organisations

...made us ask ourselves where we sit on the campaigning-providing spectrum

...provided a model which is replicable for other complex issues.”