A street scene in Manchester City Centre. On the left is a pub with a blue awning and 'OCC' signs. A street sign for 'BLACK THOMAS STREET' is visible. In the background, a clock tower is visible. Pedestrians are walking on the sidewalk, and cars are parked on the street. A red 'no entry' sign is also visible.

# The Life Of The City

## **Manchester City Centre - An Age-Friendly Neighbourhood?**

A research report prepared for  
**Age-Friendly Manchester**  
December 2015

**Report produced by**  
**Centre for Spatial Inclusion Design-Research**  
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**December 2015**

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Cover Image: Sam Stockman  
[<https://flic.kr/ps/snQ4I>]

# Project Overview

**Whilst Manchester has a young population, particularly in its urban heart, there is a significant and growing number of older people who are choosing to live in the city centre. This project set out to understand the experiences, advantages and challenges faced by older people living in and around Manchester City Centre.**

## What is this report for?

This report was commissioned by Age-Friendly Manchester as part of their programme of work understanding and developing Manchester as an Age-Friendly City. As members of the World Health Organisation's Age-Friendly Cities programme, Manchester has undertaken a series of pioneering neighbourhood-based pilot projects in Old Moat, Cheetham, Crumpsall, Whalley Range and Chorlton which looked, each in different ways, at how the WHO Age-Friendly charter could be used to improve the lives of older people in individual Manchester neighbourhoods.

These Age-Friendly Neighbourhood projects explored how 'age-friendly' each of these residential areas were currently and how they might be made more age-friendly in the future. The experiences of older residents in these areas were recorded through discussions which considered eight key issues outlined in the WHO's Age-Friendly Cities charter: Built environment; Transport; Housing; Social participation; Respect and social inclusion; Civic participation and employment; Community support and health services; and Communication.

This report explores how the city centre operates as a place to live for older people, investigating what 'neighbourhoods' exist and what they are like. The context for these investigations begins with the fact that most larger cities in the UK are home to very few older people, yet globally cities are recommended as ideal places for people to live as they grow older <sup>[1]</sup>.

The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development <sup>[2]</sup> recommend the 'compact city' as the most socially and environmentally sustainable model for the future of cities in an urbanising world. As our urban populations grow and the proportion of older people in European countries increases, our city centres present a concentration of resources and infrastructure which could be of great benefit for older people. This report begins by identifying where older people currently reside in and close to Manchester city centre. It explores the different lifestyles and experiences they have and how their residential locations contribute to their needs and desires for an age-friendly city.

## What did we do?

In order to investigate the 'age-friendliness' of Manchester city centre we adopted a mixed methods approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative research techniques. We used spatial data analysis, focus groups, stakeholder interviews and housing surveys to explore these issues

## Who is older?

The focus of this project is primarily the experiences of people aged 55 years and over (referred to in this report as '**older people**'). Our report aims to make distinctions between the diverse characteristics of older people based on factors such as tenure, ethnicity and disability.

## What are the third and fourth ages?

In this report we sometimes refer to two categories of older people; those in the 'third age' and those in the 'fourth age'. These categories are subject to considerable debate in gerontology. We use these terms to indicate two distinct stages of life which come after a typical adult working life with the third age being a time mostly unencumbered by poor health, but the fourth age describing a period of life where health issues have a significant impact on quality of life.

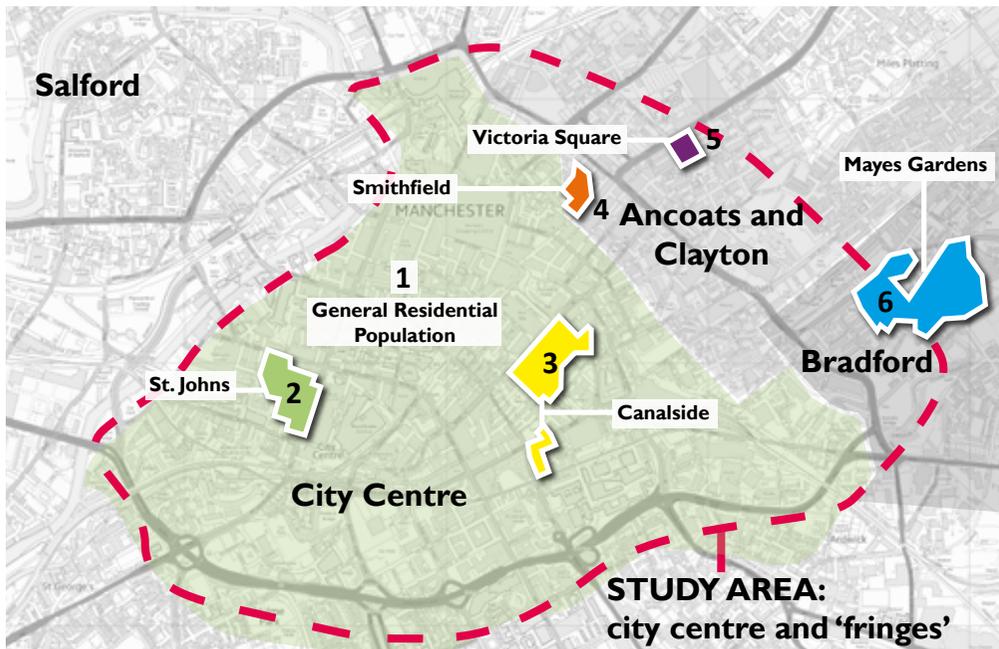
[1] Centre for Cities (2015) 'Urban demographics: Where people live and work' <http://www.centreforcities.org/publication/urban-demographics/>

[2] OECD (2015) 'Ageing in Cities' <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264231160-en>

## Where did we look?

This report set out to look at where older people live in Manchester 'city centre'. One of the first findings of this research is that the distribution of older people in the city centre is not uniform. There is a low percentage of older people spread across the city centre, and 5 areas with a higher proportion of older residents which we have called Canalside, Mayes Gardens, Victoria Square, Smithfields and St.Johns (see page 14 for information about how these sites were distinguished). In addition to these five location, we refer to the older people living as a minority across the rest of the city centre as the 'general residential population'.

The purpose of this research is to distinguish between the experiences of older people in different spatial environments, and explore how their home, immediate neighbourhood and the city as a whole meet their needs as older people. Whilst the five areas we are investigating are located both within the City Centre ward and wards adjacent to it such as Ancoats and Clayton, and Bradford, we include these fringe locations in order to explore the different experiences of older people who are proximate to the city centre. The map below show the outline of the 'city centre' for the purposes of this report.



In this study, we constructed an understanding of the experiences of older people in the city based on location and their interactions within specific urban spaces. Whilst this project did reach a range of people with different ages, ethnicities, sexualities and wealth, these are described in terms of the specific neighbourhoods in which the individual participants reside.

## What are we trying to find out?

- **Is the city centre a suitable place for people to choose to live as they grow older?**
  - How do neighbourhoods in and close to the city centre serve the needs of different groups of older people?
- **How can the city centre provide opportunities for Active Ageing?**
  - How can the needs of different ages and lifestyles be accommodated in different areas?

(Note: This study does not address the experience of older people who visit the city).

*Is the city centre a suitable place for people to choose to live as they grow older?*

**The chief benefits the city brings for older residents are excellent infrastructure connections, very high potential of social activity and circumstances for greater inclusion. However these features are not uniformly experienced and are accompanied by a number of challenges.**

■ The city centre is currently home to a number of small but distinct 'groups' of older people, alongside a very small percentage of older people spread across the whole residential population.

■ These specific 'groups' and the general residential population of older people each have very different experiences of the suitability of the city centre and different life plans for their fourth age.

■ The city's simultaneous provision for visitors and commuters to engage in work, leisure, shopping and culture enables and constrains the residential experiences of each of these groups in particular ways.

■ Key difficulties for older residents are related to the contrast between traditional patterns of residential activity and the inhabitation patterns of both residential and visiting users of the cultural and leisure services the city provides at night. However, the effects of and potential solutions to these issues also vary across the different 'groups'.

■ Older residents appear to be less transitory than the population around them and are more likely to be aware of and affected by changes over time.

■ 'Neighbourhoods' which can offer some degree of attachment, coherence and control offer clear benefits for older people of all ages and abilities.

■ Older people have a crucial role in the development of neighbourhoods in city centres as their expertise, relative permanence and voluntary contributions are a vital way of reflecting and refining the development of the city in periods of rapid change.

■ Highly socially mobile residents can enjoy the city from a wide range of residential locations, however those who do not generate a strong neighbourhood connection (between other individuals, services and assets) are more likely to move out of the city centre in the fourth age.

*How do neighbourhoods in and close to the city centre serve the needs of different groups of older people?*

## **1+2. General Residential Population including St. Johns**

**The city provides an exciting and intense focus for social activity, and creates as an inclusive environment in relation to issues of gender, sexual orientation, race and political persuasion.**

- The general residential population are unlikely to identify as 'older' and share many of the experiences and attitudes to the city of much younger users of its work, leisure, shopping and cultural assets.

- The city was also seen by this group (who did not see themselves as older) as inclusive of all ages.

- They are very likely to be owner-occupiers and often have an influential and active role in the management of their residential blocks. Many reported taking part in a range of 'neighbourly' activities, although not necessarily with spatially proximate neighbours.

- They seek greater influence in relation to protecting their economic investment, increasing their social involvement, being good 'neighbours' and improving their (and others) quality of life.

- They wish to ensure that the occupants of the apartment blocks are more likely to have similar - residential - lifestyles (but not necessarily ages), using management structures to prevent absentee landlords and unvetted tenants and sub-tenancies.

- They would like to prevent anti-social behaviour generated mainly by the night-time economy (but also from activities such as skateboarding or graffiti) from negatively affecting the immediate and city wide environment of their 'neighbourhood'.

- These older people live almost exclusively in apartment blocks as a small minority amidst a majority of younger people.

- They do not report missing close 'neighbourly' social contact as they generally have very mobile and highly connected social lives.

- In many cases this group moved to the city specifically to increase the range and intensity of social connections in contrast to more suburban environments with greater familial /personal contacts.

- The negative impacts of the night-time economy were noted but described as an understandable trade-off for the benefits their city centre position provided.

# St. John/ General Spatial Overview

## KEY

- 'City Centre' - - - -
- Territory and activities - - - -
- Social/retail paths ————
- Residential Migration ————

 2nd home

 St. Johns - moved as working adult (20+ yrs ago)

 Moved for work

Thinking of moving out

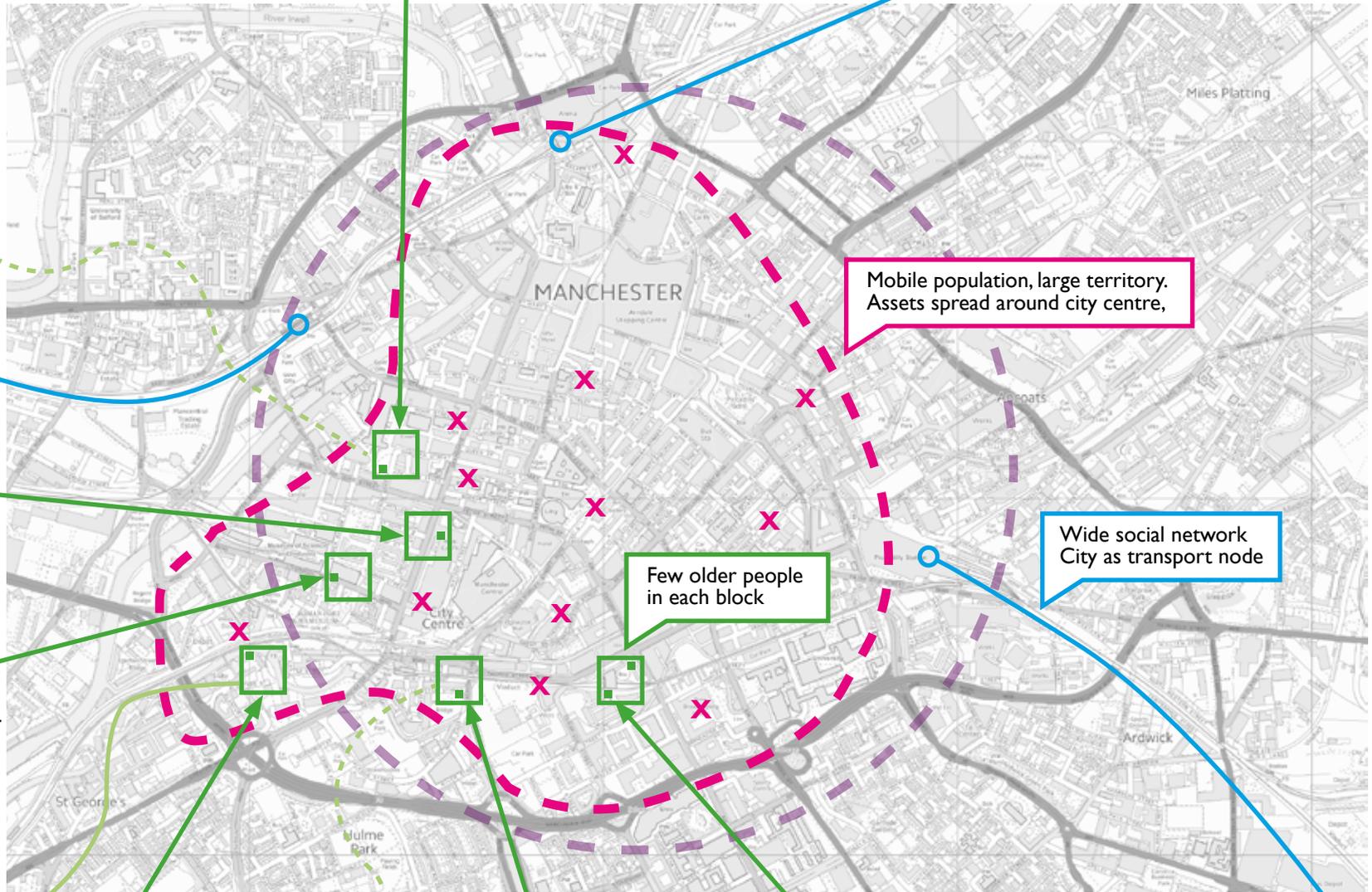
 From suburbs Move in last 10 years

 Abroad

 London

 Wanting excitement

 Sold Home Equity Released



Mobile population, large territory. Assets spread around city centre,

Few older people in each block

Wide social network City as transport node

Friends and family

Leisure and Culture

*How do neighbourhoods in and close to the city centre serve the needs of different groups of older people?*

### 3. Canalside

**The experience of older residents of Canalside demonstrates that a neighbourhood environment supportive of the needs of older people into the fourth age can be provided in the city centre.**

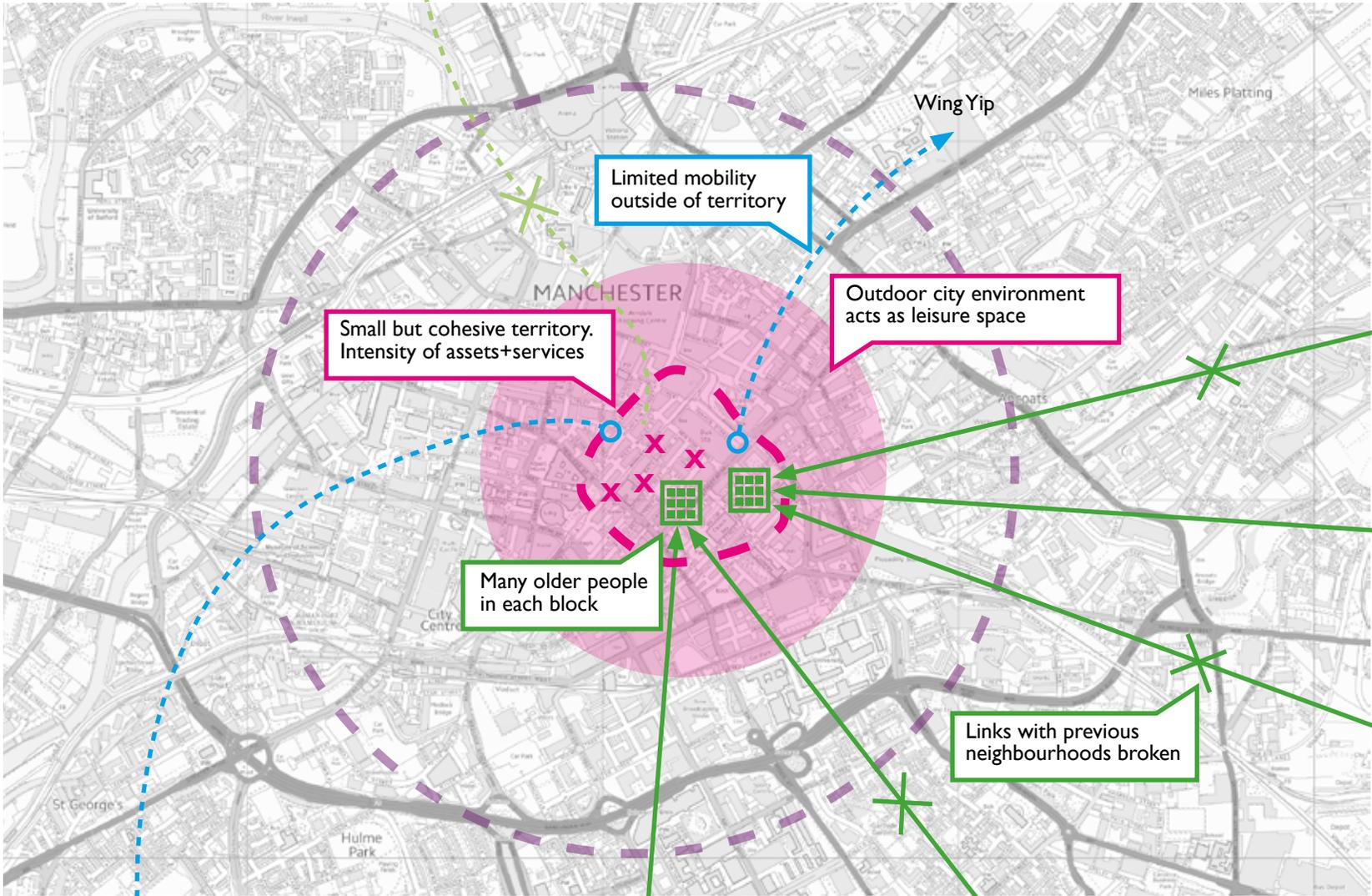
- The older residents of the 'Canalside' area are mostly tenants of Tung Sing, a registered housing provider of accommodation exclusively for older people of Chinese and Hong Kongese ethnicity. The Tung Sing accommodation sits within a neighbourhood with a high concentration of residents of Chinese and Hong Kongese ethnicity.
- While it is an area in close proximity to China Town, residents identified with the city rather than this ethnically designated zone.
- There appears to be a strong overlap with the social and cultural requirements of the surrounding residential population meaning that many restaurants, supermarkets and entertainment venues are seen as neighbourhood assets for this group.
- Public spaces in the area are seen to contribute to a feeling of neighbourhood, enabling the city to be enjoyed as a leisure space by some.
- These residents were relatively mobile and highly socially active, enjoying a wide-ranging and targeted provision of activities supported by Tung Sing and other local groups.

- They did not appear to be directly active or influential in the management and generation of activities and events within the neighbourhood or the wider city.
- The city centre offer of Tung Sing is highly sought after by Chinese and Hong Kongese residents living as a minority in other towns and villages in the region.
- This group made a planned move away from more personal or familial connections in order to benefit from an offer serving their needs into the fourth age.
- The reported draw-backs of city living related to the small size of apartments as well as air and noise pollution.
- The negative impacts of the night-time economy were noted but described as an understandable trade-off for the benefits their city centre position provided.

# Spatial Overview: Canalside

## KEY

- 'City Centre' - - - -
- Territory and activities - - - -
- Social/retail paths - - - -
- Residential Migration - - - -



Trips to parks

Few culturally relevant opportunities

Links broken with previous neighbourhoods

*How do neighbourhoods in and close to the city centre serve the needs of different groups of older people?*

#### 4. Smithfield

**Smithfield is well integrated with the public social infrastructure of the surrounding neighbourhood, but increasingly can only be enjoyed by owner occupiers**

- Smithfield was a social housing estate, but now has about 45% of properties in private ownership (either rental or owner occupier).
- Residents able to maintain social relationships over the lifecourse and may have lived in this location for a long period of time (25+ years), based on access to public social provision ie. suitable pubs and restaurants.
- There appear to be potential negative impacts for long term residents in the area due to rapid changes in tenancy following right to buy and subsequent conversion into short term rental.
- High proportion of older people living alone, mostly in 1 bedroom apartments without adaptation.
- Cultural offer and city infrastructure appear to be fully accessible to residents.
- Properties seem to be in poor condition.
- The negative impacts of the night-time economy were noted but described as an understandable trade-off for the benefits their city centre position provided.

This information was prepared with reference to spatial data and a single indepth interview with an older resident.

*How do neighbourhoods in and close to the city centre serve the needs of different groups of older people?*

## 5. Victoria Square

**Living in Victoria Square enables some older residents to maintain a high level of sociability into the fourth age.**

■ Victoria Square is a very well established social housing block which is now focused on provision for the over 60's. Older people in this location are very likely to be living alone with some moving from other less desirable locations outside the city centre.

■ The majority of residents had positive experiences of living in Victoria Gardens, particularly in relation to the communal facilities and the quality of their homes. Their attachment to their community led some to worry about perceived threats such as the 'right to buy'.

■ Residents are unlikely to own cars and use the city centre for transport connections to desirable retail locations such as Ashton-Under-Lyne and Bury.

■ Many residents do not perceive or utilise the city centre as an essential resource for social and cultural assets.

■ Residents appeared to identify as 'older' and were not planning to move, finding the property and community suitable for living into the fourth age.

■ The immediate vicinity was seen to be gentrifying and there were mixed reports as to its appropriateness for their needs.

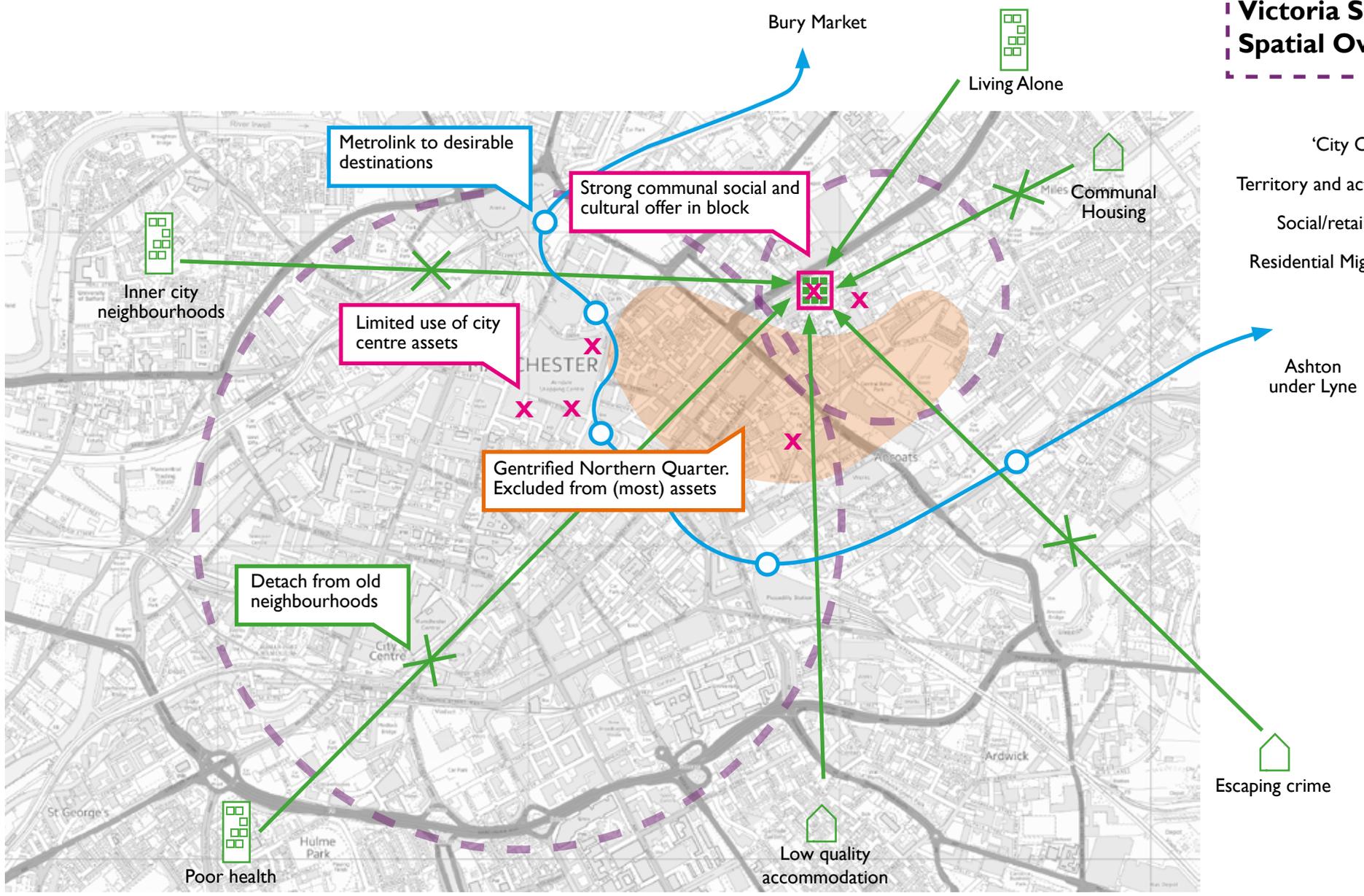
■ The size of the block, its design, management and location near the city centre appeared to assist residents in introducing a range of activities and events within Victoria Square.

■ Some residents found low levels of social engagement within Victoria Square and suggested that the block size may be too large for close social relations.

# Victoria Square Spatial Overview

## KEY

- 'City Centre' - - - -
- Territory and activities ■ ■ ■ ■
- Social/retail paths — — — —
- Residential Migration — — — —



*How do neighbourhoods in and close to the city centre serve the needs of different groups of older people?*

## 6. Mayes Gardens

**A mix of internal activity and high mobility allows Mayes Gardens residents to overcome a limited local offer.**

- Mayes Gardens is a long-established community of older people living in a low rise residential environment.

- The majority of residents have chosen to move in from surrounding areas of East Manchester to enable a continuation of their existing third age lifestyles, while providing an environment suitable into the fourth age.

- No residents reported a desire to move away from Mayes Gardens, or could foresee a time when this would be necessary.

- Positive features include: private outdoor space, the village layout and car parking, while a secure site boundary, warden and alarm system provide reassurance for future needs, even though many have no need to use them at the present time.

- Many residents reported good relationships with their neighbours within the scheme, enabled by the controlled and semi-private nature of the 'village green' and pedestrian walkways within the gated complex.

- The provision of community space and the support of the on-site staff and housing provider have enabled social interaction within the community, particularly the ongoing design and maintenance of the shared central gardens undertaken by residents.

- Issues related to crime around Mayes Gardens were highlighted, but many in the group felt that the hidden nature of their complex provided a sense of protection.

- Many residents reported living in other east Manchester neighbourhoods for the majority of their adult life, and the maintenance of connections to these communities was seen as much more important than the creation of connections with the city centre.

- Residents have high levels of car ownership and good access to public transport. They preferred to access their previous neighbourhoods for social activities and retail opportunities, rather than the city centre.

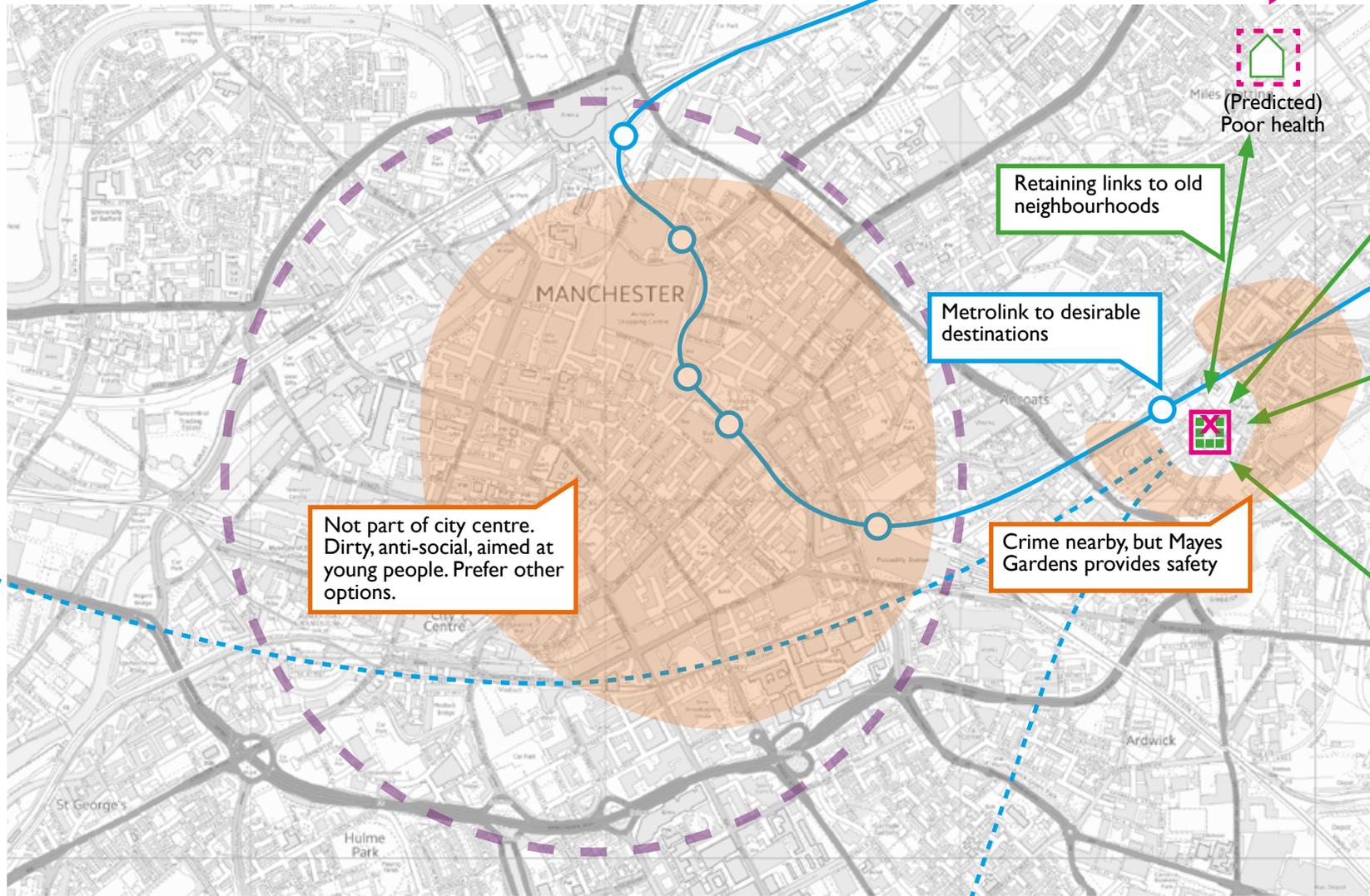
- Some Mayes Gardens residents reported a dislike of the social and physical environment of the city centre, particularly in relation to (daytime) anti-social behaviour, litter and graffiti, and expressed preferences for other retail options such as Ashton under Lyne or Bury Market.

- Mayes Gardens residents appear to identify with surrounding neighbourhoods rather than the 'city centre'

# Mayes Gardens Spatial Overview

**KEY**

- 'City Centre' (dashed purple line)
- Territory and activities (dashed pink line)
- Social/retail paths (solid blue line)
- Residential Migration (solid green line)
- Zone of exclusion (solid orange area)



Not part of city centre. Dirty, anti-social, aimed at young people. Prefer other options.

Crime nearby, but Mayes Gardens provides safety

Retaining links to old neighbourhoods

Metrolink to desirable destinations

Utilise local offer in previous neighbourhoods

Social network in old neighbourhoods

Ashton under Lyne

Long term East Manchester resident

Family home too much to maintain

(Predicted) Poor health

Trafford Centre

Car ownership to access retail/cultural assets

## *Can the city centre provide opportunities for Active Ageing?*

**The city centre offers older people experiences inclusive of age, race, gender and sexuality. Its suitability is dependent on accommodating a diverse range of needs and desires.**

- Evidence indicates that it is possible to create a balance between larger city conditions and specialist supported provision to create age-friendly neighbourhoods in the city centre.
- The city centre offers a diversity of residential locations with a range of densities of local assets. Accommodation for older people responds to the relative asset density of its locale. The most successful examples develop neighbourhoods with a higher density of local assets alongside block arrangements which produce closer social networks.
- City assets and experiences are currently less readily available to older residents in the fourth age, or with more limited mobility or means. The suitability of residential accommodation rapidly decreases if local assets are unavailable (due to location) or internal social networks are not supported (due to lack of space or provision) as residents enter the fourth age.
- Residents within closer social networks centered around their immediate accommodation are less affected by reduced mobility in the fourth age, and can use the social offer within the community to strengthen their social network as they grow older.

## *How can the needs of different ages and lifestyles be accommodated in different areas?*

### **Age-Friendly City Centre neighbourhoods maintain higher densities of age-accessible local assets alongside block arrangements able to produce closer social networks**

- Provide greater opportunity for older investors to have an active role in the management of their blocks, enabling them to be active neighbours, maintain the quality of their physical environment, control absentee landlords and unvetted tenants.

- The continuing influence of older residents in apartment blocks across the city could be enhanced through the development of more extensive resident networks, and this could be seen to create a 'naturally occurring network' of older residents including private and public provisions. This would develop a fourth age offer in relation to the needs to the general residential population

- Apartment blocks in the open market without age-restrictions may begin becoming more age-specific due to the management influence of existing older residents. Tenant management encourages owner-occupation and less absentee landlords, criteria it appears that future purchaser seek. The current movement toward build-to-rent will narrow the pool of housing options for older homeowners wishing to buy, thus creating stronger clusters of older residents in existing blocks.

- Enable residential development to accommodate a wider range of habitation patterns and needs. For example, make general needs accommodation more appropriate for a wider range of residential users including families, as recommended in the Manchester Core Strategy (H1 and CC3)

- Enable greater control over street spaces through the construction of private and semi-private residential space at street level.

- Enabling similar patterns of habitation between the older residents and the younger residential population and visitors, as evidenced by shared use of restaurants, supermarkets and some entertainment venues.

- Social tenants reported a number of positive experiences which would not be possible in locations or communities outside of city centre. Future developments in the city centre should not exclude the needs of social tenants in both the third and fourth age.

The diagram to the right represents the relationship between the density of local assets provided in the city, the levels of social interaction available to the individual, and how age changes the individual experience of the city.

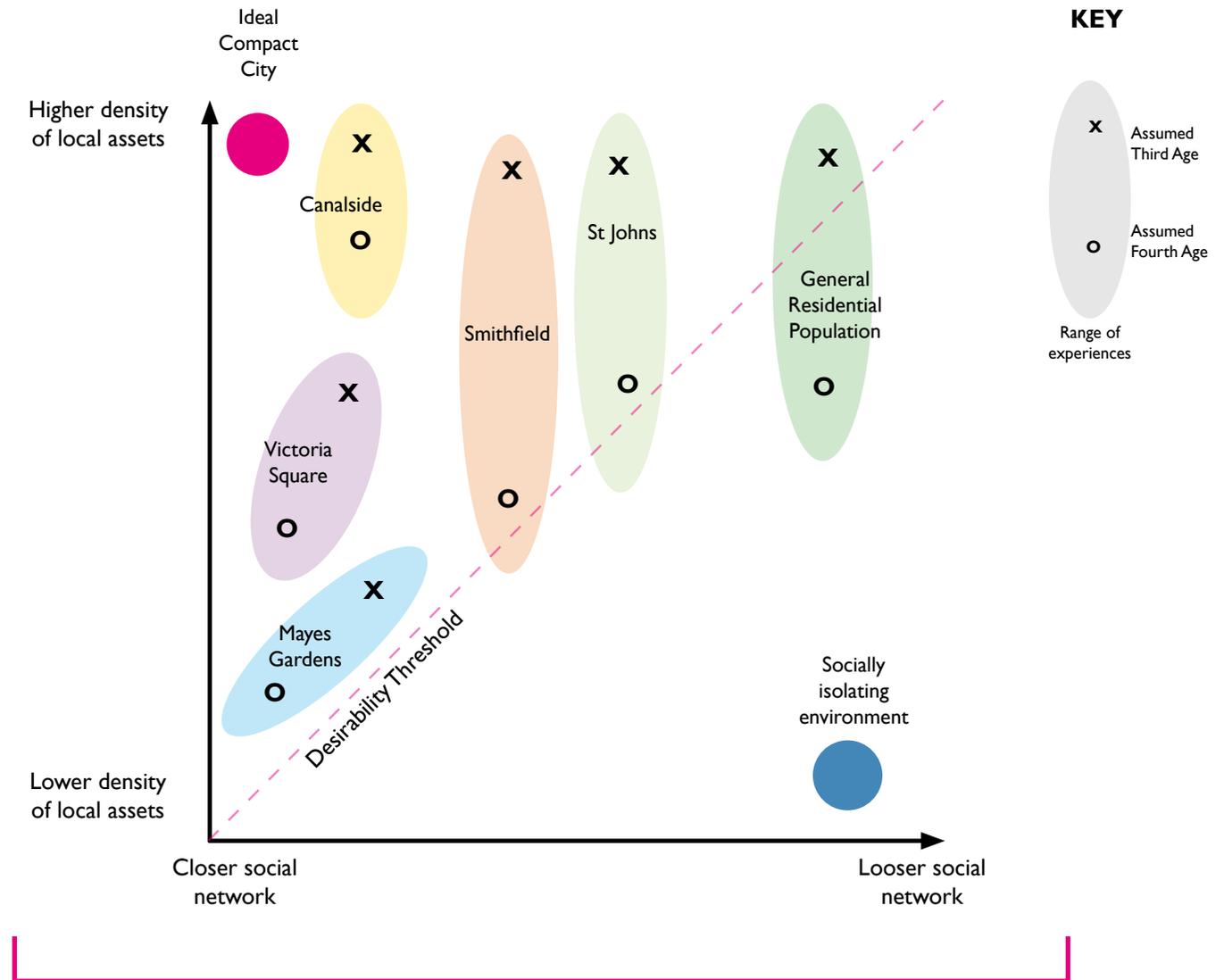
The ideal 'compact city' is one which allows a high density of both local assets and the opportunities for social interaction (pink dot). The less attractive environment, in the compact cities model, is one where the resident has few assets which are accessible locally, and few opportunities for social interaction (blue dot). Between these two points sits a desirability threshold (pink dashed line), with identifies groups of people who may consider leaving the city if they are capable to do so.

Each bubble represents a range of experiences of individuals within each location, which changes as people move from the third to fourth age (X and O in each bubble).

The more consolidated the accomodation and the more it is able to enable social relations and activities, the less important the neighbourhood assets appear to become. In the transition from third to fourth ages the requirement for very local provision can increase.

Highly socially mobile residents can enjoy the city from a wide range of residential locations. However without the possiblity to benefit from a neighbourhood setting, they are likely to move out of the city in the third age (ie. drop below the desirability threshold).

Note:  
Density of assets is considered subjectively in relation to physical and social mobility. For example, third age residents are more likely to experience a higher density of local assets because their experience of 'local' assets would be larger than that of a fourth age resident.



**Schematic diagram of the relationship between asset density and social networks in Manchester city centre**

## Example policy response

The findings of this report should be used as a way of informing future strategic responses to urban and neighbourhood development. Below is an example of how these findings could be used to develop potential action proposals.

### Possible reflection on residential growth strategy in relation to report findings:

- Existing market housing appears to already be 'appropriate', as people in the third age are actively selecting non-specialist housing options.
- Older investors appear mainly attracted by city offer of intense social activity in an environment inclusive of age, sexuality, gender, and race.

### Alternative issues raised in relation to desirability of city centre in third age:

- Influence over housing conditions to protect investment
- Management of apartment building/block (appearance, tenancy issues and community)
- Influence over neighbourhood character or development (immediately in relation to night-time economy and long term in relation to rapid development)

### Actions in response:

- Continue to market the inclusivity and vibrancy of the city (ensuring those features remain available to residents as they age)
- Favour construction of new properties which enable resident involvement in building management and option to increase owner-occupiers
- Favour developments which activate the street with residential uses not just those related to the night-time economy and aim to develop mixed neighbourhoods including families

### Consequences in fourth age

*Strong neighbourhood attachment: e.g couple, those with family near by or having long term city centre residency*

Desire to remain in home

*Little neighbourhood attachment eg. short term residents, city primarily seen as cultural venue.*

Desire to move away from city centre - countryside, abroad, closer to family.

### Actions in response:

- Enable easy conversion of properties to life-time homes, but use only as a secondary marketing instrument for those who wish to stay in the city centre.
- Provide support for fourth age residents who become disengaged from the cultural offer which first drew them to the city.

"8.6 - There are proposals for the strategic development of new housing for older people. This recognises the positive need for housing stock to better meet the needs of older households, the reality that many older households have substantial assets in the form of equity in their existing homes, and brings those together as a possible new driver for housing growth."

**Manchester City Council (2013) "Residential Growth Perspective"**

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