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Between Boundaries: From Commoning and Guerrilla Gardening to Community Land Trust Development in Liverpool

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PDF

Abstract

Emerging in the cracks of the ownership model are alternatives to state/market provision of affordable housing and public/private-led regeneration of declining urban neighbourhoods, centred on commoning and collective dweller control. This paper explores how the community land trust model can become an effective institutional solution to urban decline in the context of private property relations. It explores a case study of a CLT campaign in Granby, a particularly deprived inner-city neighbourhood in Liverpool, England. The campaign seeks to collectively acquire empty homes under conditions of austerity, which have opened up the space for grassroots experimentation with guerrilla gardening, proving important for the campaign in gaining political trust and financial support. This paper discusses the potential of the CLT model as a vehicle for democratic stewardship of place and unpacks the contradictions threatening to undermine its political legitimacy.

Introduction: Dilapidated Dwelling

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> whether new build or rehab, stand like oases in a desert of dereliction and run-down blocks of walk-up flats (Towers **1995**:230).

Such symptoms of "dilapidated dwelling" reveal a familiar story of post-industrial inner-city decline across the global North. This paper delves into the history and future prospects for regeneration of the particularly deprived neighbourhood of Granby, Liverpool: the specific place described in this scene above. Liverpool's "inner-city problem"—persistent unemployment, deprivation, depopulation, urban shrinkage, housing vacancy, dereliction and abandonment—has multiple roots and complex contributory factors, not least its economic collapse as a global seaport (Sykes et al. **2013**). Conventional large-scale state and market-led regeneration, most recently the Housing Market Renewal (HMR) Pathfinder programme, have largely failed to address these "wicked" problems (Cocks and Couch **2012**; Cole **2012**). Mutual housing models like the co-ops celebrated above represent a potentially more effective, self-sustaining, and socially just affordable housing tenure and regeneration solution to Liverpool's inner-city problem.

Building on arguments for the re-appropriation of our urban commons and the search for alternatives growing in the cracks of capitalism (Blomley **2004b**; Chatterton **2010**; Hodkinson **2012a**, **2012b**; Ward **1985**), this paper explores how mutual housing alternatives may be established in disinvested inner-city neighbourhoods, to provide effective institutional blueprints for the democratic stewardship of place. The main part of the paper is an in-depth case study of a campaign in Granby, Liverpool, for a community land trust (CLT) to take back empty homes under community ownership after decades of disinvestment and demolition plans. Incorporated as a legal body in 2011, the "Granby Four Streets" CLT is an innovative attempt to establish an urban CLT as a vehicle for neighbourhood regeneration; making its mark at an opportune moment when large-scale demolition-and-rebuild programmes, notably HMR, have prematurely drawn to a halt following the financial crisis and the imposition of austerity (Pinnegar **2012**). After years of anti-demolition campaigning by local residents and failed negotiations between the city council, housing associations, and private developers—a deal has finally been brokered to rehabilitate the four streets as a CLT-led vision.

The CLT vision is for an incremental, self-sustaining, and community-led approach to rehabilitation of housing, public space, and the derelict local high street for new work and retail (Assemble **2013**). Redevelopment is envisioned as a piecemeal experiment in community self-help, drawing mostly on local skills and resources, in stark contrast to the speculative development model (Tonkiss **2013**). The recent deal with the council gives the CLT ten properties to provide affordable housing for local people in need as well as four corner buildings for community enterprise. Like co-ops, CLTs take land off the market into community ownership, but distinguishing CLTs from other mutual models is the unique capability to separate the ownership of land from the tenure of housing, thereby allowing various

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key complementary component of CLTs, the MHOS model has been recently developed by CDS Cooperatives to circumvent the problem of leaseholder enfranchisement that afflicts cooperative tenures (Conaty et al. **2003**). The MHOS leases buildings from the CLT, whose constitutional covenants ultimately protect the land from private buy-outs. NAHC were inspired by LILAC (Low Impact Living Affordable Community) in Leeds, the UK's pioneering MHOS development (see Chatterton **2013**). LILAC, however, is not coupled with a CLT, so Granby Four Streets treads new ground as the demonstration project of the CLT-MHOS model.

The remainder of Granby Four Streets stock will be transferred to two local housing associations to provide "affordable rent" and shared ownership. Although some activists feel this has diluted the original community vision, the CLT has nonetheless been critically influential in bringing together more powerful development actors around the shared goal of refurbishment for a mixed-tenure neighbourhood. Moreover, the CLT seeks a greater stake in the area than indicated by ownership alone: aspiring towards a "stewardship" role as the over-arching democratic decision-making institution through which all other stakeholders and residents may come together to negotiate and pool resources. This paper explores the challenges of institutionalisation and the promising potential of the CLT model for place stewardship under conditions of austerity and long-term neighbourhood decline.

Originating in the 1960s American civil rights movement to promote black property ownership, CLTs have since been utilised to address the pernicious effects of absentee landlordism, speculative property development and gentrification (DeFilippis **2004**). CLTs have mostly been developed for the provision and local collective control of affordable housing, with growing international application (Moore and McKee **2012**). But there are real prospects to use the model for neighbourhood regeneration in the UK, following in the footsteps of the US, where CLTs are a relatively well established and growing sector: first institutionalised as a municipal housing programme in Burlington, Vermont in the 1980s (DeFilippis **2004**); and in the 1990s by grassroots inner-city community campaigns, notably Cooper Square in New York (Angotti **2007**) and Dudley Street in Boston (Medoff and Sklar **1994**).

Granby Four Streets is part of an emerging urban CLT movement in the UK, concentrated in London and Liverpool. The first urban CLT campaigns include: the pioneering East London CLT established in 2007 by campaign organisation London Citizens (Conaty and Large **2013**); an unsuccessful tenant-led CLT campaign for community ownership of an ex-council estate in Elephant and Castle in London (DeFilippis and North **2004**); a failed campaign to acquire empty homes in Little Klondyke, Bootle, just north of Liverpool city centre; and Homebaked CLT in Anfield, Liverpool, a successful arts-led regeneration project for a CLT-owned cooperative bakery and affordable housing funded by Liverpool Biennial (Moore **2014**). In contrast to London, the Liverpool campaigns are motivated by the threat of

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back to the 1960s, such as Bonnington Square in London and Langrove Street in Liverpool during the 1980s, involving occupations, squatting, and do-it-yourself rehabilitation (Towers **1995**)—part of a broader history of self-help housing (Mullins **2010**). As a contemporary struggle in this lineage, I hope the Granby case study might shed new light onto these longstanding questions around how legally recognised forms of collective land ownership can be successfully institutionalised out of grassroots activism.

In what follows I explore how the political campaign and formal body of Granby CLT arose from more informal activism and everyday practices of "commoning" (Linebaugh **2014**). Although not enough to tackle the severe physical dilapidation, this grassroots activism has nonetheless proved a critical precondition for the CLT's success in attracting vital support and funding to acquire empty homes from the city council. The struggle to build trust with stakeholders has been especially challenging due to a complex local history, but also, I argue, due to the ideological dominance of private property relations within planning practice and property law, which Singer (**2000**) describes as the "ownership model". Before exploring the case study, I first conceptualise the CLT model in the context of mutual housing, the commons, and the difficulties to institutionalisation posed by the ownership model.

The paper draws on ongoing Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC)-funded doctoral research aiming to understand how radical alternatives to state/market provision of affordable housing have gained traction in the recent history of Liverpool: a city with a particularly rich legacy of mutual housing experiments. The research first identified several pivotal moments of radical experimentation through an extensive desk-based historical study and five scoping interviews with "expert" informants, revealing Granby to be particularly significant in an emerging city-wide CLT movement. From mid-2013 to 2014, I visited Granby and attended the monthly Cairns Street Market; attended community meetings; and conducted 30 in-depth semi-structured interviews with key actors—activists, residents, housing associations and council officers, city politicians, and national policy experts. Interviews were coded for common themes through iterative feedback between conceptual concerns, empirical observation, and broader documentary analysis.

Community Land Trusts: Institutional Articulations of the Commons?

CLTs are one particular model of housing tenure and land ownership within mutualism (Hodkinson **2012b**; Rodgers **1999**; Rowlands **2009**); part of a broader movement for local autonomy and collective ownership of the means of social reproduction (DeFilippis **2004**). Mutual housing models provide a third option to the familiar dualist categories of public/private sector, state/market provision—as non-profit, voluntary, community-led, place-based membership associations (Bailey **2012**). The key function of mutual models—which range from Garden Cities and tenant co-partnerships, through co-

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those de-commodified dwelling spaces re-appropriated from the market or protected from the full force of exchange relations (Hodkinson **2012a**). Commons are constituted by values and practices largely free from transactional market relations: mutual aid, cooperation, solidarity. Commons are simultaneously material resource *and* social practice, brought into dialectical unity through collective labour, in what Linebaugh (**2014**) terms acts of "commoning": (inter)active, customary, cooperative social relations rooted in place.

Mutual housing models are imperfect institutional reflections or representations of housing commons. For instance, the socio-material dialectic of the commons is embodied in the CLT form, which describes both the social practices that constitute the organisation and the physical land and assets to be commonly owned. Such models seek to reconnect inhabitants with the means of social reproduction by institutionalising some form of cooperative tenure, or "third estate", in which member tenants cooperatively own land and housing as collective landlords, therefore transcending the landlord–tenant/freehold–leasehold binary that permeates British property law (Rodgers **1999**). This mitigates against the inherent alienation and exploitation of the tenant–landlord relation—which Colin Ward (**1985**) held responsible for the swift physical dilapidation of council housing estates. It does so by providing "dweller control" (Ward **1974**): autonomy over the activity of dwelling, which should be seen as a verb as well as a noun, just as the commons is a social activity as well as a material resource. By institutionalising a form of housing commons, mutual housing alternatives have the potential to resolve the deprivation and dispossession at the root of the inner-city problem.

Mutual housing models are necessarily impure pragmatic articulations in legal form of an ideal-type commons, synthesising in complex hybrids different aspects of public, private, and common ownership (Geisler and Daneker **2000**). Actually existing commons necessarily entail exclusion as "limited common property": "property held as a commons among the members of a group, but exclusively vis-à-vis the outside world" (Rose **1998**:132). Just as their relative autonomy is dependent on external support, internal commoning practices are paradoxically dependent on enclosure from the capitalist outside, thereby threatening to reproduce the social exclusion of private property at a higher scale—a frequent criticism of co-ops. This may be counteracted by the concept of "stewardship", the principle that civil title to land is never absolute, but rather held in *trust* with duties of care, social responsibility, and accountability in serving the common interests of fellow and future users (Geisler and Daneker **2000**). It is morally derived from the idea that property values are only partly "earned" by the labour and investment of the individual owner/occupant, the larger part flowing from what Davis (**2010**) calls the "unearned social increment": collective value creation emanating from countless contributing actions, transactions, and public investments from local to global.

Stewardship is the ethical principle underpinning the rejection of the individual right to profit in the

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representatives are equally split between member-residents, expert stakeholders, and the wider community (Davis **2010**). The concept of stewardship used here refers specifically to the outward-looking capacity of the CLT model to work for community benefit over mere member-resident benefit, by including broader stakeholder expertise in the democratic management of decommodified land and assets through a trust structure accountable to wider publics; to transcend the exclusivity of ownership through more inclusive access and representation of present, possible, and future user interests of CLT-governed space.

Between the Boundaries of the Ownership Model: Challenges for Institutionalisation

The challenge of institutionalisation of our housing commons is made especially problematic for two reasons. First, articulation of the commons as property rights appears conceptually impossible and politically self-defeating. Private property rights legitimate purely passive individual claims to own and divest of land irrespective of common use, as an abstract deed of entitlement backed up by the state (Singer **2000**). Commoning, by contrast, is a horizontal practice with customary rights legitimated autonomously through the very act of their mutual negotiation: a relational claim to shared space justified immanently as an active form of human "doing" (Rose **1994**). Articulation as legal rights threatens to codify, ossify, and undermine into passive and alienated relations the highly active, interactive, and organic relations of the commons.

Second, the existing hegemonic system of private property rights—the ownership model—is extremely hostile to other forms of ownership, especially the commons (Singer **2000**). The ownership model is the legal foundation of (neo)liberalism, a political discourse and economic project based fundamentally on the institution of private property, rooted in separation and abstraction (Blomley **2004b**). It invests absolute control over a clearly delineated space in a single identifiable private owner, whose formal legal title alone bestows entitlement (Singer **2000**). It promotes the legal separation of people—between owners/non-owners—and the spatial separation of land, constructing exclusionary walls of capitalist enclosure. By marking territory with visible spatial boundaries, property becomes a "spatialised thing" abstracted from its context, devoid of social relations (Blomley **2004b**). This ideological cloaking of property helps make land appear appropriable, transferable, and alienable from its social context. The "right to transfer" and the "right to speculate" in order to profit from property appear as naturalised conditions of land itself, making non-alienable common ownership seem like non-property (Singer **2000**). The powerful protection of exchange rights under the ownership model allows the enclosure of urban space into an alienable object, and the extraction of socially produced surplus value. This is the legal DNA of what Lefebvre (**2002**:305) terms "abstract space": "a naked empty social space stripped bare of symbols"; a globalised net of homogenous quantitative equivalence facilitating exchange relations and erasing the qualitative difference and

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property rights: enforceable claims to use or benefit from particular property, sanctioned by the sovereignty of the state. It is only through their translation into legally enforceable property *rights* that moral common *claims* gain necessary recognition, protection, and security—an important traverse to be carefully crossed for the long-term survival of collective dweller control.

All efforts to institutionalise mutual housing models must contend with a hostile legal landscape polarised between the public and private realm, and geared towards private homeownership. British property law acknowledges only two types of tenure, inherited from feudalism: freehold and leasehold—landlord/tenant—treating mutual members essentially as either tenants or part-owners (Rodgers **1999**). Ironically, leaseholder enfranchisement legislation passed in 1967 to protect tenants from ruthless landlords empowers co-op members to buy out their equity share, thereby threatening the re-imposition of private property relations (Conaty and Large **2013**). The co-op movement is lobbying for legislative tenure reform to include a "third estate" (Rodgers **1999**): the legal protection required to sustain common property relations over time. Each new mutual model can be seen as the latest historical iteration in institutional vehicles designed to negotiate greater legal protection of the housing commons against enclosure.

Our emerging era of "austerity urbanism" (Peck **2012**) has not only compounded the inner-city problem, but also opened up new opportunities for grassroots groups to resist urban enclosure and reclaim space for social reproduction in the interstices of the post-crash city. This is testified by the recent growth and research interest in new forms of grassroots urbanisms, variously prefixed as "guerrilla", "insurgent", "everyday", "do-it-yourself", "interstitial" and "makeshift' (Hou **2010**; Iveson **2013**; Tonkiss **2013**). These practices might include community gardens, occupations, squats, co-ops, and alternative gift economies, and have been characterised as "actually existing commons" (Eizenberg **2012**), growing in the "cracks" of the dominant development model (Tonkiss **2013**), and pre-figuratively re-imagining urban life as an urban commons (Chatterton **2010**). Part of this emphasis on the informal, the temporary, the insurgent, and the micro-scale is no doubt a response to the hegemonic power of the ownership model: the need to form "extra-legal counter-publics" that "operate within legal shadows" to "unsettle" the neoliberal settlement (Blomley **2004b**:18). By working silently to reclaim common space between the public/private legal-spatial boundaries in the ownership model, grassroots urbanisms thrive on their invisibility to the system (Iveson **2013**). However, by the same token, they are often too informal, ephemeral, disconnected, and localised to properly challenge deeper structural issues to effect lasting urban transformation.

Indeed, the growing literature on alternatives or "alterity"—"the possibility of an economic and political 'other'" (Fuller et al. **2010**:4)—highlights the need for some degree of socioeconomic self-sufficiency, or relative autonomy, from mainstream capitalist state structures, through the construction of alternative "circuits of value". Indeed, the long-term success of insurgent attempts to

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Homes Agency (Mullins **2010**). This is part of the new localism agenda and the UK coalition government's "Big Society"—of neighbourhood planning and community rights to buy/bid/build—in which community asset transfer/acquisition now enjoys cross-party political support (Bailey **2012**). In this context, CLTs and self-help housing have received renewed policy interest as part of a growing "third sector" of community-based organisations and social enterprises increasingly turned to by the state to manage assets and deliver public services and regeneration at the neighbourhood scale.

However, British policy interest in the CLT model predates these trends, first imported from the US in the 1990s by British advocates seeking to resolve issues of rural housing affordability, and used by communities in the Scottish Highlands to regain control of assets from quasi-feudal landlords (Moore and McKee **2012**). The government-funded National CLT Demonstration Programme from 2006 to 2008 piloted 14 CLT projects (Aird **2009**), leading to the formation in 2010 of the National CLT Network, an umbrella organisation that connects and supports member CLTs (National CLT Network **2015**). Whilst essential for growth, state support presents the danger of co-optation and dilution of the radical land reform potential and local autonomy of CLTs. The contradictions of institutionalisation, in becoming "state-like", are reflected in the tensions between "scaling up" and "going viral" as alternate forms of replication (Moore and Mullins **2013**). Institutionalisation is a delicate balancing act of giving legal and procedural structure to informal grassroots practices without losing the organic social energy and political vision motivating unique projects. The remainder of the paper explores how the power of the ownership model presents complex challenges for the practical institutionalisation of Granby CLT in Liverpool.

Liverpool: A Laboratory for Innovation in Mutual Housing Experiments?

The Granby campaign is situated in Liverpool's ongoing process of economic and social transformation. From its meteoric rise to world city and leading global seaport in the nineteenth century to its equally dramatic fall from grace following the decimation of its raison d'être, the shipping trade, Liverpool has been an "outrider" of the post-industrial transition, suffering from some of the worst effects of industrial growth and decline, and at the forefront of urban policy innovations to tackle its persistent housing crisis (Nevin **2010**; Sykes et al. **2013**). Liverpool was the first British city to build public housing in 1869 in response to squalid "back-to-back" tenement housing conditions, later pioneering the UK's first resident-led housing co-ops, and the largest community-led housing trust operating today, the Eldonians (McBane **2008**). With the rapid loss of its maritime economic base—capital flight, disinvestment, and unemployment—Liverpool's population halved in under half a century, from a peak of over 800,000 in the 1930s to around 400,000 by 2001 (Cocks and Couch **2012**). The inner-city areas of Victorian terraces, once housing thousands of dockers and their families, were disproportionately hit by the decline, with severe depopulation, dereliction, and deprivation; by the

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complicated history entwined with place that reaches back to Liverpool's roots in Atlantic trade—and witnessed one of its most virulent and violently repressed riots in living memory, against poverty, institutional racism, and police brutality (Frost and Phillips **2011**). Not only did the "1981 Uprising" imprint the area with a perceived social stigma—thereby reinforcing decline—it also created mutual mistrust between city authorities and local residents, some of whom believe the council has engaged in a deliberate programme of managed decline (resident interviews 2014).

Yet Granby's decline has provoked community resistance and social innovation through mutual alternatives. The Shelter Neighbourhood Action Programme (SNAP), the pioneering action research project run by the homelessness campaign organisation Shelter from 1969 to 1972, was set up to resolve Granby's endemic deprivation and appalling "slum" housing conditions (McConaghy **1972**). SNAP helped establish the country's first rehabilitation housing cooperatives, in turn inspiring a flourishing new-build housing co-op movement in the 1970s—leaving a legacy of over 50 co-ops across Liverpool (Lusk **1998**). This was motivated by widespread agitation for better housing conditions among residents living in insanitary and poorly maintained terraces and tenements; driven by resistance to displacement and community fragmentation (interviews 2013). Colin Ward's (**1974**) radical ideas for "dweller control" were influential in the development of the Weller Streets in Granby, the UK's first truly resident-led fully mutual new-build co-op (McDonald **1986**). The subsequent rhizomatic spread of new build co-ops across Merseyside was deeply rooted in an innovative programme of tenant education in cooperative principles, architectural design, and housing development regulations (interviews 2013). It was spearheaded by the secondary co-op development organisation, CDS, working with local architectural firms to innovate participatory design methods that enabled working class residents to design, develop, and manage their own homes in an unprecedented process of collective dweller control.

The exceptionally generous funding regime and supportive infrastructure of this period facilitated the growth of co-ops as well as housing associations, which have since expanded to become the most powerful property development players in Granby today (Lusk **1998**). Indeed, Liverpool's large professionalised housing associations started out as small non-profit charitable trusts and co-op agencies. The largest association operating in Granby today, Plus Dane, is the direct heir of CDS, which it absorbed in the 1990s. Subsequent political opposition during the 1980s from the Militant-dominated Labour council threatened the co-op movement with "municipalisation" and extinction, yet also galvanised other community groups, such as the Eldonians, into action (Frost and North **2013**). Neoliberal reforms have since put an end to co-op development, reflecting broader trends towards the privatisation of public housing, through Right to Buy and stock transfer of council housing to an increasingly market-led housing association sector (Ginsburg **2005**). Whilst the co-op movement has been constrained from further development by neoliberal policies it has nonetheless opened up the political space between public and private to think creatively about how to resuscitate a problematic

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most terraces with lower density estates, leaving only four original streets, known as the “Granby Triangle”. These four streets map neatly onto the original SNAP boundaries, suggesting that early rehabilitation efforts have been relatively successful. From the 1990s, the council began buying up housing association properties—emptying them of their tenants—and offering market prices to the small minority of remaining owner-occupiers. A vocal group of homeowners, organised as Granby Residents' Association, refused to move and campaigned to save the streets. Described by an ex-council officer as the “final battleground” (interview 2013), these four streets became centre-stage to a bitter conflict fought between the council and the small minority of remaining residents. The resistance attracted the support of national lobby organisations Empty Homes Agency and SAVE Britain's Heritage, helping raise the media profile of the campaign to rehabilitate rather than demolish empty terraces.

Conflict intensified with the commencement of HMR Pathfinders, the controversial £2.3 billion national programme rolled out from 2003 to 2011 across nine de-industrialised northern English inner-cities, notably Liverpool, whose city council helped pioneer and lobby for government funding (Cole **2012**; Nevin **2010**). HMR Pathfinders aimed for long-term structural change in failing housing markets through part-refurbishment and large-scale demolition of “obsolete” Victorian terraces and replacement with a more “sustainable” mix of tenures (Webb **2010**). Part of the mixed communities agenda, HMR has been critiqued as state-led gentrification, remaking place in the image of a new target middle class population (Allen **2008**), and for conceiving lived neighbourhoods as abstract sub-regional markets, conceptualising the “city-as-property” over the “city-as-inhabited” (Pinnegar **2012**). From a Lefebvrean perspective (Wilson **2013**), HMR represents the domination of “abstract space”, based on exchange value, over the use values of “lived space”.

Liverpool's HMR Pathfinder, “NewHeartlands”, earmarked around 70,000 houses in an inner-city ring for demolition/refurbishment, initially forecasting £3 billion public/private investment until planned completion in 2018 (Nevin **2010**). Liverpool was divided into four “Zones of Opportunity”—or “ZOOs”—each appointed a single preferred developer to work in partnership with the area's leading housing association, and accountable to a governing board of stakeholders, which, unlike previous regeneration programmes, included no local resident representation (Cole **2012**). In a tragic repeat of history, ZOOs mapped closely onto the 1960s slum clearance areas: a landscape witness to more than two generations of regeneration (Sykes et al. **2013**). This relentless focus on one monolithic solution to complex neighbourhood contexts—with little opportunity for piecemeal community projects—demonstrates the enduring influence of the ownership model over regeneration thinking in Liverpool.

The failure of HMR to resolve the inner-city problem—at least in part attributable to the premature withdrawal of state funding mid-way through its planned lifecycle in 2011 in the context of post-crash austerity—is now all too evident in the swathes of vacant land and empty tinned-up properties across

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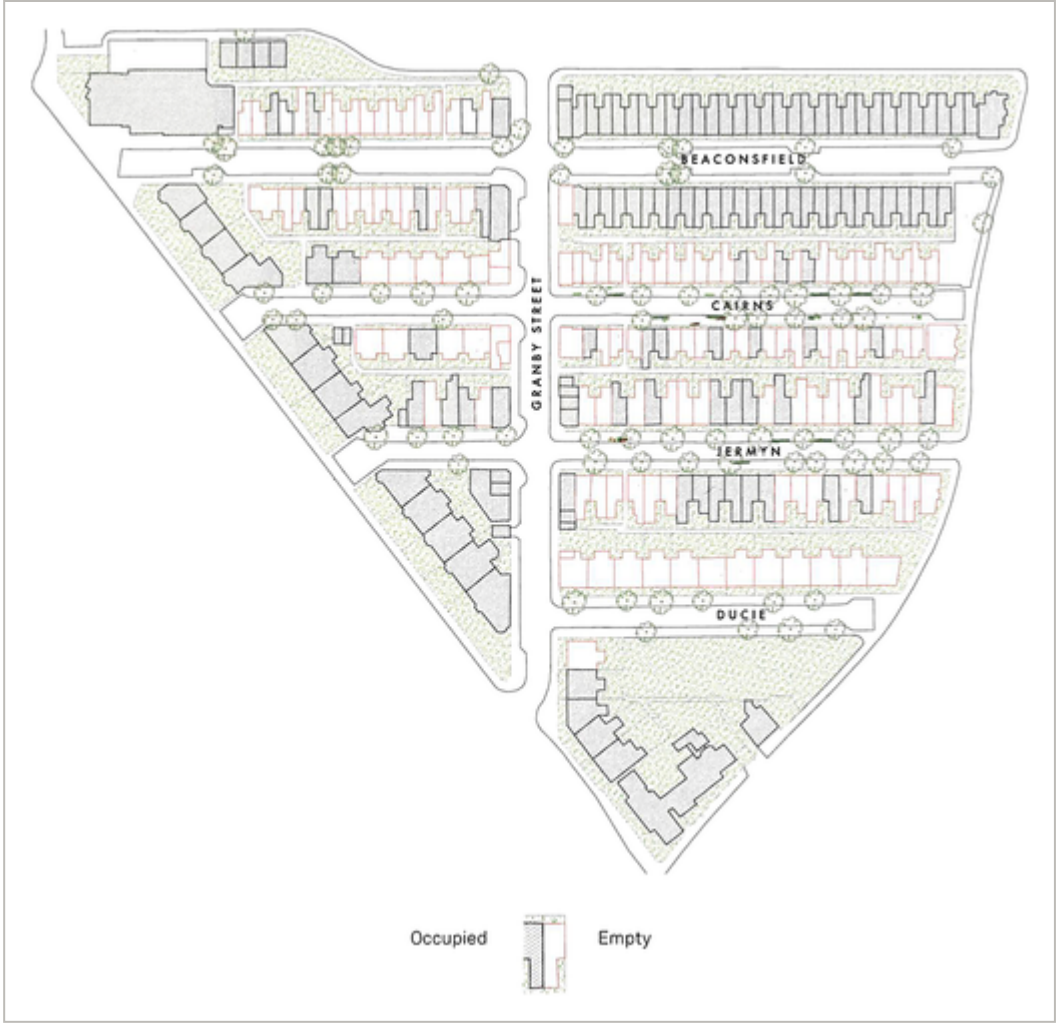


Figure 1

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Map showing vacancies in Granby Four Streets (source: Assemble **2013**; reproduced here with permission)

Growing Granby from the Grassroots

Long before the withdrawal of HMR, the remaining residents in Granby had already begun to resist its adverse effects—properties boarded up, streets collecting rubbish, attracting vandals, houses literally falling in—by cleaning pavements, clearing rubbish, and reclaiming the derelict streetscape as a community garden. They placed potted plants and garden furniture out on pavements, painted derelict house frontages with murals, and grew plants and flowers up buildings (see Figure 2). Much of this was preceded by a council-funded adult education programme on ecology and gardening called "Growing Granby", which entrusted a nearby vacant plot to local residents via a short-term lease by housing association Liverpool Mutual Homes for a community garden, as well as inspiring more

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Figure 2

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Green Triangle guerrilla gardening (source: photos by author)

Working without permission from the council, these guerrilla gardeners engage in everyday acts of "commoning": bringing the domestic, intimate spaces of their homes out into the public streetscape, sharing it with others, and creating a distinctive hybrid community garden that mixes domesticity, privacy, communality, and public openness, bearing the hallmarks of an "actually existing commons" (Eizenberg **2012**). This blurs the boundaries of public and private space, representing what Blomley (**2004b**:15) calls "creative acts of resistant remapping" of the official abstract map of the ownership model. In blurring these boundaries such insurgent acts are informal and unrecognised forms of ownership—an "imagined proprietorship" (Blomley **2004a**) or an "un-real estate" (Rose **1994**), highlighting the organic and active aspects of ownership as a process of human "doing" (Rose **1994**). This is a stark refutation of the ownership model and its insistence that only two moments of action matter: acquisition and transfer (Blomley **2004a**). Green Triangle commoning also cuts across political and social distinctions among residents, who have forged common bonds despite diverse worldviews through communal cleaning, planting, and tending (activist interview 2014). However, these practices are largely confined to a small number of remaining homeowners, highlighting how "commoning is

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community comes together in celebration—setting up stalls selling everything from everyday essentials to artwork—with live performances from local musicians, diverse cuisine cooked on-site, and dancing amongst the medley of shoppers, sellers, and wanderers. This do-it-yourself experiment is a tentative move towards constructing a relatively autonomous "circuit of value" (Fuller et al. **2010**), with plans to acquire four corner buildings on Granby Street as community-owned enterprises, studios, cafes, and shops as part of its regeneration into the bustling shopping avenue it once was.



Figure 3

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Granby Four Streets market (source: photos by author)

These do-it-yourself developments have both progressive and regressive potential, containing the contradictions of what Tonkiss (**2013**) calls "interstitial urbanism". Their creative and pioneering endeavour to take back streets left to decay by austerity politics is both a crack in the ownership model, prefiguring an actually existing commons, and simultaneously an unwitting agent of austerity urbanism, taking up the slack in the paralysed development model and filling the gap left by the retreating state to productively reuse derelict housing when all else has failed. Granby's Green Triangle thus fulfils an ambiguous double-role, vis-à-vis "roll-with-it" neoliberalism (Keil **2009**)—the normalisation in everyday life of entrepreneurialism, creativity, self-reliance, flexibility, and do-it-yourself initiative as a means to facilitate capital accumulation. Green Triangle activists, mostly women associated with the city's artistic milieu, enact a certain bohemian habitus which may act to alienate or exclude other social groups from the area, and which plays into "creative class" politics and city branding, potentially planting the seeds for green gentrification as Liverpool's economy recovers.

Indeed, this has attracted the interest of other creative types in the area. The Northern Alliance Housing Cooperative (NAHC)—a small group of idealistic young professionals, designers, and postgraduate students living locally and looking for empty homes to retrofit into mutualised eco-

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“philanthropy at 5%”—and came across Granby through auspicious links with SAVE Britain's Heritage. Piquing his interest in Granby was not just the Victorian architectural assets found right across inner-city Liverpool, but the proactive do-it-yourself ethos and social entrepreneurialism of Granby residents breathing life back into their faded grandeur.

Conflicts of interest between the community and the private investor may well play out in due course, but so far HDSI have provided crucial financial support: considerable low-interest loans as well as the funding and expertise required to successfully apply for several grants, such as Nationwide Foundation and government's Empty Homes funds, each worth £125,000 (interviews 2014). Working with CLT members, HDSI has also commissioned a persuasive design statement from the innovative London-based architecture collective, Assemble, which sets out a practical plan to acquire and refurbish 27 of the 128 vacant, boarded-up empty homes in the four streets as a mix of affordable homes, as part of a long-term vision to rehabilitate the other empty homes and revive the neighbourhood's economic backbone, Granby Street (Assemble **2013**). Under the creative direction of Assemble, the CLT is working with HDSI and NAHC as joint partners to realise this vision—each hoping to take on properties and manage them as different tenures—but with the CLT as the ultimate umbrella institution under which all other partners and legal ownership of the land are organised.

A large part of the broad community mandate for the CLT model is its capacity to incorporate the co-op and other tenure types, integrating divergent property interests, and the democratic trust governance structure, enabling wider stakeholder participation for long-term place stewardship for community benefit over resident-member benefit. CLT membership extends throughout the L8 postal district, beyond the immediate Granby Triangle, and so the CLT recognises its scalar contributory relationship with surrounding urban areas. Members meet regularly to discuss CLT affairs and democratically elect representatives onto the trust management board, whose membership of 12 periodically rotates, with tripartite representation of member residents, the wider local community, and key stakeholders. The latter third includes representatives from Plus Dane and Liverpool Mutual Homes, the council, as well as crucial financial and technical expertise in development. The diverse black community are actively engaged as stakeholders: the Men and Women's Somali Groups each have board representation, as does the Steve Biko housing association, established in 1982 to provide local black community access to social housing in the context of racial discrimination, and now helping develop and deliver the CLT housing allocations policy. Tenants displaced by HMR are represented in the wider community third, to be afforded a “right to return” in CLT housing allocations; but it remains unclear how the very limited number of houses will be fairly distributed among the much larger number of evicted tenants.

Indeed, such apparent inclusivity is not without internal tensions: the CLT is marked by what many describe as tense politics. The local black community has a long historical attachment to Granby,

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also act to exclude, and efforts need to be made to engage other residents in a more mutual and open learning process.

Trust: The Clue's in the Title!

Gaining the support of the council, as the primary gatekeeper, is essential for successful acquisition. From the council perspective, the burden of proof lies firmly on the CLT to demonstrate its social responsibility to manage assets, and to convince local government of the merits of transferring a large quantity of public assets to an untested community-owned organisation. A local architect/NAHC/CLT activist states the problem:

> We have to prove that we can do something before people trust, because that issue of trust goes both ways as well … local residents don't trust the city council, the city council don't trust local residents to do anything other than kick up a fuss … Hopefully that would get easier … breaking down the barriers that have been built up over the last ten years with HMR … and a certain fear at the council level … just trusting people to do the best for the neighbourhood doesn't really seem to be there. I think it's there now with some of the members but it's still not there with all of the officers; that's an institutional culture thing, which I expect takes decades to change.

Trust is the magic ingredient holding the entire CLT endeavour together. HMR in Granby stands at the end of a long complicated history of mutual mistrust between council and community, first flaring in the 1981 Uprising and now threatening to paralyse collaborative decision-making over the future of the area. Residents feel a powerful sense of resentment and injustice that their homes and community have been “stolen” from them by the council (resident interviews 2013)—an oppositional position posing additional barriers to negotiating a mutually satisfactory solution.

The absence of trust is evident in the council's decision, in the wake of HMR's cancellation, to tender the four streets for “best value” bids, entering into year-long negotiations with a private development company, Leader One, whilst CLT ideas were side-lined. Such a competitive logic—pitting parties against each other—is a manifestation of the ownership model, formalised in the 1980s by compulsory competitive tendering policies (Hodkinson **2011**). This winner-takes-all approach is attractive to councils who can settle a definite contract with one single responsible and liable owner, but which imposes severe entry barriers for smaller community-led projects without the resources or expertise of private companies. It is also risky: the Leader One deal collapsed under unreasonable demands for the council to underwrite any losses, the admirable refusal to effectively privatise profit

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categories of the ownership model—assuaged by the semantic association with individual "homeownership"—as it is with the actual workings of the MHOS model itself, which are more akin to a co-op than its name suggests (Chatterton **2013**). This is where its power lies in playing the language game of private property rights, and potentially using this brand advantage as a way to leverage support from otherwise sceptical gatekeepers.

It was only the austerity-driven failure of Leader One that eventually turned attention towards the CLT vision: the only viable option left on the table. A change in council mind-set was already evident in its self-help "homesteading" plan. Empty Homes funding has been made available to sell empties for £1 to individuals with local connections to restore through do-it-yourself labour on the proviso that certain conditions are met, such as living in the house for at least five years without sub-letting (Crookes and Greenhalgh **2013**). Such a piecemeal approach is perhaps too individualised to effectively tackle a large area of empties, having only been tested with a handful of properties in Granby. Yet it signals a break with the dominant speculative development model.

CLT partners have taken inspiration from this self-help method to come up with "community homesteading" (activist interview 2014). They plan to develop CLT houses on a one-by-one basis, drawing on the do-it-yourself self-build techniques of homesteading but employing resources and labour from across the entire community. They hope to establish relationships with local colleges to help train young people in craft and construction in return for lower labour costs, thereby strengthening financial viability and embedding development in the local economy. This disrupts both the spatial and temporal logic of the neoliberal urban development process: the "sharp-in/sharp-out" model, which "assumes a division between the makers and the users of space" in the fallacy of the "end-user" (Tonkiss **2013**:320), and alienates existing residents from the process, whose lives are put on hold or displaced entirely. Community homesteading, by contrast, transcends this division through a more socially participatory, temporally incremental, albeit spatially piecemeal approach towards securing collective dweller control.

Conclusion: The Contradictions of Institutionalisation

This paper has advanced two opposing imaginaries of housing ownership and neighbourhood regeneration. The first describes the dominant ownership model, which sees ownership and dwelling as *externally* related, with property appearing separable from its social context, enabling abstraction and exchange on the global market, as a form of abstract space. The alternative is a utopian imaginary of *internal* relations, in which the social and material aspects of dwelling are dialectically entwined. Whereas the former is founded on a disconnection between producer/consumer—the alienation of landlord/tenant, owner/occupier—the latter reconnects maker with user, developer with dweller, through collective dweller control. Active doing is emphasized over passive entitlement. This

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collective control over the means of social reproduction is paradoxically dependent on state support to authorise and finance community acquisition of land and recognise its legal ownership.

Actually existing commons are neither free from contradictions nor immune to human power relations. They construct their own walls within—and boundaries without—as necessarily exclusive enclosures that protect against more pernicious enclosures. Mutual housing models are essentially pragmatic compromises made with a hostile legal landscape that attempt to express mutual relations in institutional form. As forms of *housing*, they are complex hybrid social spaces, combining the necessary privacy of the home with more cooperative social relations for the democratic governance of land. The great strength of the CLT model is its flexibility in the face of hegemony: its incorporation of multiple tenures enabling diverse interest groups, stakeholders, and sources of support to govern together through trust. This emphasis on *stewardship* over ownership—community benefit over mere member benefit—is a promising avenue towards overcoming the inherently exclusionary dynamics of housing commons. The political potential of stewardship to transcend the gap between common ownership and public trust lies in this capacity of the CLT structure to incorporate wider publics in democratic decision-making; acting as an outward-looking counterbalance to the necessarily inward-looking closure of housing commons. Further empirical research is required as Granby CLT develops to assess this potential and investigate the actual effects of governance practices, particularly housing allocation decisions, on distributive justice and social relations.

The Granby campaign is a novel experiment in the CLT-MHOS model and community homesteading; but to be more than just an isolated one-off experiment, the issue of replication is fundamental. Granby's success so far appears to stem from contextual particularities peculiar to time and place: chance encounters with co-op activists, community organisers, and social investors; the unique local history of collective action and innovation in cooperative housing; and the window of opportunity opened up by austerity urbanism. It was only through the moratorium placed on monolithic demolition-and-rebuild schemes that the CLT became attractive to Liverpool policymakers—a last-ditch option when all other standard approaches had been exhausted. Austerity also demands funding from sources other than the state, in this case from the HDSI “mystery millionaire”. Such an emerging role for social investment and the reliance on private capital raises many questions over the accountability, viability, and replicability of such schemes, perhaps made too vulnerable to the whims of philanthropic capital. However, by understanding the socio-political dynamics of ground-breaking projects first tested out under such extreme conditions, I hope to have revealed insights for the political potential of mutual housing projects in other contexts, with similar catalytic conditions.

The myriad preconditions for urban CLT campaigns to re-appropriate empty homes for community use exist in countless other places, and we can see seeds taking root in similar ex-HMR inner-city contexts, for instance in Middlesbrough (MCLT **2015**). Lessons can be learnt from an unsuccessful

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essential ingredient in Granby's success to be the dynamic and creative grassroots activity that first spurred others to seriously consider the merits of the CLT. It was only through this performative demonstration to city authorities and potential allies of a local collective will to take on the stewardship of a disinvested space that vital funding streams and development expertise were ever secured. A fundamental barrier is therefore the considerable burden on local volunteering energies—residents' proactive capacities, skills, and motivations to engage in complicated campaign and development processes—and their deeply problematic uneven spatial distribution; raising serious concerns for the viability and systematic replication of such projects, especially in the poorest neighbourhoods where they are most needed.

The challenge of replication and institutionalisation hinges on this tension: between, on the one hand, inspiring, mobilising, and sustaining the intense political campaign energy and grassroots practices of commoning that are the lifeblood of common ownership institutions; and, on the other, the need for legal definition, professional expertise, and scaling up into institutional structures. If such mutual experiments are to take root and grow in other disinvested contexts, more systematic support and coordination from intermediary bodies, such as regional-scale umbrellas, is required to nurture the seeds and plant new seeds through viral transfer: to bring together localised experiments into a more connected movement; to enable mutual learning, knowledge sharing, and resource pooling, whilst avoiding the pitfalls of professionalisation. In a promising move, the National CLT Network (**2015**) has recently secured social investment funds for an Urban CLT Project to offer £10,000 grants to 20 demonstration projects to specifically support the difficult transition stages after start-up, such as negotiating with land acquisition.

Insights may be drawn from Liverpool's housing history: progressive lessons from the cooperative education and design democracy at the heart of the 1970s new build co-op movement; and also warning signs. Just as the city's huge housing associations, recently helping deliver HMR demolition, started out as place-based charitable trusts—CDS morphing into Plus Dane, for instance—so too is there a danger that Granby, like other CLTs, might eventually mutate into an unwieldy concern with large-scale property interests and little connection to people or place. A key question for further research is how to secure lasting collective dweller control without becoming just another part of the shadow state, overloaded with unwanted public service delivery responsibilities. In seeking to develop and replicate successful common ownership institutions, we run the risk of diluting, paralysing, and fossilising into inflexible bureaucratic structures the informal, spontaneous, and creative energies of commoning which animate radical collective action.

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